

Christian Stammel

Founder and CEO of Wearable Technologies AG, Munich

When and how did you get involved with wearable technology?

In early 2000, I used a chest strap for the first time to monitor my heart rate. As an active student athlete back in the nineties, I was always looking for ways to combine my professional experience in high-tech with my sports activities.

In 2003, I started a joint project with Falke, Vodafone, and Vitaphone to develop the first fully integrated ECG T-shirt. With this shirt we won the renowned ISPO AWARD, after which we tried to market the shirt.

At the time, there was no market – not even a market definition for these product categories. This led me and my team to establish our own marketplace in 2004, for which we registered the Wearable Technologies brand and website.

After more than eight years of evangelism for the wearable technologies market, our company is now the biggest B2B platform in the entire market space. We are driving this market further with our dedicated open innovation programs, world leading networking events (WTconferences), and standardization/certification activities.

How does Germany compare to the U.S. and other countries with respect to creating innovative wearable devices?

In 2000, Germany was one of the leading nations in the field of WT initiatives – especially with regards to nationally funded research projects. In 2003 and 2004, many of these projects were stopped and industry giants also slowed their development due to a lack of market success.

Although Germany and Europe are a bit behind the U.S. today with regards to the fast adoption of new wearable technologies, exciting room for growth still exists. While the U.S. has traditionally excelled in marketing and business development, Germany still has a market advantage with its top-notch engineering. Therefore, Germany will play an important role in the future of the WT market – especially in fields, such as mobile healthcare, which require highly sophisticated engineering. The Munich-based WT healthcare company “Moticon,” the overall winner of last year’s WT Innovation World Cup, exemplifies German excellence in engineering.

WT has served as a business accelerator for more than 3,000 innovative companies. Could you provide advice to our readers on what makes a successful entrepreneur in the field of wearable technology?

There is a big difference between a successful entrepreneur in Silicon Valley and in Germany. A German start-up sometimes develops a product or algorithm for more than three years before it tries to receive advice on securing capital from VCs, private equity, or business angels.

In the U.S., most entrepreneurs and start-ups just have a business plan and possibly an initial prototype to secure their first million dollars in funding for further product development. If Germans are able to copy the American way of thinking about start-ups and combine it with excellent German engineering, great potential and opportunity exists.

In my opinion, the main ways to accelerate a WT business are:

- Right time to market (the technology has to fit into the existing tech environment, e.g. smartphone adaptation with Android or Apple is key)
- Interoperability (use of easy-to-connect standards, e.g. Bluetooth low energy technology)
- Internationalization (a global view for the product roll-out)
- Engineering skills (in the WT market, a mix of electronic devices and cloud/app software has a much higher barrier to entry than just software application – real manufacturing requires advanced skills and much more funding)
- Distribution/pricing

Smart watches, interactive textiles/garments, and brain-controlled exoskeletons – In which areas do you think wearable technology will have the greatest impact and why?

All areas you mentioned will have a major impact. As a key trend, we also believe in the so-called “hearable” segment, which includes headsets, headphones, and hearing aids with additional options for monitoring health or other data for an enhanced user experience. Other alternative items aside from today’s widespread wristbands and glasses will also be of interest.

According to IMS Research, the wearable technologies market is considered to be the next “mega trend” and will exceed \$6 billion in sales by 2016. In your opinion, how will wearable technology affect our everyday lives over the next decade?

Wearable technologies will be everywhere in our future lives: from addressing critical needs in the health care and elderly care sectors to providing enhanced gaming experiences. The award-winning movie “Her” is a good example for what stage WT products and solutions may reach over the next five years.