CUSTOMER CASE

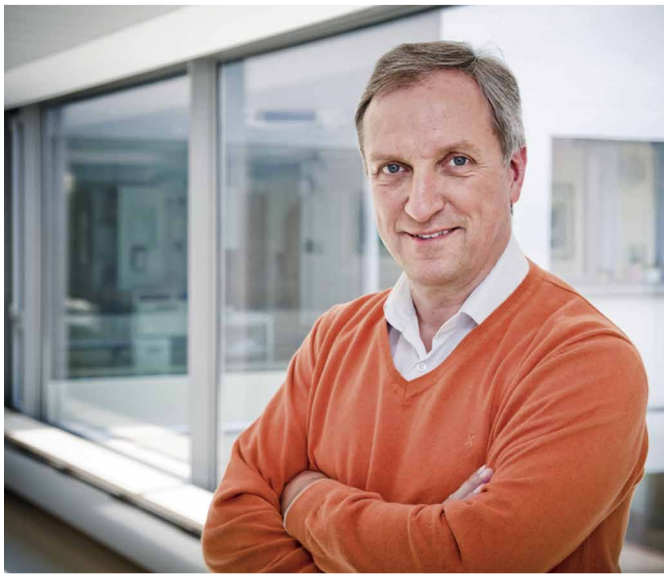
Gierth X-Ray International GmbH, Riesa, Germany

Bringing the benefits of Agfa HealthCare's digital radiography solutions to veterinarians in Germany and beyond

With a vet leading the company, imaging equipment distributor Gierth really knows what its customers need: from one-person veterinary practices to universities and even the world's zoos

"In the scope of our partnership with Agfa HealthCare, we have supplied all five schools of veterinary medicine in Germany with complete Agfa HealthCare- and Gierth-branded radiography solutions. That alone is a great success."

Ralf Georgi,
veterinarian, CEO of Gierth



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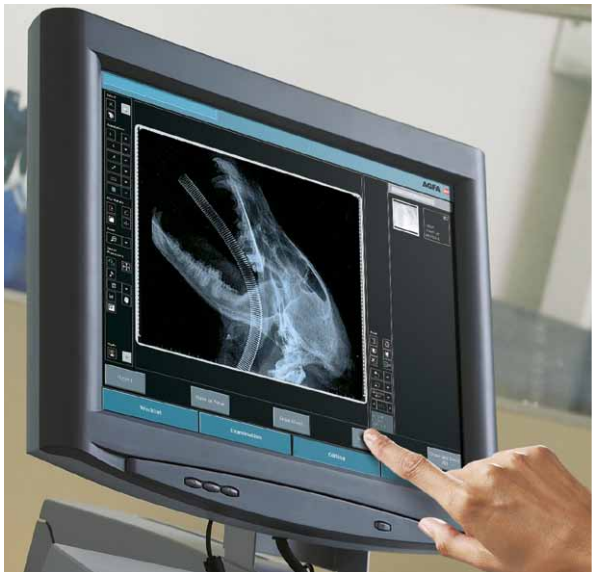

Not that long ago, radiography for the treatment of animals lagged well behind developments in human medicine, and remained predominantly a film-based process. But throughout Europe, and certainly in Germany, that is changing fast. A remarkable 85 percent of the country's equine practitioners now enjoy the benefits of digital radiography, whether computed radiography (CR) or direct radiography (DR). Among pet care practices, between 45 and 50 percent had gone digital by 2012, and many more will follow soon. Gierth X-Ray International GmbH, a distributor and complete solutions provider based in Riesa near Dresden (Germany), has been a driving force in that evolution. Partnering with Agfa HealthCare since 1999, the company now distributes a complete range of Agfa HealthCare digital radiography systems, typically as part of fully integrated, customized solutions.

TOP-QUALITY, FAST IMAGES MEET ANIMAL CARE NEEDS

"Today, high-resolution digital systems have fully caught up in terms of image quality," says Gierth CEO Ralf Georgi, himself a trained veterinarian. "What is more, they open up a wealth of new opportunities in diagnostics and digital image communications. And even for very small practices, the cost of digitization is no longer prohibitive. For example, even a practice with one veterinarian and an assistant, performing just a single X-ray exam (consisting of two images) per day, would generally have some 15,000 to 20,000 euros a year to invest in new technology – and standard CR solutions are now well within that price bracket."

Established in 1977, Gierth currently employs seven sales staff handling distribution of veterinary radiography solutions throughout Germany. In parallel, the company develops and builds a range of X-ray accessories (including X-ray tables and stands), creating total solutions for all veterinary needs. A range of Gierth innovations has its origins in a long-standing collaboration with a Japanese partnership, including the world's first high-frequency, portable X-ray system, introduced in 1992. Continued miniaturization of radiographic technology in tandem with performance optimization, all within the context of increasingly complex medical imaging workflows – this is the vision that drives Gierth.

