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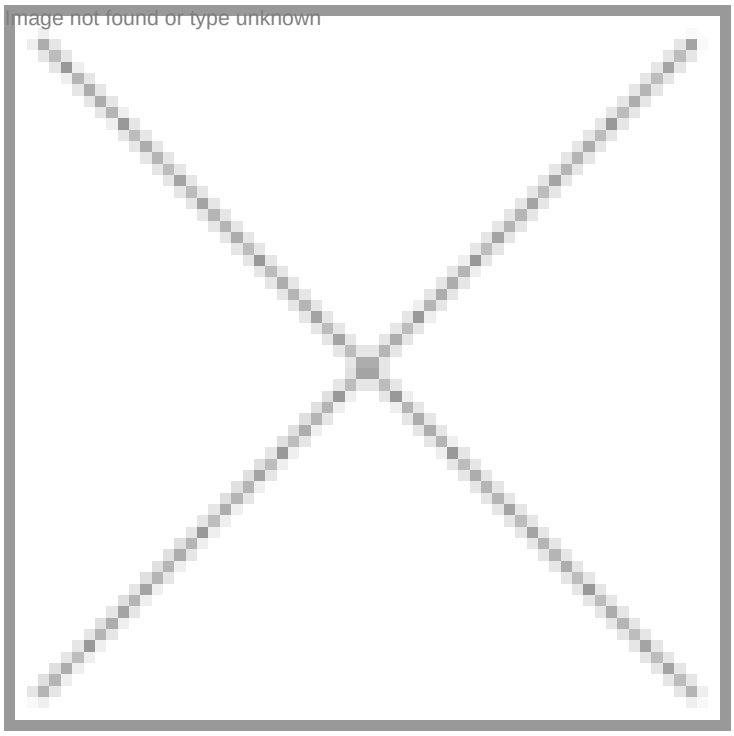

"Lab India enjoys a formidable share in the mass spectrometry business,"

-Umesh Pawa, VP, PSM division, Labindia Instruments Pvt Ltd

Gurgaon-based Lab India's PSM division has completed a decade of operations and has been a consistent performer ever since it sold its first mass spectrometer to Ranbaxy. Umesh Pawa, VP, PSM division, Labindia Instruments Pvt Ltd, speaks to BioSpectrum about the company's new products and trends in the mass spectrometry.

How has the mass spectrometry (MS) market grown over the years?

We started in 1996 and till 1998 there were no sales. The technology was not very well accepted in India and we were proving the technology to our very first buyer, Ranbaxy. After they saw the value they got another system, which was followed by few more buyers and at the same time, the CRO business started in India. We started seeing a steady growth of 25-30 percent from 2000. In 2004, the market saw a sudden growth of 100 percent in the mass spectrometry segment and we are the clear leader. Since then, the growth has been very uniform. The MS market is now growing at a steady rate of 20-25 percent.

How is the PSM division performing?

The MS market was estimated at $40 million between July 2006 and June 2007 and Lab India enjoys a formidable share. Our

MS business stood at $29 million during that period. This includes sales and service. The reason for this dominance in the market is a good after sales service and support for these high tech instruments. Being high cost instruments our customers can't afford downtime on these instruments. We have put together a support infrastructure in terms of service, application support, and initiatives for providing spare parts.

What have been some of the recent developments in the division?

Some of the developments have been in the area of therapeutic drug monitoring wherein one needs to monitor the concentration of the immunosuppresants that are given to a patient to avoid the body's resistance during an organ transplant. Traditional techniques like immunoassays give a very high false negative and positive rate and the variability in results is very high. Of late mass spectrometry has been found to be very precise and accurate in measuring the results. In India, hospitals haven't yet employed this technology. This technology is widely used in the US and Europe. In forensics, mass spectrometry is used to precisely measure the concentration of banned drugs of abuse taken by athletes in their sweat, blood, and urine. We have launched a new system, developed by Applied Biosystems, called Cliquid, for forensics recently. In one shot, a 20 minute run, it can check for 1200 drugs of abuse, screen for all these compounds and tell if they are present. This is not yet in practice in any of the labs, but we are in discussion with some of them.

What are some of the new products that you introduced?

Cliquid is a software platform rather a series of software that gives a black box kind of a result, even a non expert user in mass spectrometry can easily operate it because it gives readymade methods. The latest launch is Cliquid for forensics. Before this we launched two more variants, one was Cliquid for food analysis that gives ready made method for testing adulterants (Sudan dye in red chili), pesticides and antibiotics residues. Cliquid for quant software was the earliest version (skeleton version) that helped to run methods for a particular molecule.

Several companies today focus on drug discovery (NCEs) wherein several compounds are synthesized everyday and screened to see if they suit the pharmacokinetic profile that is intended. MS is being used for these analyses but in order to automate this process we launched the Discovery quant station for early ADME studies. The software automatically optimizes the conditions for each one of the several compounds and runs a PK profile on a short subset of each of these samples. This process is different from the bioequivalence, bioavailability studies in case of clinical trials because there we have a large number of samples and few molecules. So the focus here was to do a quick screening method and run the samples quickly.

Shalini Gupta