



One hundred years since the birth of Camillo Olivetti

“The inventor and the industrialist are mutually complementary, and an invention cannot mature and give the benefits of which it is capable, if it is not an integral part of a sound and suitable industrial organisation. The day scientific and experimental studies are considered for their true worth, and sound, honest industrial organisations are able to obtain the maximum advantages from them, helping with development and practical applications—on that day only will our inventors see their ideas put into practice for everyone’s benefit. This will be a great advantage morally and economically not only to themselves but to the country that has seen them launched”.

These words, still valid today, were spoken at the beginning of the century by Camillo Olivetti, when he was preparing to produce his first typewriter. The ingenuity, foresight and determination to succeed implicit in his statement laid the foundations for the building of the Olivetti organization into what it is today—an international group with 18 factories, situated in various parts of the world. Its sales network reaches all over the world by means of 27 associated companies and 106 general agents. It has 58 thousand employees. Its production ranges from portable typewriters to the most sophisticated electronic products for data processing and covers the entire sector of information handling.

The Founder

Camillo Olivetti, born in Ivrea on August 13th, 1868, was a man whose unexpected and bold decisions, whose “eccentricities”, always amazed the small township of Ivrea. When the sign “Ing. C. Olivetti & C., first national typewriter factory” was erected on the roof of the first factory in Ivrea, the new projects of Camillo Olivetti were judged to be even more ambitious than his previous ones for manufacturing electric measuring instruments. In fact the typewriter, far from competing with the pen and ink-well, was at the most an object of curiosity.

In 1908 his first typewriter, the M1, was finished. “It is still not perfect”, he

wrote, “but I believe that in a short time I can make it as good as the best machines of its kind”. In 1911 the M1 gained considerable success at the Universal Exhibition in Turin, notably for its appearance.

Though the phrase “industrial design” was then unknown, Camillo wrote: “Even the beautiful appearance of the machine has been taken care of. A typewriter must not be a toy for the drawing room, with decorations of questionable taste, but must have a serious, and at the same time elegant, aspect”.

With the “thousand machines” mark reached, Camillo Olivetti had a distinctive tie-pin struck for all employees. This event was to be linked, several years later with the founding of the “Golden Pins” for all employees completing 25 years of service with the firm.

New ideas, fresh energy

Adriano, son of Camillo Olivetti, brought fresh energy and ideas for the technological and social growth of the factory when he joined the Company. In 1929 the Research and Development Office was started. In 1932 the first example of a portable typewriter—the MPI—was brought out, and by 1934 the workers exceeded 1,000.

Commercial growth proceeded at the same rate: in 1929 the first company abroad was created—S. A. Hispano Olivetti, at Barcelona. In 1937 the studies led by Guiseppe Beccio, and Massimo Olivetti, Camillo’s second son, resulted in the production of teleprinters. Four years later the firm entered the field of calculators with the Multisumma.

In 1938, at the age of 70, Camillo Olivetti gave up the presidency of the company to his son Adriano, who had already held the position of managing director for 5 years. In the autumn of 1943, his health, already precarious, grew worse. He was admitted to the hospital in Biella, where he died on December 4th, 1943.

Centenary celebrations

The Centenary of Camillo Olivetti’s birth was commemorated by events organised by a civic committee and by the Company. A commemorative ceremony including an official oration, was held at the Giacosa Civic Theatre in Ivrea on October 13th. Public visits to production departments and the firm’s social services were arranged.

At the Metropolitan Museum in New York on 25th September, an exhibition of

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