

# Give the doctor what he needs – preferably today

Advanced tech and customer support help Ellex expand laser and imaging market share

by Howard Larkin

## Outlook on Industry

High technology photocoagulators, photodisruptors, and SLT photoregeneration systems form the backbone of much of modern ophthalmic surgery. But when the complex lasers that you and your patients rely on require service, the last thing you need is a three-day wait. That's why Ellex opened a European support centre last year.

"Having technical support in Europe means we can respond in real time with a back-and-forth exchange that would be nearly impossible going across multiple time zones," says Peter Falzon, CEO of the Adelaide, Australia-based firm. "We can get three days' work done in 15 minutes on the phone, and we have supplies on hand, so any parts you need can be shipped that same day."

The support centre is just one feature of an overall strategy to get closer to its ophthalmologist customers. Since 2002, Ellex has transformed itself from a manufacturer of lasers marketed by other firms to a full-service direct seller. More than 95 per cent of the company's sales are now of its own branded products. About 25 per cent of those sales are in Europe, which, along with Japan, are Ellex's fastest growing markets. For the first six months of fiscal year 2007, worldwide sales were up 26 per cent over the previous year.

Falzon believes this commitment to customer service helps set Ellex apart. "When you make an investment in a laser it is not only how well the laser performs, but how well the company performs to install it, service it and keep it operating," he says. "For that you need quick access to service engineers. Providing uninterrupted performance is the difference between the premier laser supplier and someone who is just selling machines."

### Investing in innovation

Of course, customer service is only valuable if the underlying products remain technologically competitive. To this end, Ellex has invested nearly €9m over the last five years expanding its product line and building on the expertise it developed manufacturing more than 12,000 laser systems since 1985.

Ellex offers a full line of ophthalmic lasers, including the Super Q and Ultra Q YAG photodisruptors, the Integre, Integre Duo and Solitaire laser photocoagulators, and Solo SLT and Tango combined SLT/photodisruptor. Lasers come in three platforms: standard, wheelchair-accessible, and portable units that can be broken down into travel cases for use at multiple locations. Ellex expanded into diagnostic ultrasound systems with the December



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Peter Falzon, CEO Ellex

2006 acquisition of US-based Innovative Imaging, Inc.

Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (SLT) photoregeneration for reducing intraocular pressure is a major growth driver. "Eastern Europe is adopting SLT fastest because of the economic advantages," Mr Falzon explains. Using the procedure as a primary glaucoma treatment is cost-effective in the long run because it cuts down on the number of maintenance drugs needed – a compelling argument for new technology in countries with limited healthcare resources.

Ellex has longer experience manufacturing SLT laser systems than any other firm, both as the original equipment manufacturer supplier for Coherent (now Lumenis), which developed SLT, and under its own brand. Product offerings include the Solo for SLT only treatment, and the Tango, which allows treatment of open- and closed-angle glaucoma and secondary cataracts using SLT and YAG modes.

The firm also supports diffusion of the new technology with extensive support

for surgeons, including a website, [www.sl-ellex.com](http://www.sl-ellex.com), and a newsletter offering clinical pearls and practical tips for integrating SLT into a surgical practice. "Customers can go online to ask the experts," Falzon says. "It's a real value-added feature for our SLT customers."

For photocoagulation, Ellex introduced its new 30XL laser slit lamp at the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery 2007 annual meeting in April. The system is optimised to allow expanded peripheral observation during surgery, providing a 10-degree convergence angle of viewing paths to create better depth perception and field of view in the peripheral retina. When used with the Solitaire photocoagulator system, surgeons can switch between slit lamp operation or laser indirect ophthalmoscope without having to disconnect optical fibres, Falzon said. "There is no need to disconnect the fibre between the slit lamp and the laser when using an LIO, so it is more reliable." The Integre Duo was the first solid-state

photocoagulator to deliver both green and red wavelengths, enhancing its utility for treating patients with media obstructions, such as vitreous haemorrhage.

On the retinal surgery horizon is a procedure Mr Falzon refers to as "retinal regeneration therapy", which will attempt to apply concepts of photoregeneration to the retina similar to those that have successfully restored the function of the trabecular meshwork in SLT. The research is sponsored by a grant from the Australian government.

Also presented at the ASCRS meeting was a selective capsulotomy procedure to adjust accommodative intraocular lenses using the Ultra Q photodisruptor. A premier capsulotomy and iridotomy laser, the Ultra Q's precise aiming and concentration of laser energy also allows highly focal treatment to relax contractions in both the anterior and posterior capsule that can pull an AIOL out of alignment – without damaging the lens surface or haptics. This marks Ellex's first foray into using lasers to help manage refraction, Mr Falzon notes.

Innovative Imaging's Eye Cubed ultrasound system will further expand Ellex's refractive presence, Falzon says. Precise biometry will be essential to making the coming generations of multifocal and accommodative IOLs function properly. The system's customised A-scan and B-scan modes make the device suitable for both retinal specialists and anterior segment surgeons.

Providing tools to support refractive surgeons is a natural progression for the company that reflects the evolution of refractive technology, Mr Falzon says. "Looking at the last 15 years the trend in refractive surgery went from spectacle correction to the corneal surface correction to intraocular correction, which is where our focus has always been." However, he does not plan to go into excimer lasers. "Does the market need anything better than the Wavelight Allegretto? No. The next step is to go inside the eye."

Integrating diagnostics into its offerings also serves the needs of ophthalmologists and their patients – which is Ellex's overarching goal, Mr Falzon says.

"The company's focus going forward will not vary from ophthalmology, providing not just products, but long-term support once they are in the hands of our customers. We are not going to go off and develop a hair-removal laser."