

# Engineer, Leader, Family Man

Sitting Down With... Rainer Kirchhübel,  
CEO, OCULUS Optikgeräte GmbH

What is your background – and how did you begin your career at OCULUS?

I studied mechanical engineering and company business operation in Stuttgart, Germany, in the 1970s. During that time, I already worked for OCULUS because my father, Kurt Kirchhübel, was the CEO. He joined the family-owned company in 1947 and jointly chaired it with his cousin Wilhelm Mager, until Wilhelm's death in 1956. As a student, I used to help build up the exhibition booths for the major shows in Germany! Even back then, I had decided to join OCULUS for good; I wanted to help develop new products and introduce them to the market.

What innovations stand out from your father's time?

My father developed many interesting products over the years, such as the Synoptophore for amblyopia training and measurement with Curt Cüppers, a University of Giessen professor. And, in cooperation with Heinrich Harms and Elfriede Aulhorn – two professors at the University Eye Clinic Tübingen, he developed the Tübingen Perimeter to examine static perimetry for detection of early Glaucoma stages for the first time. Kinetic perimetry was standard at that time. (Incidentally, I was later involved in building the first OCULUS Automatic Perimeter – also in cooperation with the University Eye Clinic Tübingen).

Can you share some career highlights?

Together with our R&D team – and Manfred Spitznas, former director of University Eye Clinic, Bonn, and Josef Reiner, former director of Highschool of Optometry, Cologne – I initiated the development of the SDI/BIOM system (the Stereo Diagonal Inverter

and Binocular Indirect Ophthalmic Microscope) in 1985. It's a highlight because I believe we set the standard for wide-angle viewing and vitreoretinal surgery with this system – and, today, OCULUS Surgical is very strong in this field. I was also closely involved in developing a new generation of trial frames, the UB 4 (we're now on the UB 6), for which we won design prizes. And in 1995, we started our Keratograph business, which is also very successful worldwide.

What's the secret to success when starting in a new market?

With any new product and in any new market, we first have to comprehensively study the scientific background. Next, we must find areas of potential improvement – and then take the right steps to bring those advances to the field. We introduced the Pentacam in 2003 but, when we started this project in 1999, I remember very clearly our R&D Director at the time, Gert Köst (who had the basic idea for the instrument) saying: "This product will either lead us to big opportunities – or it will fail!" In the end, we succeeded; today, I like to think that it sets the worldwide standard in screening the complete anterior segment of the eye. And it's another big highlight for me.

Is OCULUS still very much a family business?

Absolutely! I work closely with both my sons: Christian is already CEO at OCULUS, and is currently responsible for sales. At the beginning of his career, he made significant improvements to our building and introduced a state-of-the-art workflow. Matthias, my other son, studied mechanical engineering, just like me; he is responsible for our new optic production. And last, but by no means least, Rita Kirchhübel has not only been responsible for national and

international marketing for more than 25 years, but she's also my wife!

Can you share any details of current projects?

Myopia progression is becoming a serious problem worldwide. We are working hard to introduce a compact screening device that enables testing of all major aspects of this disease, including autorefraction, keratometry and axial length. It is called the Myopia Master.

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Do you have any advice for future CEOs – including your successors?  
Always listen to the market! Meet colleagues and key opinion leaders regularly and never stop learning. For me, learning how to learn was one of the most important lessons at university. If you have an important decision to make, always sleep on it first, and use your common sense. Look after your health – and the health of all your team members. Enjoy quality time with family and friends. The next generation at OCULUS is already very much involved in the business, and they are ready to continue growing our healthy base with intelligent products.