

AUDIOLOGYNOW!

Experience the Magic



"Quality, not quantity" was an aim for this year's AudiologyNOW! programme committee. The convention, that ran from 26th to 29th March in Orlando, Florida, witnessed several changes to its format; new start times, new events and new presenters combined to provide attendees with a magical audiological experience.

Thousands came to Orlando, Florida to 'Experience the Magic' of six hundred educational sessions, courses, research presentations and posters, to attend or read at AudiologyNOW! Chair Georgine Ray: "Last year the many sessions were overwhelming, so we have pared them back a bit. And we tried hard to ensure there was some new blood this year." Another change was the earlier start on Wednesday, with a full schedule of educational sessions and learning

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labs. Two speciality conferences ran on this day. The sixth annual Academy Research Conference (ARC) focused on 'Hearing Aids and the Brain', assessing how the relationship between hearing instruments and the brain has significant clinical implications on diagnosis and treatment of children and adults. For students, the Student Academy of Audiology Conference, C.S.I. – Case Study Investigations – returned for a second year. Also for students was a panel discussion on what they can do with a hearing degree. A round-table discussion with presenters and students followed the presentations on career paths. For newly qualified audiologists there was a new feature at the convention. The 'Speak Up, Speak Out' assembly was an hour dedicated to professionals who have qualified in the last five years; a chance for them to network and discuss their early experiences.

The opening night party 'Celebrate Audiology' had a new location in the exhibit hall.

The Great Debate

A new feature during the 2014 AudiologyNOW! convention was a session billed as 'The Great Debate'. Presenters and contributors deliberated, "The current model for audiology practice where product sales seem to be the centre of our existence, is an appropriate model to sustain the future of the profession." Some presenters argued the pro-side whilst others argued against the statement. Areas covered included an increasing dependence on product sales relative to diagnostic services for revenue generation; the impact of third parties and direct-to-consumer products and services; an increasing role of surgical implants with traditional hearing aid patients; remote access to patients globally through tele-health; and the ability of audiologists to respond to the anticipated demands for their services through efficient hearing and balance services.

Audiology Solutions

There were no unexpected announcements during 'Audiology Solutions' exhibition time, as the major manufacturers have their launch schedules that no longer fit around conference timetables. Social media and other marketing channels ensure that audiologists are very familiar with the latest developments. Whilst there was a buzz around the exhibition hall from the 'Made for iPhone' possibilities, the event seemed a little quieter this year. Exhibitor numbers were lower, with some obvious non-attendees and those that were there had downsized their booths. Delegate numbers also appeared slightly lower in the exhibit hall. Georgine Ray: "There's so much online now. Exhibitors are finding that

their Return On Investment is a little better spent (in their mind) on doing things on their own. There is an evolution of change happening. We do have some exhibitors that have not come back. I am hoping there will always be a presence of exhibits."

Whilst some of the long-standing exhibitors were missing, there was a noticeable number of first time exhibitors; particularly from the hearing aid manufacturer arena. Companies from Spain, Turkey and China exhibited for the first time. Some have been manufacturing hearing aids for sixty years, and are looking to expand.

There were two topics of popular conversation in the exhibit halls, besides 'Made for iPhone' - PSAPs and CostCo. Personal Sound Amplifier Products (PSAPs) are dividing opinion with many fearing the increase in the supply of these products through the internet. Several of the suppliers of PSAPs were exhibiting and a new product announced just before AudiologyNOW! has achieved its crowd-funding target ready for release. The supplier is looking at charging \$199 per product, with a hearing test that can be done on the website.

