

Jim Mazzo

The president of Abbott Medical Optics Inc. shares some secrets to his success.



Why did you pursue a career in the ophthalmic industry?

I was actually a zoology major in college, but I was hired by Allergan, Inc., as a sales representative in 1980 and have been in the industry ever since. Gavin Herbert was instrumental in my joining

Allergan, and to this day, he is a mentor to me. I learned a lot about the customer during my time “carrying the bag” for Allergan. It has served me well throughout my 30-plus years in this industry, both while working overseas and heading up Abbott Medical Optics Inc. (AMO) as a public company after we were spun off from Allergan.

You have played key roles in the prosperity of AMO and Allergan. What factors have contributed to your success?

Staying close to the customer is critical. I spend days with our representatives in the field. I call practitioners and meet with them regularly. As an industry leader, you can fall in love with the press clippings, but the customers keep you grounded. Around here, we frequently ask our employees, “Who is the most important person at AMO?” the answer is always “the customer.” Having had the opportunity to work with eye care professionals each and every day early in my career provided me with an invaluable framework for truly understanding the needs of both the doctor and the patient. Additionally, having spent 12 years living and working overseas gave me an opportunity to learn how those customers’ needs change based on geography and to appreciate the importance of culture in a global organization. What works here in the United States does not necessarily work in Germany or Japan, and it is important to understand the needs of the global market.

What is your most memorable experience in this industry?

Spinning off from Allergan and starting AMO as a new, global entity was very exciting. We had a lot of critics and doubters who did not think we would make it. The experience of building a new company and taking it public is absolutely one of my proudest and most memorable achievements.

In what ways will the ophthalmic industry evolve in the near future?

New technology will be a catalyst for growth and evolution in our industry. Obviously, as a market leader,

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AMO has a robust pipeline, but there are many smaller start-up companies with incredibly talented people who will continue to develop disruptive technologies that will make procedures safer, less invasive, and more effective. I think we will see advances in the areas of retina and glaucoma devices and drugs working together. We will also see growth from emerging markets, as new infrastructure is established and more doctors are trained.

Technologies that combine medical devices with pharmaceuticals hold great promise. For example, at AMO, we are exploring adapting drug-eluting stent technology, currently used for vascular patients, for ophthalmic applications. Accommodating IOLs also hold a lot of promise. There is a big opportunity to develop new technologies to treat the back of the eye through medical devices and new pharmaceutical therapies. On the refractive side, the market is still largely untapped, particularly in developing economies. As these economies begin to mature, we are seeing the development of an emerging middle class that will drive the growth of new procedures. Furthermore, there is a large opportunity to continue to educate patients and help them overcome barriers such as fear, awareness, and cost when considering laser vision correction.

What is something most people are surprised to learn about you?

I am currently serving as chairman of AdvaMed, which advocates for a legal, regulatory, and economic environment that advances global health care by ensuring patients’ access worldwide to the benefits of medical technology. Additionally, other than my zoology degree, people are probably surprised to learn that my first love is baseball. I am a die-hard Cubs fan, and I played minor league baseball before my days as a sales representative. If it were not for the curve ball, I am sure I would have had a pretty good run! ■