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# Fine FAUCETS

Swedish faucet and accessories manufacturer Ostnor is consistently lighting the way with its leading-edge technology, high quality, attractive design, and eco-friendliness.

Images courtesy of Ostnor

**F**or 150 years, Ostnor has been developing and selling water taps and accessories to the Nordic region, under the strong and well-established brands of FM Mattsson, Mora Armatur, and Damixa. *The CEO Magazine* caught up with President and CEO Claes Seldeby about the long history of the business and how it is making its mark on the industry in 2015. Claes is a trained electro-technical engineer and has previous experience in management mainly within electrical distribution and energy efficiency. He has been leading the international Ostnor organisation since September 2011.

**The CEO Magazine:** Ostnor recently celebrated its 150th anniversary. Can you tell our readers a bit more about that and how the company came to exist?

**Claes:** We have a long and proud history. The company was founded back in 1865 as FM Mattsson by a Swedish man—Frost Matts Mattsson was his name. He produced the first brass tap in 1876 and shortly after that his two sons took over the business. They decided to go separate ways in

1927, where the one brother continued to develop the FM Mattsson brand and the other one started a new brand called Mora Armatur. They became the two biggest competitors in the Swedish market and later on also in the Nordic region. Both companies were driving each other to be extremely good in innovation and technology. In 2003, it was decided by the families from FM Mattsson and Mora Armatur to again join forces and so a merge took place. The two families came back together and from that point they also changed the name to Ostnor for the group, and kept the two brands FM Mattsson and Mora Armatur. Last year, we made an acquisition of the number-one Danish brand of taps and mixers, called Damixa, which dates back to 1932 and thus has developed, designed, and produced taps, showerheads, and mixers for more than 80 years.

**Over this long period, how has the mission of the company changed?**

We started quite early with the manufacturing of taps, very simple taps, and of course we have been in the taps and mixers business up

until now. I would say that we have changed business models, developed new products, and been driving innovation. What we are looking into now, when we are talking about the future, is to expand our product portfolio to go beyond taps, mixers and shower sets and look at kitchens and bathrooms and be able to deliver a full solution. We want to be more of a solution provider than a product supplier.

**In the time you have been CEO, what has been the biggest challenge you have faced?**

Continuing to merge the two, and now three, brands without creating too much overlap and also turning the family-owned company into a more international and agile, competitive organisation. Going for markets outside of the Nordics has been one of the main challenges, starting with having more investment in product development, and also now with acquisition.

**In terms of product development, how do you ensure that you have the right team to tackle that challenge?**

Innovation is a top priority for us. It's one of the key values that we are working with and it has been, >

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I would say, one of the most important factors when it comes to differentiation of our products. We have an in-house development department. We develop everything on our own. We have a long history of highly skilled development engineers and we are growing the department all the time. I would say being in that environment and also developing the people who are onboard.

**How does Ostnor invest in staff with regard to training and development?**

We have set up quite a comprehensive program when it comes to training. We make competency reviews every year on our staff. We have a request list of competencies where we bridge the gaps with training based on the individual competency plan that everyone in the company has. We have a talent management program where we define, or identify, the key talents that we have and then

we put them in a special training to be able to clear the succession of top managers in the future.

**Sustainability is very important to Ostnor. Can you talk about what you do and why it's so important to the company?**

We work with sustainability both on the product side and on the production side. When it comes to a product, we are focused a lot on water saving and on energy efficiency. This means that we reduce the amount of water needed to take a shower, for example, without giving up the comfort that you would like to have when you take a shower. Also, for taps, we are working a lot with reducing hot-water consumption. We recently conducted a large test in Copenhagen Airport where we measured the water and energy consumption before and after changing the taps to new efficient mixers in one of the terminals. We reduced the hot-water



consumption by 66 per cent, and the overall water consumption by 24 per cent. This meant that the investment that the airport had to take was actually paid off in less than two years. Of course, it is an important factor to be competitive in design and price and so on, but it is also important to drive sustainability—that's really a key factor for us.

When it comes to the manufacturing side, we have begun to work with lead-free brass in our mixers, which means that we have made a shift in the manufacturing for two ranges of products for the time being. It has been a task that we have been working on for the past one and a half years. The idea is to phase out all non-environmentally friendly material over time, making the products green and sustainable throughout their lifecycle.

**Other than sustainability, what else sets Ostnor apart from its competition?**

We have our fully automated and complete manufacturing site here in Sweden where we cover the entire manufacturing process from moulding, chrome-plating, polishing, and mounting to shiny new product. We manufacture mainly for the Nordic countries,

and can thus reduce emissions by keeping production local and being very close to our customers. We do everything from a customer-value point of view. We are a leader in the market when it comes to developing a new product. We are number one in the Nordic in terms of delivered products and I would also say that we are number one when it comes to innovation. Being close to our customers, being in front as the leader in the market, and driving innovation are the key values of our company and what differentiates us.

**How does the company collaborate with customers, suppliers, and retail partners to achieve success?**

With some of our customers we have actually been working together for just over 100 years. This means that the organisations know each other very well. We focus on the customer value for the end user and I would say that we have very integrated processes when it comes to sales, marketing, and trying to attract and to retain the end users that we have. On the supplier side, we start with product development, with working closely with our key suppliers in order to make sure that we design for manufacturing. We try to adapt and make things as manufacturing-

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friendly as possible and we try to work with a few suppliers that take a big responsibility in creating success for us.

**What does the future hold for Ostnor and what consumer trends do you foresee over the next two to three years?**

Today, we have a solid position in the Nordic region where we have built a very strong platform that puts us in a position where we would like to expand outside of the region in a much stronger way than we have done in the past. We would like to continue to grow, obviously where we are in the Nordics but also further afield in Europe. We have just set up a subsidiary in Asia and we are looking at the Middle East. With our three strong brands that complement each other on features such as innovation, function, and price, I would say that we are in a good position to succeed. We would like to continue to grow, to drive the innovation and to expand the product portfolio. That is what we see in the future and that will put us in a good spot.

One very clear trend is that the consumers tend to be more and more engaged in selecting the products for their homes. They show a much bigger interest in water consumption and energy efficiency, but also in the design factors, which is becoming more and more important. Even though price is still an important factor, functional design, innovative features, and special techniques also become game changers in our business. The need for new innovation and new product is becoming much more important than it was 20 years ago. •

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