The other hot topic amongst American hearing care professionals was the announcement by Phonak that they would be supplying product to CostCo. This company has accounted for half of the growth in the American market in the last few years. Lukas Braunschweiler, CEO of Sonova gave his reasons for "entering another successful distribution channel" at the Sonova Investors and Analysts meeting. He said there are four big "winners" in the global market at the moment: the Veterans Association, Boots, NHS Australia and CostCo. Entering into a partnership with CostCo was vital to achieve one of "Phonak's strategies for the next three to four years of increasing market share in the US." ■

A TOUR OF THE HEARING INSTRUMENT MANUFACTURERS

Audifon

Audifon added new Receiver-In-Canal (RIC) products to the Libra and Miro ranges, in both price points. Jane Perrone, Vice President of US Operations: "The new RICs have ear-changeable, much smaller receiver units, so will fit more ears." With two different speaker units, the R-housing is suitable for a broad fitting range. The top-end Libra has adaptive directional microphones, uses a 312 battery and has a choice of 42dB or 55dB receiver, whereas a 72dB receiver is already tested. Across the Libra, Miro and Vico families, Audifon has also released Power BTEs. They have the same feature sets as their respective families and provide 78dB gain and 136dB SPL output in a small housing.

Perrone explains: "We have encased the receiver which gives more useable gain."

Belton

Belton has announced the Belton First, as its 'Made for iPhone' hearing aid. Ear-to-Ear synchronization provides wireless communication between the hearing aids that prioritise speech. CrossLink Directionality analyses the changing environment to focus on speech and conversations. Noise is removed through Smart Gain Pro and Sound Cleaner Pro and Sound Shifter moves sounds from the higher ranges to more audible regions. Finally Feedback Eraser with WhistleStop prevents whistling and other feedback problems. The hearing aids receive sound streamed from an

Apple product at the tap of a finger. The iPhone can also control the hearing aids. The HearPlus app allows wearers to personalise their listening experience. It remembers the places you have visited and if re-visited the hearing aids will automatically change to the setting the wearer preferred in that environment.

Bernafon

This was the first American outing for the Carista 5 and 3 product families, along with the new SoundGate 2, Phone Adapter 2 and TV Adapter 2, the wireless connectivity devices. Carista uses the Audio Efficiency™ technology, which includes features such as Adaptive Noise Reduction Plus, for efficient and impressive noise suppression technology, and

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REMfit, for a rapid, precise, and individual hearing instrument fitting.

Bernafon's wireless connectivity devices connect the hearing impaired to mobile and landline tele accessories phones, TVs, computers, GPS systems and MP3 players. Audio signals are transmitted wirelessly to the Caristas, using SoundGate 2 as a wireless bridge. Benefits for customers using Soundgate 2 include an improved SNR; an integrated telecoil for use in theatres and other public places and an extended rechargeable battery life in the Soundgate 2.

Hansaton

Hansaton has added the XearA ITE, "A major step forward for hearing instruments in terms of both form and function. It is almost invisible and extremely comfortable", said Robert Eastman, Hansaton USA President. The XearA ITE has many of the features of the BTE model, including Conversation Lift to improve speech intelligibility in noise. The feature works by using an adaptive directional microphone system with a noise suppression algorithm. Sound Restore is a frequency compression algorithm that remaps high-frequency sounds into an audible range. Amongst many other features the XearA also has Bi-Corn wireless which provides Bluetooth to many sound sources. "The device has remarkable signal processing capability, which restores a level of speech clarity that many people feel they've lost forever," said Jerry Yanz, Director of Audiology, Hansaton USA.

Oticon

Oticon has completed the launch of all technology levels on the Inium platform (Alta, Nera and Ria) and have ensured that their ConnectLine accessories can now be used with iPhones. Soren Nielsen, President of Oticon: "We have two major themes at the convention this year. First we gave added value to our connectivity world, a 'Made for iPhone' solution. This means that our connectivity solution ConnectLine is now fully integrated with

Apple's product range. Any person that has an Oticon wireless device over the last 7 years can upgrade to these accessories."

The other theme on the Oticon booth was Brain Hearing. "It is a way to explain the core of our philosophy and how our hearing aids are designed. We have always focused on low power use in our hearing aids. We do that because we do a lot of signal processing and our signal processing is based on the reality that it is the brain that is hearing", Nielsen explained. With Brain Hearing, Oticon state they are thinking brain first, aiming to help the brain make sense of the sound it receives from the ears, instead of 'Ear Hearing', where technology looks to compensate for damage in the ear.

