

EUROPA FORUM

Staying ahead in global competition for exports

Innovation and a speedy response to customers' needs are the key to staying ahead in a competitive global climate for exporters, says Michael Willome, the CEO of Conzzeta AG.

HOW CAN EXPORT-ORIENTED companies thrive in international competition?

Innovation and permanent renewal are the keywords for me. Your product range must offer added value that customers are prepared to pay for. And you must never stand still, because success can be copied, and that's when the competition gets a foothold. You have to stay ahead. That requires vision and the courage to venture down new avenues. Particularly in high-cost locations like Switzerland, you have to make permanent, uncompromising efforts to increase efficiency. Innovation doesn't just apply to products: it involves the entire business model and process optimization. The whole package must be right. It is an advantage to have a solid capital base – this creates independ-



Michael Willome,
CEO of Conzzeta AG.

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ence and insures freedom, which is particularly helpful in difficult times.

HOW CAN ESTABLISHED companies ensure constant renewal and momentum for innovation?

Even if digitization is changing our world, it is the people who ultimately make the difference. You need creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset. It's a question of the business culture. Unfortunately, we still see too much bureaucracy and caution. The perfect solution often comes too late – it's better to offer an 80-percent solution quickly, then take the last steps together with the customer. You have to respond rapidly and work backwards from the customer's needs to determine what they mean for your own company, rather than the other way round. Successful companies have open and communicative employees who are ready to take risks.

WHICH EXPORT MARKETS do you know particularly well?

From personal experience, I know Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North Amer-

ica. I have lived and worked in all these regions. Of course, local characteristics play a role, and the differences are considerable and multi-faceted. In order to sell, you have to listen to everyone, be self-effacing, and show presence. Respect, modesty, honesty and consistency are virtues that are valued everywhere in the world. I see the biggest difference in Asia, where speed is of the essence and big solutions are required. In Europe, progress can be incremental.

TRANSLATED BY CATHERINE HICKLEY

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