

The new ideas keep on coming

BioGrafie: Dr. Steffen Hüttner from the BioRegion STERN



Dr. Steffen Hüttner, CEO of HB Technologies AG: successful founder in the BioRegion STERN

(Source: Andreas Körner/BioRegio STERN Management GmbH)

(Stuttgart/Tübingen) - Dr. Steffen Hüttner is a long-distance runner and company founder in Tübingen, Germany. Even in times of a pandemic, the CEO of HB Technologies AG, INTAVIS Bioanalytical Instruments AG, INTAVIS Peptide Services GmbH & Co. KG and SensoRun GmbH & Co. KG has not been put off his stride. His innovations with HB Technologies include a social distancing app for queue management in surgeries, hospitals and shops. Hüttner also designs concepts for fully automated PCR testing of blood samples for customers. His solutions to make the manufacture of peptides more efficient are vitally important both for developing vaccines and for antibody tests.

Dr. Steffen Hüttner's desire to be a company founder was never in serious doubt. "I always wanted to be an entrepreneur," reveals the holder of a doctorate in biochemistry, CEO of HB Technologies AG and pioneer in the field of developing custom medtech and biotech software. Gaining his initial business experience in the events sector, of all places, was the ideal preparation. The keen sportsman met budding engineer Bernd Hölle when playing table tennis. Together, they organised club nights in the university city of Tübingen in the mid-1980s. Their successful format attracted thousands of dance lovers to the Refectory Morgenstelle. "At times, we were employing up to 150 staff for our Clubhaus events, and we had to deal with everything from bookkeeping and licensing to safety and advertising," explains Hüttner. "What we learned with this first company was of more use to us than any business degree," he underlines. Following this perfect preparation for life as an entrepreneur, Hüttner set up a software company specialising in the management of medical practices while he was still studying for his doctorate.

Even back in his student days, Hüttner recognised the need to combine life sciences, information technology and automation. "Our lab experiments used to involve time-consuming, manual processes. In most cases, they took at least an entire day but still had to be repeated umpteen times," he recalls. The life sciences sector was still in its infancy, with automation efforts in the region focusing above all on the automotive industry. "Although much of what is now reality had

already been envisaged in theory back then, inadequate computing power often meant it was not yet possible," explains Hüttner.

A marathon rather than a sprint

The "yet" is significant, because the former marathon runner always knew what he wanted to achieve. In 1992, he and Hölle - who had since become a qualified mechanical and automation engineer - founded Hölle & Hüttner AG, a service provider for technical software and hardware solutions. HB Technologies AG, as the company is now called, is currently working on numerous international projects. Whether they involve laboratory equipment and processes or app-based assistance systems, the ultimate aim is always to use automation, information technology and artificial intelligence to achieve biotechnology and medical technology goals faster and with better results.

Hüttner has always been motivated by the challenge of making processes more effective. He and his team are now in global demand, above all to implement customer-specific applications for life science businesses. The company's know-how has also been called upon during the coronavirus crisis, amongst other things to develop the software control system of automatic machines used for the PCR testing of blood samples for customers. The programmers also found time to upload a social distancing app to the app store for queue management in surgeries, hospitals and shops, which the City of Tübingen is being allowed to use free of charge.

When Hüttner made INTAVIS Bioanalytical Instruments AG in Cologne a wholly owned subsidiary of HB Technologies back in 2008, he became CEO of a world market leader for innovative laboratory equipment used in areas such as peptide synthesis and in-situ hybridisation. These methods for detecting specific DNA/RNA sequences and/or proteins in individual cells, tissues or entire organisms make it relatively straightforward to identify disease genes under a microscope. In 2019, Hüttner went on to establish INTAVIS Peptide Services GmbH & Co. KG in Tübingen. This company specialises in producing synthetic peptides, which play a particularly important role in personalised medicine. The aim is to give patients their very own "peptide cocktail" geared to their specific needs - to cure certain types of cancer, for instance. Peptides are also a crucial part of vaccine development and antibody tests, which makes it vital to find a tailored yet cost-effective production method that meets all regulatory requirements. "It currently costs around 250,000 euros to manufacture a single peptide under GMP conditions, so this figure needs to come down," insists Hüttner. He and his team are working hard on new solutions in collaboration with partners such as the University Hospital of Tübingen. Little wonder, then, that there has been no question of short-time working at the company during the pandemic. It's more a case of "long-time working" for the CEO, whether on site or from home. In addition to taking part in countless video conferences, he also uses an app to meet his colleagues in a virtual coffee room. That's still not enough for Hüttner, though. "I miss having discussions and opportunities for dialogue such as the BioRegio STERN summer reception," he admits. His commitment to the STERN BioRegion and his role as Director of Verein zur Förderung der Biotechnologie und Medizintechnik e.V. (Society for the Promotion of Biotechnology Stuttgart/Tübingen/Neckar-Alb) are hugely important to the dedicated networker. "The highly effective cluster created here by the society and BioRegio STERN Management GmbH is definitely the place to be and enjoys an international standing. Even in the USA, they admire the businesses in our region," says Hüttner proudly.

What's the real point?

It's important to the father of three children for the purpose of what he does to go beyond economic objectives. He likes to quote the famous 2005 Stanford speech of Apple founder Steve Jobs, who had the following to say on the subject: "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do."

When he's not reading biographies of successful entrepreneurs, Hüttner enjoys going on (long) runs through the woods. He needs to be active to take his mind off his responsibilities as a CEO, but he never switches off completely, because he naturally comes up with more new ideas while running. One example is SensoRun, a wearable sensor kit that analyses users' running style with a view to optimising their personal training and preventing them from overdoing things. As CEO of SensoRun GmbH, Hüttner is planning to join forces with the trauma hospital Berufsgenossenschaftliche Unfallklinik Tübingen to develop a digital assistance system based on a sensor that analyses movement and pressure data (in a brace, for example) to monitor rehabilitation patients. Another sporting innovation is taking shape as part of the biohybrid network to develop biohybrid products and methods. Together with the University

Hospital of Tübingen's Department of Sports Medicine and the University of Augsburg's Chair of Embedded Intelligence for Health Care and Wellbeing, Hüttner and his team are working on the KIRun mobile measuring system for runners. Sensors can determine their physical state based on biomechanical, physiological and above all auditive data in conjunction with environmental parameters. "The objective is to make running healthier and more beneficial for each and every individual," says Hüttner, who knows how important that is. Years of intensive long-distance running have taken their toll on his knees, but the life sciences entrepreneur is already considering using regenerative medicine to grow new cartilage and have it implanted. "I'm unlikely to compete in any more 100-kilometre runs, but it should surely be possible to remain mobile and pain-free," he insists. Staying still is simply not an option for this marathon man.

About BioRegio STERN Management GmbH:

BioRegio STERN Management GmbH promotes economic development in the life sciences industry, helping to strengthen the region as a business location by supporting innovations and start-up companies in the public interest. It is the main point of contact for company founders and entrepreneurs in the Stuttgart and Neckar-Alb regions, including the cities of Tübingen and Reutlingen.

The STERN BioRegio is one of the largest and most successful bioregions in Germany. Its unique selling points include a mix of biotech and medtech companies that is outstanding in Germany and regional clusters in the fields of automation technology and mechanical engineering.

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