Phonak

The new Lyric3 has as latest improvements that it addresses "input we got from providers to improve the sound quality and audiological fit," said Bryan Holmes, Managing Director for Phonak Lyric. Lyric already had impressive customer statistics. In a US survey, 86% of Lyric patients agreed that the Lyric sound quality is very natural, 93% say they hear more clearly with Lyric than with previous hearing instruments and 94% would specifically recommend Lyric to family and friends.

Lyric3 can be worn 24 hours a day, seven days a week for months. This ability has been further improved with a new low-power processing chip that provides adaptive signal and compression processing, an expanded gain range and improved pre-calculation based on NAL.

Maarten Barmiento, Group Vice President Marketing for Phonak, said, "Lyric is now fully integrated into the Phonak portfolio. The concept was also taken to the next level." Phonak further launched the Tinnitus Balance Portfolio, an in-depth training and counselling programme for audiologists to use to expand their business.

ReSound

The biggest buzz at AudiologyNOW! was created by ReSound. They finally started shipping LiNX in late February 2014. LiNX streams stereo sound from an iPhone, iPad or iPod touch without the need for an additional pendant-like device. The ReSound Smart App customises the hearing instrument, allowing users to set volume, change treble/bass and use geo-tagging to assign and adjust the acoustics of frequently visited places. The app will also 'Find my hearing aids' if they are misplaced. Behind the MFi function, the hearing aid has the latest version of Surround Sound by

ReSound, ReSound's proprietary sound processing technology using 3rd generation 2.4 GHz wireless technology.

Rexton

Rexton showed new high powered additions, new families and improvements to products. Finesse 2c is now available as a P BTE and in three Energy Custom models. The Accord 2c also featured a whole range of new devices: a high power BTE, two power BTEs and three Energy Custom models. This range of power models all provide maximum amplification, up to 82 dB gain and use the TwinCore technology. With accessories they all connect to the users' digital world.

The completely new product family from Rexton is the Joy 2c. At the lower end of the Rexton product portfolio, Joy 2c is available in 3 BTEs and 4 custom models with a range of skin tones for both BTEs and ITEs. Finally, Rexton unveiled two new accessories, the new Mini Blu RCU app and the new Smart Pocket Remote Control. The mini Blu RCU App offers users full control over their hearing aids through their Android smartphone. The app is downloadable from the Google Play Store.

Siemens

Siemens launched ProSuite, a new consultation concept. Roland Heichel, Head of Product Marketing for Siemens: "On the basis of existing counselling and fitting tools we developed new ones and bundled them." The range of hearing instruments has become diverse over the years, going from tiny CICs to classic BTEs, with or without tinnitus programmes, wireless capability, rechargeability and up to six programmes. With the wealth of accessories that are also available, Siemens believe that ProSuite will enable the best possible selection and fitting.

"Counselling Suite 3.0 helps the dispenser to explain where the hearing loss comes from, the hearing loss itself and the kind of hearing solutions that are available," Roland Heichel said. An essential part of the ProSuite is the new Unity 3 diagnostic and fitting system. The portable, lightweight technology is USB powered, enabling the hearing care professional to conveniently keep it in the office or take it to a patient's home. Finally, the ProSuite includes eARena, a 20 day online training session that helps the hearing aid wearers get used to their devices one day at a time.

Sonic

Sonic invited audiologists to make a head-to-head comparison of Sonic hearing solutions against



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competing products. Marcel P. Vennik, Director of International Sales: "We ask participants to listen to three different products in different environments and then rate their preference in a neutral questionnaire. Some people will question it, but we have a clean, comparable fitting. So far Sonic stands out with the sound quality and the noise reduction."

Sonic introduced Flip40 and Flip60 at the show, the latter being the wireless version. Designed to deliver just the features listeners need, Flip40 rounds out the Flip family which now includes product options from Premium to Basic. Flip40 is built on Sonic's Speech Variable Processing platform and provides exceptional sound quality along with benefits like Speech Priority Noise Reduction and easy-to-use controls. The SoundGate 2 represents the next generation of Sonic wireless accessories. It delivers 200% increase in range and 100% increased battery life.

