

**MAKERS**

What's the Future of Height Adjustable Tables? SiS Ergo, the Company Credited with the First-Ever Product, Has Some Answers

FOR THE COMPANY THAT PIONEERED THE FIRST HEIGHT-ADJUSTABLE TABLE 50 YEARS AGO, THE FUTURE LOOKS JUST AS PROMISING TODAY AS IT DID THEN.

by Emily Clingman

Have you ever wondered about the origin of the standing desk? It's a simple concept, yet the height-adjustable table has steered the modern office into a new era.

Danish company SiS Ergo is responsible for that. In 1970, aggravated that workers needed two tables at different heights — lower for seated desk work and higher for typing while standing — SiS came up with one table design to accommodate all the tasks.

“Why not make two in one,”



Claus Hansson

said Claus Hansson, SiS Ergo principal owner who bought the company in 2008. “It was a simple pin and post adjustment. And at that time, it was not about needing to stand for health.”

For many years, the adjustable table sold exclusively as a typewriter table. Then, at one point, IBM ordered 30 of them for the purpose of giving employees choices for movement at their workstations. In the 1980s, SiS USA was introduced in the states. Since that time, the company has quietly continued its tradition of developing products with high design, easy customization and quick delivery — three traits noticeably absent, observed SiS, from other manufacturers who offer height-adjustable table products today.

One company taking notice of SiS was Innovative Office Products (IOP). In February, SiS Ergo was acquired by IOP, the parent company to HAT Contract, another leading height-adjustable table provider. IOP's other brands, Innovative, ErgoTech and CompuCaddy, manufacture ergonomic product solutions for office, health care and other specialty workspaces.

SiS Ergo's President Scott McPartlin, a veteran of the office furniture industry for more than 20 years, has been involved with sit-stand products since their very beginning.



Scott McPartlin

“I sold my first height-adjustable table in 1997 for approximately \$2,000,” he said. “I couldn't believe I would ever sell one of those again. The price was more than a typical cubicle station with a desk and chairs. Also, the cubicles weren't really designed for a height-adjustable table — breaking down the electrical, removing the peds and overheads. It was really almost impossible. Fast forward to now, and that's basically all I sell.”

With the office industry's shift to open floor plans, the number of Height Adjustable Table suppliers has exploded and created a “sea of sameness,” McPartlin said. He added SiS's core principles of beautiful design, custom capabilities and fast delivery is not only what sets SiS apart now, but what will be the drivers for growth in the future.



SiS Factory in Rudkøbing, Denmark

“Height-adjustability is here to stay, and the winners down the road will be the ones who are innovative in integrating ergonomics all the way around, planned from the inside out, not just an add-on,” he said. “SiS has the widest innovation and availability — not just taking what comes off the boat and slapping a sticker on it. From the ‘80s on, three of the big five companies have worked with SiS to introduce height-adjustability to the world. We’ve kind of been the genie behind the curtains.”

A big break for SiS came in 2007 when it collaborated, developed and launched a full line of height-adjustable tables for one of the leading commercial furniture manufacturers in the U.S. According to McPartlin, SiS was the obvious partner because of its core competency in this emerging part of the market.

“There are very few companies that can make, design and/or fabricate every element — we’re talking about the feet, legs, tops, storage components, wire management, privacy screens — everything except for the motors and electrical,” he said.

“With our process, if you want a different foot or wire management system, you can meet with our engineers who will develop what you’re looking for. You won’t get this from any other height-adjustable table manufacturer.”

SiS’s position as a vertically integrated manufacturer was a key reason it began working with Gensler. Gensler’s role was serving as the Product Design Consultant, and SiS was responsible for the engineering and manufacturing of the product. SiS won the opportunity to outfit Gensler’s Chicago office with a custom-made, sit-stand solution for that office’s design team. Shortly thereafter, Gensler initiated extensive research to determine what its global design team wanted in a height-adjustable table. McPartlin said the research revealed three key findings: “They wanted improved space efficiency, better wire management and personalization options.”

Working from this research, Gensler and SiS collaborated on what eventually became SiS’s Fiellø product.

“Fiellø was the first research-based, height-adjustable table solution brought to the U.S. market,” McPartlin said. “It really is the poster child for our holistic design and customization capabilities. Our ability to meet all their needs from A to Z as their single-source manufacturer was a critical factor in their decision. Whenever they asked us for something, they didn’t get a ‘no,’ and they didn’t have to wait six months. It was a great partnership and a great opportunity to put our all of unique capabilities into action.”

According to McPartlin, when Fiellø was launched, it became the trendsetter in what we’re seeing today with a “finished product” — no loose wires hanging from the table and easy accessory integration.

“Fiellø can be ordered and installed with zero interference because we make everything,” McPartlin said. “We have a patented track system that runs below the



1988 - Printer table

table surface which serves as the skeleton of the table. It's a reinforced set of aluminum rails that allow everything to be integrated in a clean, seamless way — the legs, the bag hook, modesty panels and wire management system — all connect into the track. We intentionally designed every Fiellø work surface with a notch-out feature to accommodate any kind of monitor arm and to allow for privacy panels. This thoughtful design speaks directly to Gensler's research for space saving, wire management and personalization.”

Now a part of the IOP family of brands, McPartlin said it'll have the resources to offer its expertise to a wider range of customers — specifically those who need a height-adjustable table with an elevated design aesthetic and easy customization options. He believes these advantages will be even more important in a post-Covid-19 workplace.

“Ergonomics will continue to be a consideration for sure,” he said. “But open office floor plans will need solutions to adapt. I think you'll see more companies wanting customization options for their workers, whether that's to improve workspace health, privacy or acoustics. Giving people choices and options to make their spaces more personalized will be important as workers transition from their homes back to their work environments.”

IOP CEO Dave Fox said the future of sit-stand is about choices.

“Customers want options, whether that's for style and design, price or something else,” he said. “With HAT Contract and SiS, we're able to provide the market with lots of choices. For customers that need a cost-effective, turnkey sit-stand solution,



Fiello

our HAT Contract brand fulfills that need beautifully. For others that need higher-level design, holistic thinking and more custom options, that's where SiS comes in. We've built our reputation as a nimble company that can pivot quickly to meet a customer or marketplace need. SiS and its custom-made-easy capabilities continue that for us very nicely.”

McPartlin points out another factor that should not be overlooked when it comes to the future of the height-adjustable table: SiS's Danish-inspired design roots.

“Design trends come and go, but the Danish approach to design — clean lines, a minimalistic look, natural woods — is enduring,” he said. “It's an inspired level of design and craftsmanship that no one else can really replicate, unless you're from Denmark. From our work as an OEM, and our work with Gensler and others in the industry, we know this look is appealing to designers who want something eye-catching and a bit more sophisticated. Design is about a story, and we have a great story.”

For the company that pioneered the first height-adjustable table 50 years ago, the future looks just as promising today as it did then. **BoF**