

PDP to expand India presence

17 December 2009 | News

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PDP Life Science Logistics India, a part of the conglomerate, PDP Couriers, UK, caters to the specific logistic needs of the clinical trials, pharmaceutical, biotechnology and healthcare markets. In addition to shipment capabilities, PDP provides global service for the supply of cold chain clinical trials supplies, diagnostic specimens and finished products. In an interview with BioSpectrum, Nick Butcher, executive chairman and Clive Bryant, director of sales and marketing, of PDP Life Science Logistics India, reveal PDP's plans in India and the enormous opportunities India and China hold for the company.

How favorable is the Asian market for PDP's business plans?

Clive Bryant: There is a rising trend in pharma and biotech companies to conduct their research work in emerging countries like India and China. The emerging markets have been growing stronger and financial spending for clinical trials by global pharma companies are restricted to these regions today. In countries like India, these companies are looking at specific set of patients. In order to support this they are looking for companies with strong logistic capabilities, and specialist couriers who can provide unique packaging for sensitive equipments used in clinical trials and for high speed delivery to remote regions in the country, specially in the background of diverse temperature and climatic conditions.

Nick Butcher: PDP came into being in July 2007, and since then, we have expanded significantly across the globe by establishing ourselves in India, Singapore, Australia, China and shortly we will be looking at Japan. We expanded in order to meet the needs of global customers. Our focus has always been clinical trials, pharmaceutical and healthcare markets. In these emerging markets there has been awareness and global understanding of the need for quality logistic systems and software. However, there are many challenges in these countries that is why companies like us have been investing heavily to support clinical trial processes.

What were the Indian market opportunities for PDP in 2007?

Nick Butcher: The market in India is focused on a variety of patients to conduct clinical trials. We believe that India and China are going to see significant growth in terms of clinical trials. Already the growth is happening. The pharmaceutical industry here is growing very strongly and the demand for drugs in these two countries is rising. As people become more wealthy, demand for drugs will rapidly increase and the support for clinical trials will grow dramatically. This is where PDP has a critical role to play by supporting the demand in these two countries.

Elaborate on the systems and softwares that PDP offers to the life sciences industry?

Nick Butcher: PDP has developed its own operating system which we use throughout the world. We have our own tracking devices and online booking systems. We differentiate ourself from other companies by providing more than just technology. We offer high-end technology systems, including tracking and tracing devices, to the advantage and benefits of our customers.

Clive Bryant: We are investing in tracking systems which is expected to link us with the customers and their processing system needs. With the help of tracking and tracing process, we will understand what is happening at each level and stage of a particular clinical trial project.

What kind of investments is made by PDP in India?

Nick Butcher: In India, we invested in establishing offices in Bangalore, Mumbai and Pune. We are shortly opening offices in Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and New Delhi. We want to establish our presence in all the metros so that we can touch base with as many customers as possible. In the second phase, we are looking at Kolkata and Chennai. Lastly in the third phase, we would like to move into tier II cities.

Does PDP have any specialist team for logistics and packaging solutions?

Clive Bryant: We have a specialist packaging team in UK for transferring knowledge to the Indian business. In UK, we have development teams, which comprises experts in packaging solutions and, their knowledge will be advanced through the support from our head office.

Are there any plans to set up a similar specialist team in India?

Nick Butcher: As of now, we are in the establishment and growth phase. As business grows in India, which should be complete in December 2009, PDP India will be a fully-functional business. Once it reached that stage, we will be looking at logistics and packaging solutions and the strategy to grow our business in India.

Could you compare the growth prospects in India and China?

Clive Bryant: India and China pose very similar and critical challenges as far as clinical trials and supply chain are concerned. At this point of time, both countries lack a strong infrastructure that allows a speedy transit, both countries have climatic challenges, which are similar—high temperatures to very low temperatures, and individual's lack of understanding of the complexity of the business and the passion to realize that this business involves the transportation of highly time-sensitive products.

Both are difficult markets and have a regulatory framework which is stringent as compared to the markets like UK. However on positive lines, both countries are investing heavily in infrastructure and healthcare. The growth is significant and the demand for modern medicine is very sharp. Drug discovery companies are now tailoring drugs that are suitable for this population/ market and also conduct clinical trials, which are the positive signs for growth opportunity.

Could you elaborate on PDP's customized logistics solutions?

Clive Bryant: We spend time with our customers before any shipment is made, and chalk out logistics plan for any study. For a customer who is based in India, we study and discuss about their plans to deploy their studies across India through all the stages of the clinical trials. We understand their packaging requirements and tailor-made logistics table to meet that requirements at the metro level, sub-metro level, and tiers II and III levels. This consultation with the customers at every stage of the clinical trial study, we come up with right packaging, refrigerating and delivery services.

What are the steps taken for quality assurance?

Clive Bryant: Quality is paramount to us. We follow defined good manufacturing practice (GMP) standards to ensure that our programs meet the quality requirements of our customers. We have a pro quality team based out of UK. And this quality team will carry out the implementation of all the facilities. At present, we have quality teams based out of four locations in UK.

What were the challenges faced by PDP when it ventured into India?

Clive Bryant: The first challenge was to develop a packaging technique that is suitable for the domestic and international markets, so we looked at potential partners from whom we could learn about the packaging changes from one part of the country to another.

Nick Butcher: One of the challenges when we started off in India was to get the right kind of people who could understand the processes and procedures that are critical to this industry.

How did the downturn affect PDP's business?

Nick Butcher: The company was bought by our management in 2007, and since then, we have been investing heavily in new markets and territories. We have not experienced the downturn because we are new in the business. We will witness growth in the coming years.

Clive Bryant: Our customer base is growing in India. They are seeking products, speed in terms of meeting the requirements and getting the products to the required destination in India or abroad, and security in terms of the fact that the products are highly sensitive and cannot be replaced. That security should also ensure protection against temperature and physical damage. In the downturn, however, everybody is looking at saving costs and are not eager to pay more for the safe and speedy services. So during this period, we have to meet our customers' expectations at an affordable cost.

Nayantara Som in Mumbai