

Connect Hearing

Connect Hearing matches the best in hearing care technology with the highest standards for professional counseling and personalized solutions, offering clients all the individual attention of a small practice with all the resources of a global business.



Connect Hearing has established a common look and feel and a global communication style throughout the group.

Hearing care technology has become so capable and so versatile that it is now possible to find a solution that will make a meaningful difference in the life of every person with hearing loss. Identifying that solution, however, requires a deep knowledge both of the range of technologies available and the unique needs of each client. Expert advice and service, delivered one-to-one through the whole treatment period, is just as critical a component as new technology in changing the lives of people with hearing loss. We provide this key component through the Connect Hearing Group, our worldwide network of professional audiology centers.

Whether in Brazil, France, Austria, the United Kingdom, the United States or Germany, each client's experience of Connect Hearing will be the same: a thorough, welcoming discussion of hearing goals and specific lifestyle and communication needs, along with an introduction to the capabilities of hearing aid technology. This conversation provides the foundation for a comprehensive hearing test and a customized hearing technology solution, prescribing the appropriate hearing aids, features, and accessories for the client's individual requirements. Our individual, relationship-based approach builds trust; it helps to turn clients into advocates, referring friends and family members. Building that personal trust is the reason Connect Hearing strives to provide all the personal experience of a small local practice along with the advanced technology and procedures of a global business.

The three pillars of Connect Hearing Group's strategy are: building recognition in all our markets through consistent branding and client experience; continuous improvement in efficiency, service quality and profitability by extending standard operating procedures, systems and skill sets across the company; and focusing on growing the business in selected strategic markets.

Building brand recognition

At its point of delivery, ours is always a local business. Clients and potential clients are used to seeking audiological services from a professional person in an appealing clinic or shop environment. We therefore maintain a strong network of convenient neighborhood hearing care centers in ten key countries. Where we have acquired established businesses, we pursue

a gradual rebranding approach, taking into account strong existing brand names or specific language or cultural preferences. In every country and market, we seek the synergies that arise from a common look and feel, a shared client experience, and a global communication style, using our award-winning and highly successful “Real People, Real Stories” approach. In 2014/15, we completed our brand integration in the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Scandinavia. Our established brands in Austria and France have meanwhile adopted our global communication approach, brand values, and store identities under the Connect Hearing umbrella.

Our brand values emphasize service: we aim to help our clients at every stage of the journey from first recognizing hearing loss through to living again a full life without limitations. We support our network with harmonized processes, consistent brand values and with digital marketing to help generate new business. In the United States and some other major markets, for instance, potential clients can start a chat session with one of our representatives at the click of a button on our website. They can book an appointment online or by calling a toll-free number, or e-mail their questions to one of our professional audiologists. We are putting the resources of a market-leading global group at the service of our local businesses.

During 2014/15 we opened new customer service centers in France, the Netherlands, and other markets. This gives clients the choice to contact Connect Hearing, even outside normal office hours, and speak immediately with a hearing care professional, providing them with an extra level of convenience and reassurance. The customer service centers can also receive calls generated by marketing campaigns, steering potential clients and leads toward the appropriate store location.

Connect Hearing’s personal yet global full-service approach has clear advantages for our clients, but it also makes us an attractive place to work. As one example, Hansaton, our network in Austria, recently won an award as part of the Great Place to Work® benchmark study, for offering an attractive workplace, excellent working atmosphere, and extensive training opportunities (see www.hansaton.at/de/ueber-hansaton/karriere/)

Quality and profitability through operational excellence

Connect Hearing combines providing the highest quality of care with running a profitable business through operational excellence: continuously harmonizing our processes and skills, thus improving efficiency and increasing margins.

An important part of our culture, is encouraging our employees to help us define best practice, which we can then roll out globally. This approach is summed up in our Professional Practice Management toolbox, which ensures that all the information we provide to our hearing care professionals is

consistent and supports the way Connect Hearing operates in all centers. Providing the best hearing care requires defining and testing the right approach to take at every stage of the client’s journey. We pilot and monitor innovative concepts in a small number of centers before approving them for worldwide rollout. Professional Practice Management supports our training and continuing education programs, ensuring high and consistent quality of care.

We share among our markets best practices in audiology as well as important services, such as human resources and marketing. Our shared procedures and information provide a consistent, high-quality client experience of fitting and counseling. We support our centers in several key markets with a single, optimized point of sale system, and by harmonizing our performance management and reporting system.

