

EGEA PUBLISHING PRESENTS

Rediscovering and protecting “The emotion of sound”

With an ageing population and an increasingly noisy society, hearing loss is a phenomenon that is bound to increase, even among the youngest: Valentina Fornari's book invites us to gain new awareness by sharing data and telling the story of an Italian company, Amplifon, that is committed to changing the way hearing problems are perceived and experienced.

Milan, December 2023 – **Hearing loss** (or hearing impairment) affects 1.5 billion people worldwide. With an ageing population and (above all) a society that is becoming **increasingly noisy**, hearing loss is a problem that is bound to increase and affect younger and younger age groups. Between the silence and the din, however, there is a danger that “**the emotion of sound**” will be lost. **Valentina Fornari** has written a book of the same title, in an attempt to raise awareness of the risks to our hearing and to combat the stigma with which these discomforts are perceived. In her book, she not only reports data and studies on the effects that noise pollution can have on each and every one of us, but also illustrates the solutions that **technology** now offers to deal with them. It also tells the story of an Italian company, **Amplifon**, which in over seventy years has established itself as a global leader in hearing care services and solutions. With the ambition to **change the lives** of millions of people.

Today, the **challenges are different**, and greater than in the past. Considering the link between hearing loss and age (hearing ability starts to decline as early as the age of fifty), the growing ageing population that characterises the developed world makes it easy to understand how important the issue of **hearing loss** is becoming. In fact, it is estimated that **25% of people** over the age of sixty are affected, with the incidence increasing with age.

Yet the issue does not only affect the 'elderly'. The World Health Organisation estimates that 1.1 billion young people under 35 are at risk of premature hearing loss due to excessive noise exposure. According to industry data, the number of **22-54 year olds** with hearing aids in America increased by 14% between 2017 and 2021 compared to users of all other ages. This, together with the growth recorded across the entire population and also in Italy in recent years, is certainly indicative of **increased awareness**. To date, in developed (so-called "high-income") countries, the penetration of hearing devices has exceeded 40% of the total number of those in need. However, much remains to be done in developing countries, where the penetration rate is less than 7%.

Moreover, there is still too much **social stigma** attached to the subject of hearing loss. So there is still some way to go.

Changing the way hearing impairment is perceived and experienced is the mission of Amplifon, an Italian company founded in 1950 in **Milan** and now present in 25 countries on 5 continents, with a network of over 9,500 points of sale and around 20,000 employees, which aims to create and spread a **culture of hearing** that alters people's perceptions and experiences, thereby **improving their lives**.

A lecturer in Marketing, Product & Service Management and Pricing & Budgeting, Fornari carefully examines the characteristics that have made Amplifon's **business model** successful, but she does not stop there, telling us a **story** that seems to come straight from the pages of a novel.

A journey that has its roots in 1944, when British officer (and engineer) **Algernon Charles Holland** parachuted into the Parma Apennines to act as a liaison with the Resistance. After the Second World War, Holland settled in Milan where he married Anna Maria Formiggini and turned a **brilliant intuition** into reality: the need to bridge the gap between Italy and the Nordic countries in terms of the diffusion of hearing aids. This undertaking was not only economic but also **social**, considering the aftermath left in the country by the **war** that had just ended. Attention to the individual and his or her wellbeing is still today the pillar on which the company is founded, chaired by his daughter, **Susan Carol Holland**, guardian of the company's values and culture. These ingredients, combined with the skills and sensitivity of Amplifon's people and its hearing care specialists, have enabled the company to grow rapidly in recent years and make a real impact on the world and on the lives of individuals.

An impact that, in Amplifon's case, is measured in the ability to **help others rediscover the "emotion"** of sound. Because, as Fornari recalls, *"Restoring hearing allows a person to hear sounds and noises that he or she was (no longer) able to hear and, consequently, to regain access to the sensations and feelings associated with those lost sounds. The value lies not only in the recovered decibels, but above all in the expressive and communicative capacity made possible by being able to hear more. Enriching the range of sounds means... hearing in colour, perceiving nuances. It means grasping all the notes, being able to appreciate the expression of each one without having to concentrate on trying to hear and decipher it. Hearing better means being able to listen to and appreciate, because you recognise them, the variety of tones, which are in themselves the expression of feelings and not only of meanings"*.

THE AUTHOR

Valentina Fornari has been an academic fellow at the Department of Marketing of Bocconi University in Milan for over thirty years, where she teaches Marketing, Product & Service Management and Pricing & Budgeting. She runs training courses and collaborates with several economic newspapers. In the evenings she goes to her own world, where there is little noise.

TECHNICAL DATA:

"The emotion of sound – People, service and innovation: the sustainable growth path of a global leader"
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