Unitron

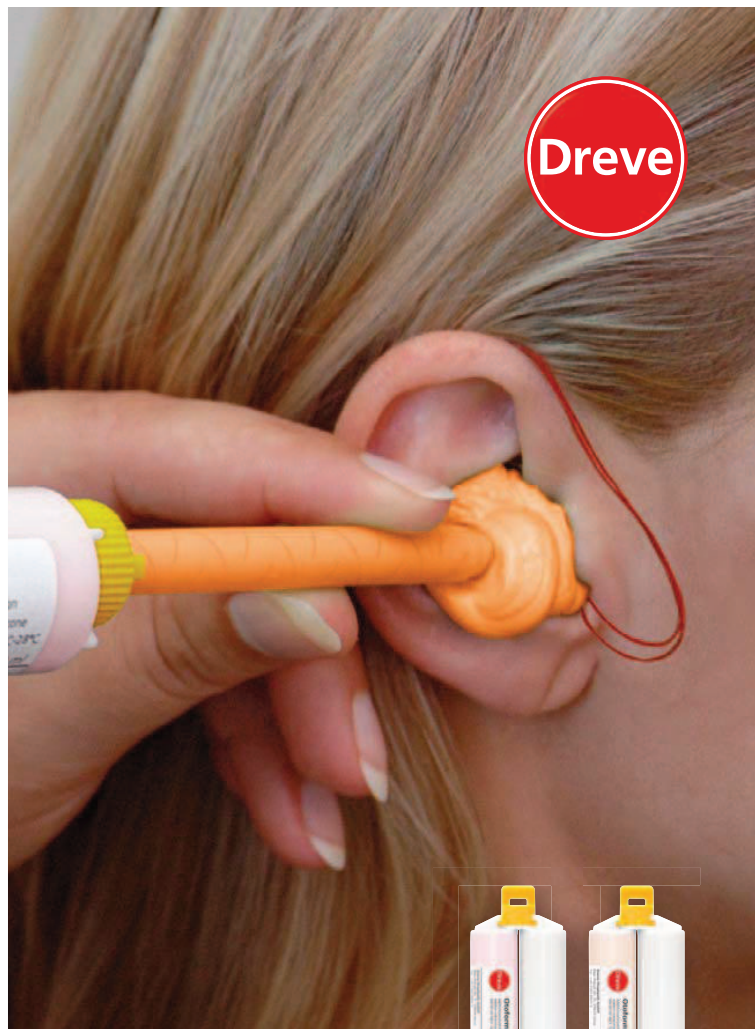
Unitron wants to create a wow when the hearing aid is put in the hand and a wow when the hearing aid is put on the ear. The recent Red Dot and IF design awards underline the success of the first part. The sound quality is key to the second goal. Jan Metzdorff believes that they have achieved this. "SpeechZone 2 can pinpoint speech within 360 degrees and respond intelligently to provide superior results for speech in noise. Speech has nowhere to hide!"

New from Unitron was Pro, the premium technology level for the Moxi2 and Quantum2 families. The key feature of Pro is the new SpeechZone 2 as mentioned previously. It also has a four destination Automatic Programme, SmartFocus 2 and the opportunity to trial the product through the unique to Unitron Flex programme. "The Flex concept is now part of the whole Unitron DNA. It is not like a product offering for us anymore, it is a benefit, an advantage you get of working with Unitron," Bruce Brown said.

Widex

"This time we mainly focus on accessories," said Soren Ernsten, Vice President of Marketing at Widex. EASYWEAR is a new wire and receiver ear-tip solution that will be used for all Widex RIC/RITE solutions. "These solutions were not cosmetically appealing, size and fit can be a problem, they can break easily and they need to be manipulated a lot," said Ernsten. "This family of EASYWEAR products addresses all of these issues."

Widex also launched UNI-DEX, to communicate and stream sound from the telephone to your ears. "It works hands-free, for all phones, for all hearing losses, for all form factors, for all price points. We have chosen to go down that route instead of the 'Made for iPhone' route. The most important thing for the many 70+ customers is not apps or being able to change programmes; it is to talk, to be able to have a conversation on the phone, that's it." An in-built microphone allows users to talk hands-free when using a mobile phone or Skype via a PC or tablet. ■



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