



## ***A Letter from Dale Thorstad President, AUDNET Hearing Group***

Hello All:



If one were to identify a core value the hearing industry embodies across the various professions that are associated with it, that core identity would likely be "helping people." For manufacturers, designing hearing aid technology that increasingly advances its ability to improve communication in an ever greater array of environments and conditions helps the people providers serve. For providers, improving skills in selecting the right technology for the diverse patient needs we encounter, adjusting that technology for maximum benefit, and marrying that technological capability with the counseling, empathy, understanding and skill needed to maximize long-term communication benefit helps the people we treat.

In all, it's a pretty good and noble system.

In my view, helping those who embody this system is important too. But, it's not always easy. I have been a part of the inner workings of this industry for some time. I have worked in manufacturing and have not only been a part of some of the industry's most innovative technological and form factor developments, I have also witnessed a number of steps backwards when self-interests muddled progress. I have worked in the dispensing world, and have not only helped craft many licensing, education, certification and training guidelines that now work to guarantee a superior standard of care for patients across the country, I have also witnessed turf wars where self-defined "groups" battle each other for bigger pieces of an existing pie instead of working together to build a bigger pie.

So, in 2002, when I stepped in to manage Marcon, the nation's first independent provider network, I did so in part because that network had already transcended some of the limitations of silo thinking. When Marcon was created in 1977, hearing aid fittings were performed by dispensers. But, as the Marcon dispenser's sons and daughters joined the family in the business, almost without exception, they did so as audiologists. So, before our merger, Marcon counted among its membership both audiologists and dispensers who worked together not only to improve the efficiency of their operations, but to advance the effectiveness of their shared responsibility - hearing aid selection and fitting. We have helped audiologists tackle the intricacies of

practice management, and we have guided dispensers toward fitting solutions and procedures rooted in audiological research. Numerous practices within our ranks have successfully integrated both disciplines into a cohesive business model that excels in serving their communities. I can say from experience and with conviction that working together produces no negatives and fosters only positives.

That is why when the opportunity to merge with AuDNet, Inc. materialized - an organization that for the last fifteen years has been working to sustain and assist independent audiology practices in their effort to be successful - our board saw immediate value. The key commonality here is independence. At no other time in our industry's history has the independent provider of hearing technology been more challenged than right now. Not by audiologists challenging dispensers or by physicians challenging audiologists. Today's challenge is by outside forces who seek to corporatize hearing care provision at the expense of the small business person. By those who promote cost as the defining point in consumer decision making, rather than the effectiveness of care. By a disparity in cost-of-goods that continues to burden the independent practitioner the most.

These are the challenges that collective wisdom, collective enthusiasm and collective purchasing can counter. And mergers such as the one that started AUDNET Hearing Group are the most effective way to harness that wisdom, enthusiasm and purchasing power. Together, we are positioned to insure that our members will succeed and thrive in today's environment. Together, we can compete with corporations better than we can on our own. Together, we can promote the value and importance of professional involvement nationally. Together, we can harness our collective wisdom. Together, we can make our businesses more economically efficient. Together, we can keep the spirit and value of small business a key part of hearing health care.

History not only defines where we have come from, it often colors how we continue to think. When new challenges appear, it is sometimes necessary to pursue new paths, in an effort to forge that better future we all envision. When we abandon those aspects of our history that have held us back, we are best positioned to move forward. Together forward.