A successful hearing care consultation relies on modern audiological equipment to support quality and efficiency. Through global purchasing agreements, we supply each of our centers with the right tools to enable an optimum counseling and fitting experience. Global sourcing and calibration significantly reduces the cost per center. Standardized equipment also makes training simpler, more relevant, and more universal. Our hearing care professionals can therefore move easily from one center to another, whether in response to increased demand or as part of their personal career development.

Operational excellence is never simply an internal matter: true efficiency ensures us that we are delivering client satisfaction at every point in the journey. For example, our Laperre network in Belgium achieves this through a continuous survey process, in which clients have several opportunities to rate their experience as they progress through their contact with the center; this allows us to take action immediately if there are concerns. In an interconnected world, where potential clients are seeking information from their peers across the Internet and through social media, positive reviews are more than important.

Growing the business

Connect Hearing’s strategy is focused on sustainable and profitable growth, pursuing the balanced use of four “growth avenues.” The first of these is about organic growth, improving the performance of our existing centers through increased traffic, improved conversion rates, and increased value per client. The second is opening new stores, exploiting our shared operational base. The third is acquisitions, which we consider in cases where we already have a strong partnership with the owner and can assure a seamless transition of client services. The fourth avenue is about innovation: transferring successful models between markets and developing new concepts for counseling, fitting, and distribution – such as shop-in-shop.

Sonova’s partnership with Boots, the UK’s No. 1 pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer, has developed into a highly successful shop-in-shop model that generates significant

revenue for the Connect Hearing Group. The partnership benefits all parties: Boots can offer a clearly differentiated service and increase its store traffic, while clients benefit from dealing with a single trusted brand, already known for its high quality in healthcare. The success of the business model is reflected by the further rise in the number to 470 locations, up from 428 a year ago.

Recent market dynamics, combined with Sonova's established distribution strategy, has prompted Sonova's decision to make Germany one of the ten key markets for our retail activities. Our existing network of around 100 stores provides a solid basis for future growth and expansion in the world's second largest market for hearing aids.



CLIENT EXPERIENCES

"Nice to be back here again!" Keith Bancroft, 93, smiles and settles back in the comfortable chair in the consulting room at the Connect Hearing store in Encino, Los Angeles. This audiological store is one of over 300 Connect Hearing outlets in the USA. "My hearing aid helps me to enjoy the things that give me pleasure at my age," Bancroft says. He particularly appreciates the Bluetooth streaming feature that transmits audio signals from his favorite TV shows and phone calls directly to his hearing aid.

Hearing care professional Dan Newmark comes into the room and greets Bancroft like an old friend. They know each other well – Newmark fitted Bancroft with his first hearing aid ten years ago. "Building up a good customer relationship is a lengthy process," Newmark observes.

He was already working as an audiologist at the Encino store before the business was taken over by Connect Hearing, and he sees the change of ownership in a very positive light. "I share the values of Connect Hearing," Newmark affirms. "I want to understand the client and offer an all-round solution, rather than just selling a product."

In the course of a global rebranding project that began in 2013, Connect Hearing has brought a total of 47 different brands together under one umbrella in the USA. All the stores now carry the Connect Hearing logotype so recognition is ensured throughout the USA. The consulting approach is also uniform – the customer should feel that he is king. In selected stores such as the Encino outlet, the same new interior design concept is implemented to create spacious premises with appealing colors and a spa ambience.

Newmark aims to meet the individual needs of each client: "Someone who can no longer understand his friends while playing golf needs an instrument that will reduce wind noise."

He points to a poster in the consulting room that shows a happily smiling golfer. Freddie isn't a photo model posing for an ad – he is a client of Connect Hearing.

His experiences form part of the global testimonial campaign titled "Better Hearing Starts with a Story" in which genuine customers recount their experiences with Connect Hearing. "It's only since I've had the hearing aid that I've enjoyed being on the golf course again – now I can understand all the jokes!" Freddie explains. He also recalls the day when the hearing aid saved his life while he was playing golf in a swampy area of Florida: "Just imagine if I hadn't heard my friends' warnings and took a step backwards. There was a gigantic crocodile lying in wait behind me!"



“I want to understand the client and offer an all-round solution”, explains Dan Newmark. He is audiologist in a Connect Hearing store in Los Angeles. The consulting approach is uniform worldwide – the customer should feel that he is king.

Freddie, Connect Hearing Customer

“I’m joking with my golf buddies again.”

