

Interview with Holger Cordes

You joined Ascom as CEO as of 1 June 2016.

What are your impressions?

I met an impressive team that lives up to its highly professional reputation in the market. Ascom has cutting edge and solid products and a sterling installed base of very loyal customers – which all three cannot be underestimated as factors for success. Together with the entire dedicated Ascom team, we will leverage these strong foundations and build our future growth and industry ambition on top of it.

It has been announced in January 2015 to transform Ascom into a company focusing on IT and communication primarily in healthcare by 2020. What is your vision for Ascom?

I believe healthcare is at a pivotal moment. The reality is that healthcare will not be sustainable at its current levels of access and quality without change. The expenses for healthcare will continue to increase considerably in the next years, mainly due to aging populations and scientific progress. Healthcare will no longer be affordable unless there are some fundamental changes. On the flip side, healthcare has not yet embraced the full potential of digitalization in general and the benefits of information velocity and data-driven decision support specifically. I am convinced that digitalizing the clinical and care workflow is one strong remedy to cure the increasing healthcare costs.

Our vision is that Ascom works towards a professional world without information gaps for the best possible decisions at any given time and location.

How do you see the development of digitalization in healthcare?

If we look at the development of the IT world of the past years, we see that the desktop world has come to an end and that the future is mobile. More soberly, we should even admit, that the desktop world never really made it into workflow support in highly mobile and ad-hoc environments.

Another observation is more and more that software architecture is foundational for good workflows. Hardware though is and will remain an important enabler that can free up the potential of good software architecture. It is hence the combination of good, interoperable and open software architecture with purpose-built cutting edge end-user devices that will free up the potential of digitalization.



Holger Cordes, CEO

A third element is that clinical environments (and many others, by the way) are highly mobile, largely ad-hoc and mission-critical. These three requirements have made life so difficult for the desktop world to become successful here. Mobility is not just a convenience, mobility has become mission-critical!

As a conclusion, I am convinced that digitalization can, has to and will change the paradigm in healthcare. Yet only if it can support ad-hoc, mission-critical and mobile workflows. This is where our expertise, strength and passion lies. This is where we see our mission.

How do you see this mission impact and contribute to a better and more affordable healthcare system?

First of all, we believe healthcare is the most challenging and most complex mobile workflow environment, but also the most rewarding and where we can make the biggest impact. It is, however, not the only industry where similar challenges through ad-hoc, mobile and mission-critical workflows exist. We will focus our development energies towards healthcare therefore, but we are convinced, that what we create will have benefits and use cases beyond just healthcare.

A major condition and the true reason for the limited success of the digital age in healthcare is to bridge the last mile to the patient, or bed if you like. Ascom already has three major elements in support of this challenge: We are at the hospital bed with our Nurse Call systems, we provide purpose built mobile devices for all the roaming staff busy with ad-hoc tasks and in constant need of communication, and we offer device connectivity and alarm management. There is hardly anyone better suited to bridge the last mile to the patient more comprehensively than Ascom.

Traditional healthcare ICT has tried to eliminate the need for communication. There is huge value in that approach and it will be a cornerstone of a more efficient and thus affordable healthcare system. Yet, it is also

wrong, because it does not reflect the highly ad-hoc, hard to plan and roaming routine of a clinical ward that will always need communication. To bring the power of traditional healthcare ICT finally to bear, we, as an industry, need to bridge the last mile to the patient. Eliminating error, closing information gaps (in particular time gaps) and enabling the best decision in a “just in time” fashion – these are the true benefits of the digital age. We will ultimately succeed, if we bring the best of two worlds together: merge information technology with communication technology and thus bring open, flexible and interoperable expertise and experience to bear for the optimization of mission-critical workflows.

Our mission, therefore, is to bridge the information gap on the last mile of workflows by providing mission-critical, real time solutions for the highly mobile, ad-hoc and time sensitive environments. We can do this by combining all elements of this bridge in the “power of one”. Ascom has the opportunity to play a major role in redefining digital workflow management from “just in case” to “just in time”.

How will you implement the Ascom strategy?

Ascom has a solid business strategy, which we are now focusing further towards our clearly identified target segments. To live its mission, Ascom will accelerate the integration of the portfolio and enhance a comprehensive value proposition. Ascom wants to be the information broker for mission-critical information in highly mobile and ad-hoc environments.

We will pursue a market-driven strategy with a strong focus on organic growth and software development to drive market share. Ascom will be converted from a divisional and regional set-up to a OneCompany organization. A global platform approach in R&D, product management and process standardization shall strengthen our position. We will also look for partnerships and alliances to support the implementation of our strategy.

Does this approach also fit for the non-healthcare business?

Absolutely. As I indicated earlier on, our customers in the industry and retail business have very similar challenges in ad-hoc and mobile mission-critical workflows. We have a strong footprint in the industry and retail business and are committed to develop it further by leveraging our innovation across. Therefore and to strengthen our position, we will sharpen and innovate our go-to-market strategies for industry, retail and OEM and drive focus through dedicated resources for dedicated segments.

Do you plan for major acquisitions in the next years?

Major acquisitions are not part of our core strategy. You cannot “buy” strategy. Our objective is to build our

strategy and grow organically through a strong focus on innovation. However, selective and smaller acquisitions may complement our strategy and will continue to drive value and speed to market.

What will the Ascom organization look like in the future?

Ascom is one company with one mission and one culture. We will set up a OneCompany organization to allow economies of scale especially in functional and global platform areas. This will allow us to free up bandwidth and energy in our customer facing organizations and combine more efficiency in the back office with more agility and drive in the market – for the benefit of our customers and other stakeholders.

How will that translate into running the operational business?

In simplified terms, the management will be split into three main areas: functional or back office operations, solutions and customer facing organizations. We will, therefore, run functional teams in a centralized manner in the future. On the solutions side we will have two areas with “System Solutions” covering our more traditional solutions including Nurse Call and Mobility and “Platform Solutions” covering our growing innovation capabilities. Last not least, I will lead the customer-facing organizations as the CEO and engage more with our sales teams and have already started to do so. You could say the new culture I want to foster is: we are all sales! And the CEO is the first sales resource in the company.

We are in a full-size transformation phase in our sales and market-facing organizations with many tangible results emerging already. We will intensify this effort further and will also implement a dedicated leader for the global sales transformation program. And we will complement these efforts with a dedicated team to focus on strategic alliances and partnerships, as not only healthcare yet healthcare especially is an ecosystem where 1+1 more often than not equals 3.

What are the goals you intend to achieve over the next years?

We will continue to win lighthouse reference projects. We will become not just a player, but a thought leader in our segment, a go-to-company for mobile, mission-critical workflow enablement. We will innovate and accelerate the rate at which we will launch new solutions to drive workflow optimization on the last mile of critical workflows and to bridge the information gap. This will enable us to sustainably return to a double digit growth path and be one of the leading Healthcare IT companies in 2020 by size and reputation and bring our innovation to other comparable sectors too.