



A training with a future

A key factor in Hansaton's sustainable growth in Austria has been its hands-on training of employees for its own specialist audiology stores. The company focuses on people looking for a career change – a win-win for jobseekers, people with hearing loss, and Sonova.

Eva-Maria Gahr never ceases to be amazed every time she cleans a hearing aid: "It's so impressive how much technology they pack into these little devices." A petite 43-year-old with a short, black hair-do, she hails from Tamsweg, a town not far from Salzburg. Having begun her training as a hearing care professional with Hansaton in September 2017, she is still a newcomer to audiology. Gahr had previously spent more than ten years working in the insurance and banking industry. "I wanted to switch profession," she says. She was ultimately persuaded to retrain as an audiologist because she liked the prospect of learning a trade and providing a service, as well making a concrete improvement to her customers' quality of life. "After a one-week taster course at a Hansaton audiology store, I knew it was for me."

Gahr has never regretted her choice of new profession and already began working at the local Hansaton specialist audiology store in her home town during her training. "I really enjoy working with older people in particular," she enthuses. "You get so much back – gratitude, especially – when customers gain a new lease on life thanks to a hearing aid." 40-year-old Elisabeth Straganz, a qualified accountant from East Tyrol, has had very similar experiences. Once her four children had flown the nest, she was looking for a new challenge. "It's a pleasure to give people something that will improve their lives. The nicest thing for me is when a customer is happy because he or she can once again hear the birds singing, for example."



Eva-Maria Gahr while fitting a customer with a hearing aid

As in other countries, there is a serious lack of hearing care professionals in Austria, and people starting second careers, such as Eva-Maria Gahr and Elisabeth Straganz with their life experience and practical skills from other professions, are ideal candidates for Hansaton. “We need properly qualified audiologists who ideally could start tomorrow, as demand is very high,” explains Michael Mugrauer, Head of Human Resources at Hansaton. Gahr and Straganz – and their 27 fellow trainees – will have finished their course in 18 months.

For years now, Hansaton has favored adult education as a way of recruiting specialist staff. The practical component of the training takes place in Hansaton specialist audiological stores; this is complemented with in-house courses in Salzburg and theoretical teaching at external educational institutions in Vienna or Innsbruck, where the final examinations are also taken.

It is certainly a big plus that this adult education option provides Hansaton with access to qualified staff with life experience; a further advantage of the system for the company is that the cost is largely subsidized by the Austrian employment ministry’s labor market service, as employment prospects in audiology are excellent once the training has been completed.

Hansaton’s training program has been expanded over several years, and as of January 2018, there are 27 men and women training to become audiologists. These will be joined by cohorts of 20 trainees in spring and fall respectively of this year. “We want our successful growth to continue, and for that to happen, we’ll need these newly trained specialists. Our focus is squarely on the new employees’ life experience and hands-on training – these will provide a solid foundation for successful customer interaction,” says Ursula Rumplmayr, Hansaton’s Managing Director. The company currently operates more than 95 specialist audiology stores in Austria and this total is set to increase, thanks to the training program. Every trainee who passes the exam stands a very good chance of being taken on directly by Hansaton.

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One such trainee is 33-year-old Ethem Kambureoglu, who completed the program in 2014 and now works as an audiologist in a Hansaton store in Salzburg. Having gained a degree in biology, he had previously worked as a lab assistant at Salzburg University. “But that didn’t have enough variety for me over the long term,” he says with a chuckle. “I missed day-to-day interaction with people. I was looking for a job where I could have direct human contact and where my biology skills would come in handy.” As an audiologist, he has a future-proof qualification: global demand for hearing care experts is growing constantly – due to demographics, and to the simple fact that people are living longer, and older people hear less well.

Eva-Maria Gahr, for one, is glad to have picked “a career with a future”. She is doing the practical part of her training at the Hansaton store in her home town of Tamsweg, near Salzburg, and will be able to stay on there as an audiologist after she has finished. “Then I’ll finally be back on home turf,” she says with a broad smile.