Agfa HealthCare's contribution

- **CR 10-X:** Affordable, table-top digitizer specially designed to offer lower-volume practices a cost-effective entry into CR that doesn't compromise on image quality.
- **CR 30-X:** Compact, tabletop system for computed radiography where space is limited or in mobile environments.
- **DX-G and DX-M:** CR systems supporting both standard phosphor plates and needle-based detectors, for the next generation in CR.

All of Agfa HealthCare's digital radiography systems come with:

- An NX Workstation which receives and processes raw images, and provides very fast image acquisition and a smooth workflow.
- MUSICA^2 advanced, exam-independent image processing software that automatically and intelligently optimizes image quality and workflow for both small and large animals.

Compact dimensions, lightness and portability are the hallmarks of Gierth's portfolio. "Many of our customers are veterinarians working on their own. Vets have to be surgeons, internists, gynecologists, anesthetists, radiologists and more, all rolled into one," explains Mr. Georgi. "Plus, there is an enormous range of species that any vet may handle on a given day – from dogs and cats to snakes, frogs, lizards, mice, rabbits, birds and of course larger animals such as horses. This gives you a good idea of the extensive specialist knowledge required. At Gierth, our mission is to make the work of these vets as easy and convenient as possible, specifically when it comes to performing imaging exams."

Agfa HealthCare's digital radiography solutions offer extensive benefits that fit perfectly with this mission. In veterinary practices, taking images very quickly is key to handling active patients. The high quality of the images and the ability to check them on-screen reduces the number of retakes, keeping workflow moving smoothly and enhancing productivity. Fewer retakes also means lower radiation dose – for the patient and the veterinarian. And Agfa HealthCare's digital imaging solutions require little space and are easy to use, freeing up valuable time, cost and space resources.

GERMANY'S VET SCHOOLS GO DIGITAL WITH AGFA HEALTHCARE AND GIERTH

This potential for a successful partnership led Gierth to approach Agfa HealthCare back in 1999. Together, they jointly developed a veterinary software solution based on MUSICA, the first generation of Agfa HealthCare's gold standard in image processing. Geared towards the entire spectrum of large and small, indigenous and exotic patients treated by a typical pet practice, the software automatically adapts its imaging parameters to the exam type and species, to optimize image quality. Along with a full line of Agfa HealthCare digital radiography solutions – such as CR 10-X, CR 30-X, DX-G and DX-M as well as the NX Workstation – this software remains a mainstay of Gierth's portfolio.

A shared vision for the veterinary market and synergies between the two companies' portfolios are the cornerstones of what Mr. Georgi describes as a partnership "firmly based on mutual trust". This partnership has led to the biggest joint achievement so far: the implementation of complete Agfa HealthCare- and Gierth-branded radiography solutions at all five German schools of veterinary medicine. These solutions are typically comprised of a specific Agfa HealthCare digital radiography system plus Gierth products ranging from X-ray tubes to X-ray tables. For example, internationally renowned veterinary school *Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover* has equipped nearly all of its clinics with a comprehensive range of Agfa HealthCare CR solutions.

Did you know ...

- *Tierärztliche Hochschule Hannover*, one of the world's leading veterinary universities, has equipped four of its clinics with a comprehensive range of Agfa HealthCare CR solutions.
- The veterinary faculty of *Freie Universität Berlin* is using two DX-G systems – versatile digitizers supporting both standard phosphor plates and needle-based detectors.
- The bird and reptile clinic of *Universität Leipzig*, which requires particularly high image resolution, opted for a DX-S-based solution.
- In a similar setup, *Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen* is also relying on a DX-S-based solution, providing state-of-the-art image quality.
- A solution based on DX-M, Agfa HealthCare's high-end digitizer, will soon be installed at *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*.

The bird and reptile clinic of *Universität Leipzig* requires particularly high image resolution and has also opted for a DX-S-based CR solution.

TREATING JING JING, "CHINA'S MOST FAMOUS PANDA"

Gierth's efforts to improve animal healthcare through imaging reach far beyond the borders of Germany, however. Some five to six times a year, Mr. Georgi packs up his X-ray generators and detectors for an unusual kind of field work. During his "wild animal house calls" he deals with elephants, tigers, lions, bears and much more, in zoos and wildlife reserves around the world. Entering the compounds of the sedated animals, he uses his advanced equipment to full effect. In some 90 percent of cases, he obtains the necessary diagnostic information for successful therapeutic treatment, he comments.

Among his notable successes was Jing Jing, the female giant panda cub born in 2005, who became famous in China and beyond as the mascot of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. But Jing Jing might not have lived to see the grand opening ceremony had it not been for Mr. Georgi. In the spring of 2007, he responded to a call from the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, located on the Tibetan Plateau in Sichuan Province, to attend to an ailing Jing Jing. Using his images as a basis for differential diagnosis, the cause of her symptoms – respiratory distress accompanied by a high fever – was soon established, and, in co-operation with Chinese veterinarians, she was successfully treated for pneumonia. According to the latest reports from Chengdu, "China's most famous giant panda" continues to thrive in her mountainous habitat.

Clearly, this is a happy result for everyone involved, and a great example of how digital imaging is changing the face of animal healthcare – including in the treatment of endangered species – even in the farthest reaches of the globe! ■

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