



IN FOCUS

# A CLEAN APPROACH

INSPIRE INNOVATE INVEST INDULGE

INNOVATION IS KEY FOR AUSTRIA'S REIWAG TO SURVIVE IN THE COMPETITIVE FACILITIES MANAGEMENT MARKET, SAYS MANAGING DIRECTOR VIKTOR WAGNER.

WORDS CHRISSIE MCCLATCHIE • 5-MIN READ

Rather than being encouraged to join the family business, Viktor Wagner found himself actively discouraged from following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. "My grandfather established a cleaning company in 1903 and, after World War II, my father took over," he tells *The CEO Magazine*.

"When the time came for me to start, my father told me there was no future in the business and that I should become a bank clerk instead because, at that time, it was considered a very stable job."

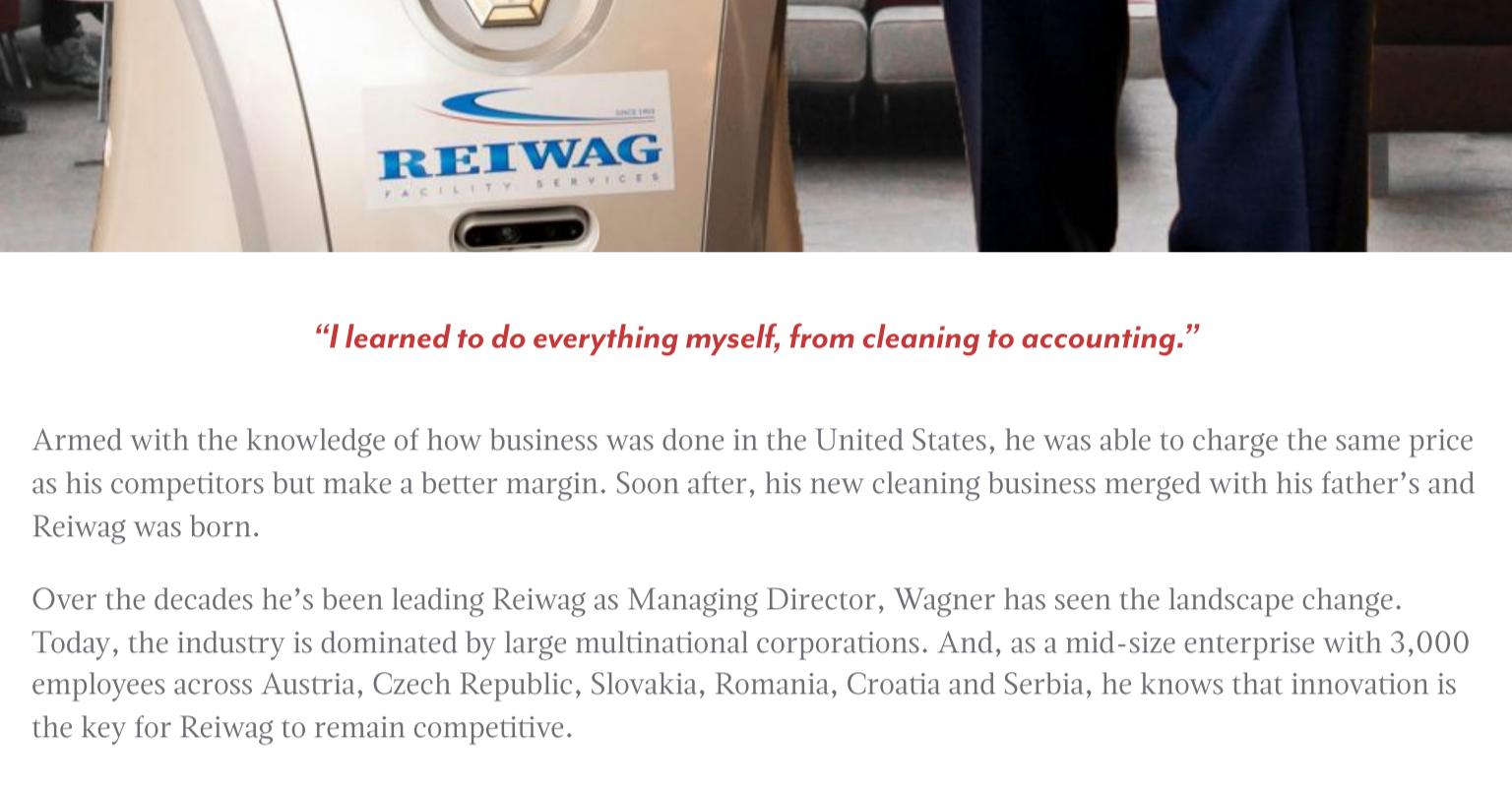
With these words ringing in his ears, Wagner took the first steps into a banking career but found something lacking. "It was not the challenge I was looking for," he says.

Encouraged by a friend's mother, who stressed to him that there was a future in the cleaning business, he boarded a plane in Vienna destined for New York. The year was 1967.

## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

He didn't stay too long in the Big Apple, but while he was there he made essential connections, learned important business lessons and built the confidence to take a real shot at his dream.

On his return, his father finally gave his blessing for Wagner to start his own cleaning business. "I knocked on the door of shops in the first district of Vienna, offering to clean windows," he says. "I learned to do everything myself, from cleaning to accounting."



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Armed with the knowledge of how business was done in the United States, he was able to charge the same price as his competitors but make a better margin. Soon after, his new cleaning business merged with his father's and Reiwag was born.

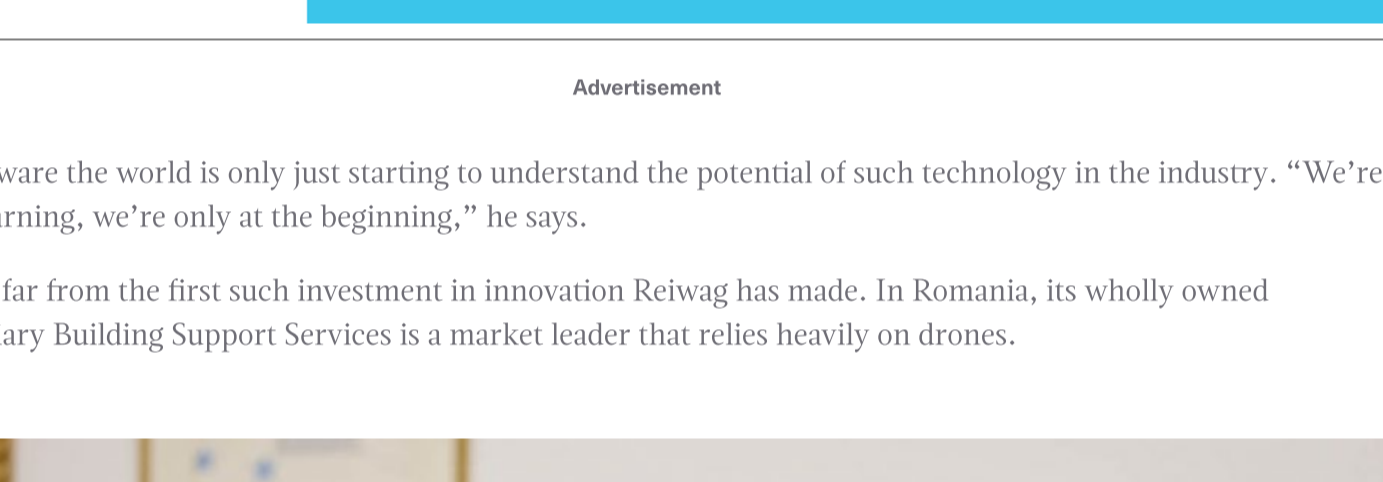
Over the decades he's been leading Reiwag as Managing Director, Wagner has seen the landscape change. Today, the industry is dominated by large multinational corporations. And, as a mid-size enterprise with 3,000 employees across Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia and Serbia, he knows that innovation is the key for Reiwag to remain competitive.

## INNOVATION IS KEY

It's this thinking that is behind the recent investment in Lionsbot, a Singapore-based smart robotics company producing robots for the cleaning industry. In fact, so firm is Wagner's belief in the innovation that Reiwag has become its lead investor with an 11 percent stake, and Wagner has taken on the role of Non-Executive Director in the business.

As it stands, Wagner says Reiwag is the only cleaning or facilities management business to have made such an investment in robotics and, he adds, "business is running very well".

# REIWAG Uses LionsBot, Like Many Other Leading FM Companies



In the world of cleaning, LionsBot equips cleaners with superpowers in the form of reliable, efficient and easy to use robots. These robots have supercharged the cleaning process in 27 countries around the world so far, making them the obvious choice for leading facility management companies like REIWAG.



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He's aware the world is only just starting to understand the potential of such technology in the industry. "We're still learning, we're only at the beginning," he says.

This is far from the first such investment in innovation Reiwag has made. In Romania, its wholly owned subsidiary Building Support Services is a market leader that relies heavily on drones.



