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**Emmanuel Viellard,**  
CEO, Viellard Migeon & Compagnie

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## **Emmanuel Viellard**

Viellard Migeon & Compagnie

Few businesses can boast being around since the rule of Louis XIV, but Viellard Migeon & Compagnie is still going strong more than 300 years after the reign of the Sun King. The current generation – the ninth to run the business – is represented by Emmanuel Viellard. He has much heritage to guide him, including a business that is strongly linked to its sense of duty to customers and employees. But his focus is on the future.

Viellard Migeon & Compagnie (VMC), a family business based in the northeast of France near the Swiss border, has witnessed a fair amount in its history. These include the French Revolution, two world wars, the Great Depression and much, much in between. That's because VMC is one of the oldest family businesses in the world, able to trace its history back to the late 17th century, when the Sun King Louis XIV ruled over France.

### A 9th generations business

Officially, VMC was founded in 1796. But origins of the business go back at least another 100 years, when Nicolas Viellard set up a foundry linked to the mining industry in the small town of Giromagny. VMC's current Managing Director is Emmanuel Viellard, a direct descendant of Nicolas and the ninth generation of his family to be involved in the great business dynasty.

What's the secret of such a long-lasting family business? Unsurprisingly, Emmanuel sees many, including that elusive thing called luck. But he also says VMC's flexible approach and proximity to the customer have been important factors.

"I think, as a family, we were good at knowing we had to be flexible," he says. "We knew that we had to revamp the business not just in every generation, but, importantly, within generations as well."

He adds: "Right from the start, our founder knew the importance of satisfying the customer and being very close to the market." Nine generations have followed that mantra and have built an extremely successful business involved in sectors linked to the steel industry.

Today, VMC is a holding company that has stakes in some businesses and 100% ownership of others. Its biggest stake in terms of revenue is a 21% holding of LISI, which specializes in aerospace, automobile and medical components. LISI, which is based in the French city of Belfort, employs more than 10,700 people. In 2014, it had revenues of €1.31b.

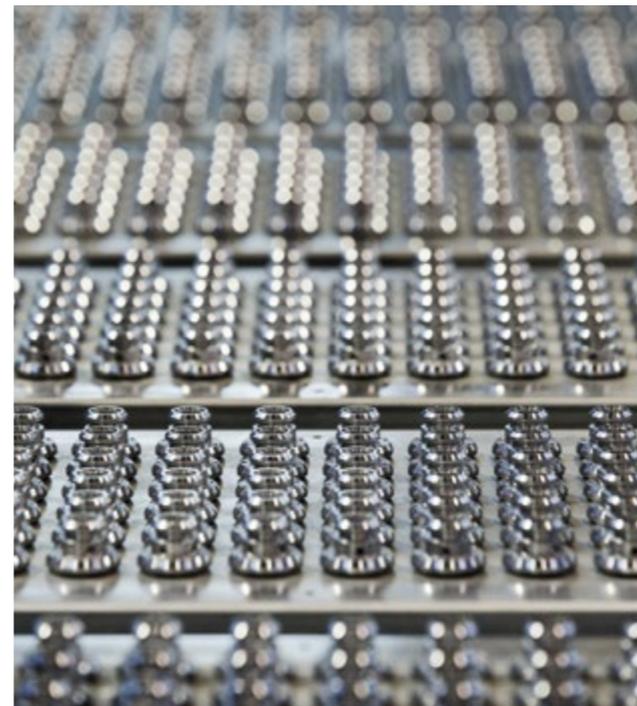
VMC also owns outright a fishhook company called VMC Peche, one of the biggest companies in the world making treble fishing hooks. It also has a majority holding in the Finnish fishhook company Rapala. Indeed, VMC's fishing business has a presence



Chateau Viellard in Morvillars, France.



The company is now run by the ninth generation.



LISI Automotive features a wide range of automotive fasteners and assembly solutions.



In the French town of Caen, Normandie, LISI produced medical components.



LISI Aerospace produces small precision parts for aircrafts.



Modern production facility of LISI Aerospace in Saint-Ouen in northern France.

in more than 40 different markets around the world. A welding company called FSH Welding Group is also fully owned by VMC.

**More than 1,500 descendants of the original founder are still alive**

Emmanuel is Deputy Chairman and Deputy Chief Executive of LISI. So, on top of his role at the holding company, Emmanuel is kept busy. "When you've got a lot to do, the key is to be focused, and having such a background in these businesses from a very early age helps me to stay focused. You know in your blood what they are about," he says.

Despite the various parts of the business having a big global presence, Emmanuel thinks that localism has played a big role in VMC's success. His family still lives in a village close to where it all started. "It has been a crucial part of our philosophy – to be close to the people and the business," he says. "There's no headquarters in the big cities, where you can be too influenced by bankers and the inevitably short-termist attitude that exists near big financial centers."

But don't family businesses that survive nine generations need something extra special? Good governance, with a slight twist, might help to explain that something special at VMC. Emmanuel says there are more than 1,500 descendants of the original founder still alive. That's a lot of potential major shareholders of any company, let alone a family business. Emmanuel says that 140 family members hold shares in VMC, but not all the same amount.

"That would be disastrous, with each shareholder holding less than 1%, and that wouldn't work as a viable business," he says. "Today, we have a strong 'knot' of shareholders, where the family governance comes from, and this helps us to maintain continuity in the business and the family."

But businesses don't all go in a straight line of growth and happiness for the controlling family, especially ones that have been around for such a long time.

Emmanuel's father Michel saw the business through a difficult time in the late 1980s, when some family members pressed

"If you're going to be around for multiple generations, you have to be prepared for the occasional upheaval."

Emmanuel Viellard

to sell VMC to an external buyer. Michel, who retired from the chairmanship of VMC in 2008 after a career of 47 years, recalled at the time that it was very difficult for the family, but the business came out of it stronger and the family more focused.

"If you're going to be around for multiple generations you have to be prepared for the occasional upheaval," says Emmanuel.

**His generation still has much to offer**

After his father stepped down, the chairmanship of VMC was passed over to Emmanuel's cousin Christophe Viellard. Christophe has emphasized the strong sense of morality at VMC, saying once: "From one generation to another, the sense of honor, loyalty and moral values that the parents have bequeathed hopefully leads the children to consider nothing other than their duty, which is natural. It is not necessarily easy, but it's the right thing to do."

Non-family senior managers also pepper the various businesses in which VMC is involved. Independent directors from other family businesses sit on the board of LISI, including Patrick Daher, of the industrial conglomerate Daher, last year's winner of EY's French Family Business Award, and Thierry and Christian Peugeot from the eponymous carmaker.

"These families give us special insights from their own experiences, which help enormously when running LISI," says Emmanuel.

The Viellards also control LISI with two other families – the Kohler and Japy families. Gilles Kohler is the current Chief Executive and Chairman of LISI.

What about the future for VMC? Does Emmanuel think the family will continue to be running a business in generations to come? Still relatively young at 51 years old, Emmanuel says there's plenty of time for the next generation to develop. "I'm not thinking too much about how the next generation is going to



LSI Automotive production facility in Delle, France.

be integrated into the business," he says. "I think this generation still has much to offer."

When the next generation does decide to come into the business, it will no doubt be guided by VMC's firm moral compass.

<b>Emmanuel Viellard</b>	
CEO	
Company name:	<b>Viellard Migeon &amp; Compagnie</b>
Generation(s):	<b>9th</b>
Founded:	<b>1796 in Morvillars, France</b>
Industry:	<b>Manufacturing</b>
Employees (2014):	<b>10,700</b>
Revenue (2014):	<b>€1.31b</b>