

# FAST-RISING WILEY X TARGETS EMEA NEXT

*The eyewear brand has exceeded its 2015 sales in Europe after just nine months, says **Thomas Wæver**.*

**W**ith three months of the year still to go, **Wiley X EMEA** had already exceeded 2015's record turnover in Europe.

The protective eyewear brand exceeded last year's total performance in the region by early September and is already planning for another record-breaker in 2017 when the US-based company will celebrate its 30th anniversary with a host of new product launches including an apparel line and the introduction of a cutting-edge 'camo' pattern.

In the words of Thomas Wæver, Wiley X EMEA Vice President and Outdoor Director, the brand is 'driving through the schoolyard at full throttle and everyone wants to be on board'.

Wiley X has come a long way in Europe in a very short space of time. Five years ago the brand, which is a legend in the US for supplying the police and military across the world with protective eyewear, was virtually unknown in the fishing market.

Now it is a company on the move with exclusive distributors in more than 30 European countries. The meteoric rise has been overseen by Danes Jan Mikkelsen and Wæver, who teamed up in 2011 when Wiley X had just over a handful of distributors across the Atlantic Ocean.

Wæver was working in sales for another company when he met Mikkelsen, who was selling the Wiley X products in Denmark and some key countries in Europe. The pair, hugely aware of the massive potential of the brand in the fishing and hunting markets, took on responsibility for Wiley X in Europe.

"I met Jan by coincidence and was taken by his enthusiasm. He knew the Wiley X brand and was convinced that it had something special to take it to the next level in Europe. It was selling well in Denmark and some European countries but we were sure that success could be replicated. All it needed was to get the message across. There is no point in having the best products if no one knows it."

The marketing push which has seen them become regulars at the European fishing trade show, EFTTEX, and the IWA Outdoor Classics event in Nuremberg, Germany, alongside sponsorship of the World Carp Classic (WCC) and World Predator Classic (WPC) tournaments has helped put them on the map.

Another major factor has been the assembling of a formidable pro-staff team consisting of some of the best known anglers in Europe, representing all types of fishing. "To grow the market we needed to reach out to fishermen and bring in people who are known in the market. That is what we have done with the Wiley X Elite fishing team.

"We have gone from a situation where no one had heard of Wiley X in the fishing tackle market to where we are now – a brand that is on the move and a name on everyone's lips," added Wæver.

However, it has not been all plain sailing. Wæver remembers the company's debut at the World Carp Classic. "No one knew about us," he says.

"That changed the following year because we had WCC winners in our Wiley X Elite fishing team and a lot of the competitors were wearing Wiley X because they understood the benefits that they brought."

Educating anglers on the need to wear the proper eyewear was also a crucial part of promoting the product. "We are growing through the seeds that we have sown. We have found ourselves a niche in protective eyewear for anglers alongside the other unique benefits anglers will gain from wearing a pair of Wiley X polarised eyewear.

"People understand that when landing a fish a jighead can come off and hit you like a projectile. There is no product on the market that protects you like Wiley X or that has been tested to comply with exacting military standards."

Wiley X Europe has now also taken on the

responsibility from the US arm for expanding sales in the Middle East, Africa and Russia.

Wæver explains the thinking behind the move. "Time differences in other countries we deal with is not an issue for us based in Europe. Our customers are in the office when we are. If they have a question we can deal with it instantly.

"That is not the case in the US so it makes sense that we deal with them. Logistically, it is also an advantage because we hold a full inventory in Denmark and can get product out to the regions in 48 hours. We are based within six hours' flight from all our customers so it is easy for us to attend regular meetings. It is not financially or logistically viable to do that from the US.

"Taking on EMEA and Russia is our biggest task ever – we are talking about more than 60 countries that we can target. Our immediate aim will be to close exclusive distributor deals in the most important regions."

Wæver adds that Wiley's success is dependant on the choice of the right exclusive distributor in each country. "We want someone who bleeds Wiley X blood. We are not looking for a brand keeper or someone who collects names to keep them away from their competitors. We have had companies reaching out to us who we have declined because the match was not right. A good partner can boost market value, but a bad one can destroy it quickly.

"Our partners have to believe absolutely in the product and want to be part of the Wiley X family.

"Exclusivity is also important as we want our partners to have the knowledge, comfort and peace of mind in knowing that they are not competing against another distributor.

"Wiley X is a big multi-corporation, but it has never forgotten its roots. It is a family business that wants its partners to feel part of the family.

"Our fantastic journey is not only based on quality eyewear and great distributors. Without the hard working staff we have, we would never have made it to where we are today. Their hard work, enthusiasm and dedication is a strong key for our success."

**Inset: Thomas Wæver and Jan Mikkelsen have convinced anglers of the strengths of Wiley X.**