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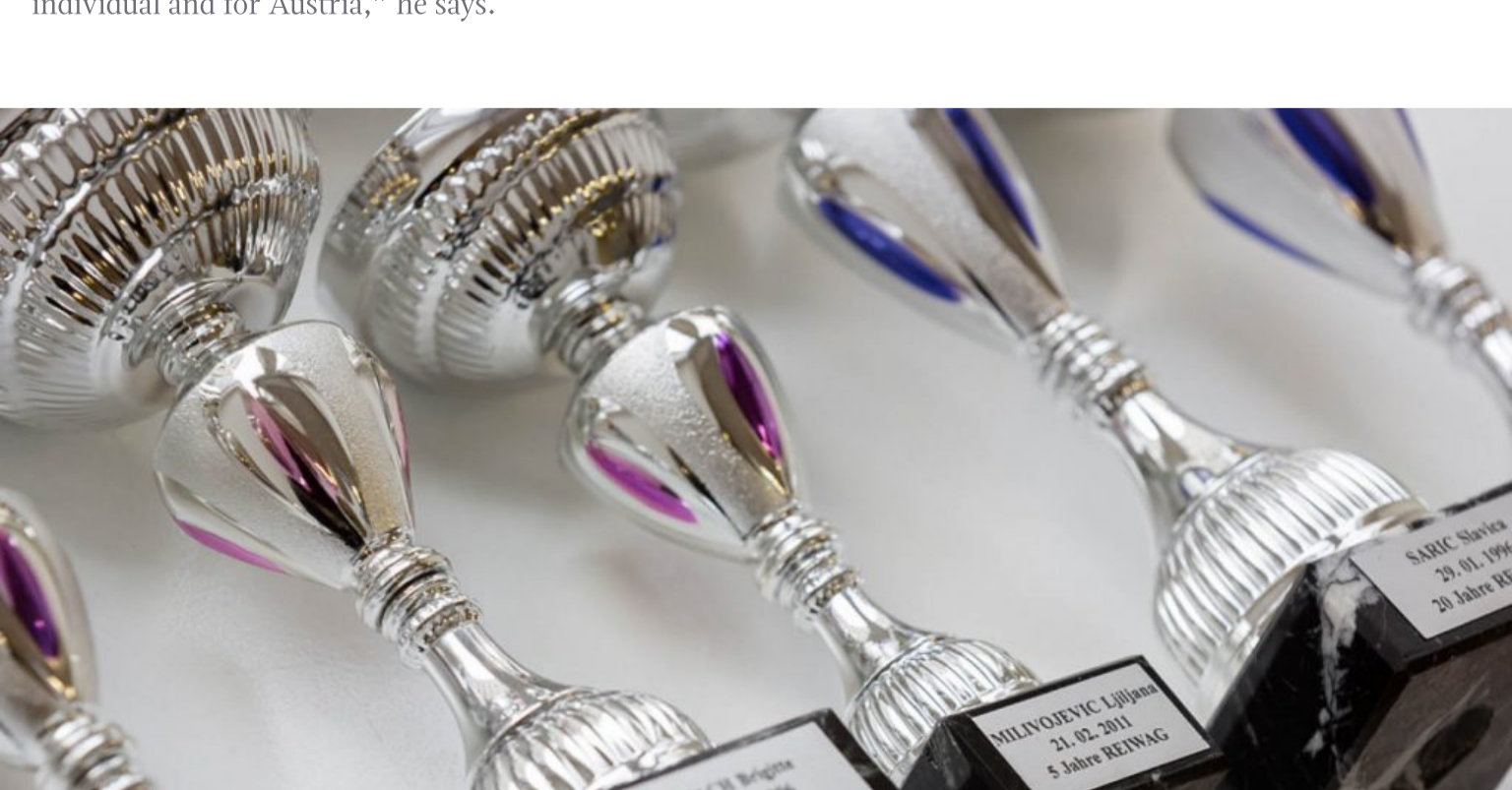
"We use drones to maintain roofs," Wagner explains. "In the past, somebody would have had to climb up there themselves. This is much faster – and safer."

Wagner says he sees a cross-border appeal for the model. "I think we can offer this business to other companies in other countries where we operate," he says.

## FURTHER EXPANSION

Despite the challenges of the last few years, Wagner is continuing to look for new opportunities, whether in Austria or beyond.

ALWAG (the buyer is, coincidentally, another Austrian business), and he says that the business is close to agreeing on a deal to buy a 60 percent share in a property management company. This, Wagner says, is a move that will "bring us forward in the Serbian market".



*"Networking is extremely important because it can lead to word-of-mouth recommendations, which are such valuable sales leads."*

He's also very happy to have recently won two very large contracts from well-known companies whose names he cannot reveal. He can, however, share that the contract covers the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Croatia.

In addition, plans are already underway to open offices in Chennai in India and Wieden, a city near Amsterdam. "We are strongly considering the United States as well, but we also know that, as a litigious society, the market comes with a much higher risk," he adds.

## IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE

If one aspect of the business hasn't changed over the years, it's the importance of people to Reiwag. "We take care of our employees," he says, explaining that every five years a ceremony is held where he presents each member of staff with a bouquet of flowers. "It's important to tell them that without them, I cannot do the job," he says.

As an owner-operator (although a trust has been established for the future operation of Reiwag), Wagner was able to guarantee his employees their jobs during the pandemic. And, in 2021 the Reiwag Foundation was inaugurated, granting a one-off tax-free grant of €1,000 (US\$1,063) to employees who have children enrolled in university.

"In the eyes of the company, education is the most effective means of improving the quality of life, both for each individual and for Austria," he says.



Within Austria, Wagner's experience has made him one of the most respected figures in the industry and he has been invited by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce to be a guest speaker around the world. He sees networking as one of the secrets to Reiwag's success.

"Networking is extremely important because it can lead to word-of-mouth recommendations, which are such valuable sales leads. Networking is what I like to do; having lunch with business partners who become friends and we help each other," he says.

"I believe this is one of the reasons why we are so successful."