

Continuous Improvement

**An Interview with Jordy Cobelens,
Chief Executive Officer, TW Steel**

EDITORS' NOTE Born and raised in Amsterdam, Jordy Cobelens' father, Ton, forged his son's interest in timepieces as a watch distributor in the Netherlands. When Ton started his own watch brand, Jordy honed his entrepreneurial skills at school by selling watches to the fathers and relatives of his friends. During this time, as an accomplished DJ, he also founded his own record company, JG Records. In 2005, he entered the watch business full-time seizing on the opportunity to head up TW Steel and front its development. Cobelens was named Ernst & Young's Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year for 2011 in The Netherlands.



Jordy Cobelens

COMPANY BRIEF TW Steel (twsteel.com), the name meaning "The Watch in Steel," concentrates exclusively on developing and leading the affordable oversized watch market established with the introduction of its first collection in 2005 in Amsterdam. With 140 models in the collection, TW Steel is available in over 100 countries with leading sales in key areas such as Europe, North and South America, and Asia.

What has made TW Steel a brand that continues to show strong growth?

The most important thing is to never look back at what has been achieved but always look at what needs to be achieved in the future. It's about constantly trying to look at how to make things better, how to increase our brand voice, and how we can improve things. I'm never happy in terms of how things are going, and I mean that in a positive way. I'm always looking at how to improve.

You need to be satisfied with what has been achieved, but if you look at where you were three years ago and you are still at the same level or have the same mindset, then something is wrong. The world is evolving at a rapid pace with social media and digital development – there is so much going on that you have to continue to develop yourself and the company. This is what we have been doing for years on a big scale.

Are you focused on enhancing the current collections or are you always developing new collections?

The Slim Line, for instance, targets a new type of consumer but still carries the same brand

DNA. It's a slim-case watch that appeals to consumers who feel the other models are a bit heavy.

Am I happy with the collection? Yes. Do I think that's it? No, we can still grow our customer base while maintaining the brand image.

How did the concept for the CEO Tech David Coulthard Special Edition piece come about?

This particular piece reflects what David stands for. We started the CEO Tech with his first piece, which came out three years ago. This one is a re-

signed piece and shows how well the relationship has been received by our consumers. We always want our ambassadors to co-design the watches with us and create a specific feeling – we want the ambassador to see himself and what he's all about in the watch.

I'm very pleased with the outcome of the watch and David is as well.

How are you able to offer such quality pieces and still remain at such an affordable price point?

We use the best materials available and put a lot of effort into the detail of the design. It's also a tribute to the factories we work with and the fact that we create a product that has a huge distribution platform. This has been our strategic position from the beginning and we will continue that focus over the long-term. Creating an affordable luxury brand requires a sacrifice, but a sacrifice will benefit us long-term.

Are you happy with the distribution channels today, and how critical is it to have a global footprint?

It's very important, because even if people don't know the brand in a particular country, if the brand is doing all these cool things around the world, you become aware of it and you want to learn more about it.

Since we operate on a global level, we have all the tools available to create an instance success in any market we enter without having to spend huge amounts of money locally.

For those who travel, it makes an impact on them when they see a brand in every country they visit.

Did you always have a desire to run your own company?

From a young age, I was always busy trying to create a business. By the time I was a teenager, I had started to do what my dad was



A watch from TW Steel's new Slim Line collection

involved in by selling my dad's line of watches to relatives and friends, and I got involved from a business point of view, as well.

Are you still engaged in all aspects of the business or have you stepped back in certain areas?

I try to be as engaged as I can. We have a good team of people that execute things on a daily basis. I can't be involved in every aspect of the business, but everyone in the company knows they can contact me via any means any time of day. I have always encouraged that. Communication is so important and I'm available to answer anybody's questions to get things moving. We still maintain that small company environment even though we have offices around the world.

As you continue to build brand loyalty, are there opportunities for product extensions or will it always be about the watches?

We have a very large entertainment company called Steel Entertainment Group, through which we manage DJs and do events, and we have our own record label.

I have another brand called Marc Coblen, which is a fusion brand of TW Steel but more focused on the female market. I'm also involved with YC Jewels, working with Yolante Cabau, a model in Holland, who is married to the famous soccer player, Wesley Sneijder.

Are you able to get away from the business?

No. This is 24/7. There is never a day off. When you have a day that you don't have meetings, you're thinking of what you can do next. It's more dangerous when I have a day off. That's when I think of all of these new ideas to pursue.

Do you take time to reflect on your wins?

I'm always raising the bar. It's frustrating sometimes because it never gives you peace of mind. You're always looking for how to improve. ●