Haag-Streit

A "Year of Innovation"

By Diana Truong

Heritage this old shouldn't feel this fresh. But Haag-Streit's 2025 lineup—three launches, one new CEO and a digital vision rooted in trust—shows that even after 165 years, Swiss precision still knows how to reinvent itself.

When Haag-Streit (Bern, Switzerland) calls 2025 a "year of innovation," they're not just polishing the optics. The Swiss powerhouse—known for its slit lamps and surgical microscopes—has spent the past year reframing what innovation means in eye care. And, true to form, they've done it without losing sight of their greatest strength: trust.

From three major product launches to a new CEO steering the ship, it's been a transformative year for Haag-Streit. At ESCRS 2025 and AAO 2025, the company globally launched a trifecta of new products: the METIS 900 surgical microscope, the Refractor 900 refraction solution, and the Elara 900 slit lamp. Together, these mark not just technological leaps but a statement about Haag-Streit's direction: digital, connected and resolutely clinician-centric.

A confluence of innovation

For Thomas Lenzen, Haag-Streit's new CEO, the timing couldn't be better. He joined the company on September 1st after decades in the medical device industry. "For me it's a great time to be at Haag-Streit," Mr. Lenzen said. "Precisely because we have all those products that we're globally launching at this point in time."

He explained that this "year of innovation" isn't a coincidence. It's the result of nearly a decade of R&D work reaching maturity simultaneously. "We have innovated in the past a lot," Mr. Lenzen said. "But we've worked very hard for the last almost ten years on those product categories. It's great that they're coming out all together at this time."

And Haag-Streit isn't slowing down. "We're going to use that momentum and maintain it for the future—and shorten our cycles of innovation," Mr. Lenzen added.

Building on 165 years of precision

Haag-Streit's legacy is hard to overstate. Founded in 1858, the company built its reputation on craftsmanship, optical precision, and collaboration with ophthalmologists and trusted business partners. Mr. Lenzen sees innovation as the natural evolution of that legacy.

"We're building on our heritage of 165 years of a great brand and innovation," he said. "We're continually partnering with ophthalmologists to create products. That's where we come from, and we'll use that tradition, and add innovation and new technology to create solutions to achieve the best possible outcome for patients worldwide."

A key part of that future is integration: connecting Haag-Streit's devices with digital software to improve workflow and clinical decision-making. "More than ever, time is money, and we're making sure there is an exchange between our products and the software of the practices," Mr. Lenzen explained. "We want to make ophthalmologists more efficient and to support them in achieving the best outcomes for patients."

The slit lamp of the 21st century

At the heart of Haag-Streit's innovation story is the Elara 900, the company's most talked-about release of the year. To mark its significance, Haag-Streit confidently lays claim to Elara 900 as "the slit lamp of the 21st century."

Theo Reininger, Senior Global Product Manager, led its launch. "We're really launching a new product that's revolutionary," he said. "The company hasn't seen something like this in the product portfolio before."

Mr. Reininger described the Elara 900 as a bridge between Haag-Streit's legendary optics and the digital tools shaping ophthalmology's future. "It merges what Haag-Streit is well known for—optics—with software," he explained. "It bridges the gap between being a device that has been analog over the last decades, and we're including software to increase its value."

That value comes from continuous software upgrades. "We have a software release cycle that's twice a year," he said. "We're adding new features based on user feedback.

And yes, one day, we'll add artificial intelligence to it."

But for Mr. Reininger, the goal isn't to rush artificial intelligence; it's to do it correctly. "We will bring it to the market when we believe it reflects Haag-Streit's quality standards," he said. "We're in the business of trust."

Guiding clinicians into the digital era

Mr. Lenzen acknowledged that ophthalmology can be a risk-adverse industry, where routines—such as slit lamp examinations—have been established over decades. Subsequently, any changes had to be approached with pragmatism and empathy. That's why, with Elara 900, clinicians will find features they know and trust—the precision optics, for example. These are combined with new digital features that speed up examinations, such as its digital "presets" and motorized controls. Combined, they make the new technology feel natural.

"Innovation must fit into everyday life to work for eye care professionals," Mr. Lenzen clarified. "As trusted partners, we bring value to customers through digital solutions."

Mr. Reininger added that even with new digital features, clinicians have adapted to the Elara 900 quickly. "We were pleased to see how fast the adaptation is," he said. "You might need a few minutes to get used to it, but it becomes second nature."

Moments of realization

Mr. Reininger said one of the most satisfying parts of the Elara 900's rollout has been hearing reactions from ophthalmologists. "When users started switching between their traditional slit lamp and the new Elara, they had this revealing moment," he said. "They realized how much manual effort they needed to put in before. Then they came back to the Elara and saw how easy, how efficient and how ergonomic it really is."

Feedback, he added, has been overwhelmingly positive. "People love it. People trust it." One clinician even described the new joystick controls as "going from manual to automatic. I'd never go back."

Innovation shaped by feedback

Haag-Streit's innovation philosophy hinges on collaboration. As Mr. Reininger described, every software release and product refinement is shaped by close communication with clinicians.

"In our release cycle, we start testing with select users," he said. "We take their feedback, implement it and make sure every release has been tested prior to launch."

Before the Elara's global premiere at ESCRS, Haag-Streit conducted a soft launch in Germany and Switzerland to gather insights from real-world users. "We wanted to make sure everything was set in place," said Mr. Reininger. "At the same time, we worked with key opinion leaders who installed the Elara 900 in their practice and used it over a longer period of time."

"We tried to have a diverse group: different ages, genders and levels of experience," he said. "The feedback was invaluable."

Reinventing without losing the soul

Mr. Reininger was candid about the biggest challenge in developing the Elara 900. "Finding the right balance—defining what the slit lamp of the 21st century is," he said.

For Haag-Streit, that meant being bold enough to innovate while staying grounded in what users love. "We are a premium brand," Mr. Reininger explained. "We wanted to create something that could one day replace our current top-of-the-line BQ 900, but we had to make sure users could continue doing what they do in a better way."

Mr. Lenzen summed it up best, saying, "The biggest challenge was bringing all the ideas, all the client demands, all the fears of being too radical…into one device. Not just evolution, but still kind of a revolution."

A vision built on trust

If there's one theme running through Haag-Streit's" year of innovation," it's trust. From precision optics to digital integration, every step reflects the same meticulous care that has defined the company for over a century and a half.

"Our ophthalmologists and distributors work with us because they trust us," Mr. Lenzen noted. "With the Elara 900, we're combining heritage with the next step, and we're doing it the Haag-Streit way."

And that, more than anything, is what makes this year not just a "year of innovation" but a milestone in a legacy still unfolding.

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