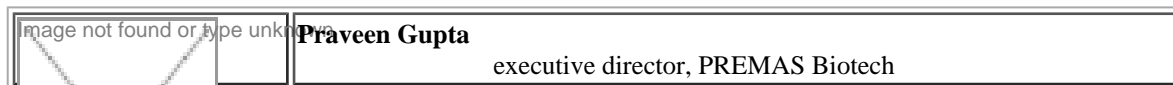


'Our focus is on game changing technologies'

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Haryana-based, PREMAS Bio- tech is among the first to have adopted a unique business model, with contract research and manufacturing services (CRAMS) running in parallel with biosupplier business under a single umbrella. Earlier this year, the company set up a separate supplier division known as PREMAS Life Sciences that caters to key market segments in India such as life sciences research (both government and private labs), new drug discovery, agribiotech based research and molecular diagnostics. In an interview with *BioSpectrum*, Praveen Gupta, executive director, PREMAS Biotech, speaks about the various aspects of the company, market trends and future outlook.

What was the idea behind the creation of life sciences division at PREMAS Biotech?

Gupta: As a mandate of developing in-house cutting edge products (like DME) and offering research services (CRAMS), PREMAS started a bio-supplier arm within the group to launch global niche technologies in India. At the very beginning, we partnered with one of the leading global genomics brands, Illumina in 2006 to cater to the then emerging Indian genomics market. In 2011, after witnessing continuous success for four years, we decided to give added focus to this business vertical and hence created a Life Science division to solely concentrate on partnering as well as launching additional high-end research tools in the market. Our strategy is to only associate with game changing technologies that are making a difference in

the global life sciences research. We are hoping that this focused approach will help us to getting a higher market share in this growing space.

Tell us about the current product portfolio, different segments and major clients of the company?

QAfter expanding our portfolio, we are having product lines such as array-based solutions for gene-expression, genotyping and epigenetics. The other products are next generation sequencing (NGS) based solutions, in-situ gene expression, single cell genomics, de-novo optical mapping solution, strain typing, multiplex ELISA/protein array, and farm animal diagnostics.

We are also currently catering to research in genomics and proteomics, drug discovery and clinical diagnostics segments. Our key customers include Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Department of Biotechnology, Indian Council of Agriculture Research, Indian Council of Medical Research labs apart from universities, drug discovery, pharma, CRO, diagnostics, and genomics service providers.

What are the latest trends in the NGS market? How big is it and how are you planning to expand your market?

QLatest trends in NGS are the development of custom panels for targeted re-sequencing. The disease specific panels for clinical genomics, combining higher read length with higher output and reduced error rates are better and faster data storage tools. These provide better analysis solutions including adoption of cloud to defer high capital cost of servers, metagenomics studies, and single cell genomics.

Size of the NGS market in India is difficult to estimate but there has been a major spurt in adoption of NGS by all major genomics labs. Apart from continuing valuable partnership with Illumina, we have also tied up with Fluidigm, which offers high through- put single cell genomics capabilities.

We have also partnered with OpGen which offers groundbreaking de-novo genome assembly solutions using optical mapping which allows very fast and accurate strain typing.

Have you noticed any significant change in the buying behavior of clients?

QThe customers in life sciences are now very well informed and are updated on latest trends. Most customers are now thinking big and compete with the best in the world. The demands of collaborative approaches rather than traditional buy and sell is on the rise.

What are the challenges faced by biosuppliers as far as the product supply in India is concerned?

QFew of the challenges include differential custom duty structure for vendors and government customers, high duty tariff, and long custom clearance cycles. Besides that, long sales and purchase cycles, difficulty in getting demo equipments, and tendering process are also the major roadblocks

Where do you see the company stand in next five years?

QWe have had a CAGR of 112 percent over last five years, which indicates our growth trajectory. We expect that PREMAS will expand both its business verticals to its full potential and mature towards developing partnerships which are beyond distribution remit.

We wish to get into joint development for products and technologies locally, which can serve a larger global audience. We also aspire to develop custom genetic panels by partnering with Indian research labs for clinical and agri-biotech sectors that are relevant to Indian context.

Rahul Koul