

Innovative leader in cardiology products sector

Thurgau: The ideal location for medical technology firm SIS Medical AG



Willi Zwahlen, co-founder, shareholder and CEO, SIS Medical AG, Frauenfeld

SIS Medical AG proves that a small medical technology firm from Switzerland can develop into one of the world's leading manufacturers of innovative cardiology products. The company was established in 2007 by co-shareholder and CEO Willi Zwahlen and a further specialist from the environment of one Switzerland's many micro medtech clusters. SIS Medical uses the powerful Swiss medtech ecosystem to produce competitive products with a global-scale unique selling proposition. The decisive factor for selecting Thurgau as the location was the ready availability of the perfect property with existing cleanrooms. In addition, qualified professionals with relevant experience were available in the region.

Product innovation used around the globe

From the very beginning, SIS Medical AG has relied on innovation during product development. The standards applied worldwide favour the manufacture of relatively highly elastic balloon catheters, but at SIS the focus is on the development and production of high pressure and super high pressure balloon catheters. The latter can withstand pressure of 40 bar, which is double the value of conventional products in this segment. As a result, the company has created a global unique selling proposition. 'We have always thought that someone should develop balloons with sufficient tensile strength such that their walls only stretch slightly when force is exerted,' said Mr

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The core business of SIS Medical AG is the development, manufacture and sale of innovative cardiology products. The product line encompasses ultra small and ultra pressure-resistant balloon catheters. CEO and co-founder Willi Zwahlen and a second specialist from the medical technology sector established the company in 2007. Since 2015, German medtech investor SHS has been the majority owner of the public limited company. SIS Medical AG employs around 35 people at its headquarters in Frauenfeld. The company is one of Europe's leading manufacturers of high pressure and super high pressure balloon catheters for interventional cardiology and is already in the market in over 40 countries.

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Zwahlen. Conventional balloon catheters stretch at the points of lowest counter-pressure, in other words not at the point where a calcified blood vessel causes the greatest resistance. You could compare it to a balloon filled with air that has been pressed together in the middle, causing it to expand at the sides. The innovative products of the medtech company are in high demand worldwide. Currently, the company supplies to Europe including Russia, South America, Northern Africa and individual countries in the Middle East and Asia. SIS Medical is poised for expansion. Marketing authorisation for the USA is planned for the end of 2018. And after that, the company would like to develop the markets in India, China and Japan.

Powerful Swiss medtech ecosystem with short paths

Highly qualified employees are essential for obtaining marketing authorisation, in addition to adequate funds and a certified manufacturing environment. Diverse micro medtech cluster consisting of companies and institutions nationwide with their roots in the horology, mechanical engineering and pharmaceuticals sectors generate an accordingly high number of specialists. The universities in immediate proximity produce outstanding qualified professionals. And Switzerland is known for its excellent quality of life, attracting clever minds from around the globe who contribute to the company's further development. Above all, the Swiss medtech ecosystem features short paths. The entire value chain is covered within a limited geographical area. Research institutions, top universities, suppliers, and clinics with world-class reputations are located within convenient distances – even across national borders. According to CEO Zwahlen, Switzerland is 'the place to be' for companies in the medical technology sector. And the brand's 'Swissness' is also an enormous benefit.

Competitive home base

Alongside the development of new products, SIS Medical places its priority on production technology optimisation. 'As we take care of development and production at the same location, we are able to test and continuously improve innovations in the manufacturing process. This allows us compete with manufacturers from low-wage countries. Even in comparison to our neighbours in Europe, we are highly competitive,' said Mr Zwahlen. This is primarily due to the high levels of productivity and motivation to work characteristic of Switzerland. And accordingly, personnel there have few days of absence. Liberal labour laws, low non-wage labour costs, and moderate tax rates are among the other positive general conditions. This is emphasised by the fact that German SHS Beteiligungsgesellschaft, the majority shareholder since 2015, has never made an issue of Switzerland as a location. Most of SHS's investments are in medtech firms in the German-speaking region. Participations in Swiss companies are disproportionately represented in its overall portfolio, which is an indication of its trust in the competitiveness of Switzerland as a centre of industry.

Thurgau: Impressive general conditions

The availability of the optimal property with state-of-the-art cleanrooms was the key factor in selecting Frauenfeld in the canton of Thurgau as the company location. And in the region, SIS Medical was able to recruit several qualified professionals with years of experience in the medical technology field and working under cleanroom conditions. The canton features an ideal economic climate in the heart of Europe with excellent transport connections and close proximity to international airports. Since Thurgau is a border canton, it is also possible to recruit highly qualified professionals from neighbouring countries. The canton also offers some of the lowest wages, property costs, and costs of living in Switzerland

Outlook for the future

SIS Medical AG plans to expand its product range. The company sees growth potential in the development of balloon catheters for use on the head and legs. In the medium term, the number of employees is expected to double.

Quick facts

Origin: Switzerland / Germany

Branch: Medical technology

Main reasons for choice of location:

- Qualified labour force / cross-border labour market
- Medtech ecosystem with short paths
- Available property
- Easily accessible