José F. Oramas – Caribbean GEO Country Manager, UPS Puerto Rico



Puerto Rico offers not only a strategic location and world-class talent but also a vibrant culture that makes it a unique and exciting place to do business

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José F. Oramas, Caribbean GEO Country Manager for UPS, highlights the company's strategic role in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, particularly within the life sciences and logistics sectors. With nearly four decades of experience at UPS, Oramas shares his perspectives on navigating challenges, leveraging Puerto Rico's unique geographic and economic advantages, and fostering innovation in the logistics industry. Oramas also goes on to highlight UPS's community initiatives, its contributions to empowering local businesses, and his vision for Puerto Rico's future as a global logistics hub.

As this is the third time we have interviewed you, could you provide an update on UPS's operations in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean since our last discussion in 2020?

UPS Puerto Rico continues to serve as a vital hub for the Caribbean. Since our last interview in 2020, we have seen significant growth in our operations, driven by the manufacturing sector, particularly in life sciences, healthcare, and medical devices. Puerto Rico remains a critical distribution hub and connection point for these industries, not only within the region but also globally. Being a U.S. territory further enhances our ability to support this sector—making Puerto Rico a strategic location for UPS.

What are the key focus areas for UPS in the region, and how are you prioritizing these areas to drive growth and efficiency?

Our primary focus areas include the life sciences sector, industrial manufacturing, and the automobile industry. Among these, life sciences is the largest sector we handle in Puerto Rico in terms of freight volume. To ensure we meet the unique demands of this sensitive sector, we have dedicated resources and maintain continuous communication with our partners. We prioritize understanding their needs and providing tailored logistical solutions which is part of our daily agenda on the island.

How has the demand from the pharmaceutical sector for logistical services changed over the past few years, and how has UPS adapted to meet these evolving needs?

The pharmaceutical sector's logistical needs vary depending on the type of goods being manufactured. For instance, pharmaceuticals often require a mix of air freight, air packages, and maritime transport for raw materials and finished products. On the other hand, the medical device sector heavily relies on air transport due to the critical and individualized nature of their products. Each device is essentially custom made for a specific individual, underscoring the need for speed and precision in logistics.

As the global demand for medical devices continues to grow, Puerto Rico has become an essential hub for this sector. Many leading companies have a significant presence on the island, further cementing Puerto Rico's position as a manufacturing powerhouse. UPS has adapted by expanding our service capabilities and maintaining the flexibility needed to support this dynamic and growing industry.

How did UPS contribute to the COVID-19 pandemic response in the region, and which logistical strengths were accelerated as a result of the pandemic?

To address this, I need to go back to 2017 with Hurricane Maria, followed by the earthquakes and then the pandemic. These events taught us valuable lessons and prompted us to revise our business continuity plans. We learned how to better prepare for disruptions and ensure our operations in Puerto Rico could continue under challenging circumstances. Puerto Rico plays a crucial role as a hub for manufacturing and distribution, and any disruption here has global repercussions, especially for the life sciences and healthcare sectors.

As a result of these experiences, we positioned Puerto Rico as a more resilient and reliable destination compared to other countries that may not have faced such challenges. Our enhanced preparedness allows us to mitigate supply chain interruptions and maintain operational continuity—even during crises.

With the implementation of new technologies, such as blockchain, real-time tracking, and other digitalization advancements, how has UPS leveraged these innovations to enhance its operations?

Last year, we introduced a new product in Puerto Rico called UPS Premier, specifically tailored for the life sciences and healthcare sectors. This innovative solution includes a device that attaches to a package label, utilizing GPS technology to track the exact location of the package in real-time. Whether the package is at a hub, in transit, or at its destination, we can monitor its movement throughout the system.

This real-time tracking capability is a significant advantage for our healthcare customers. For example, raw materials or critical components for production lines can be tracked instantly, ensuring no delays in locating packages. Unlike traditional methods where proof of delivery confirms the package’s location, UPS Premier provides continuous visibility.

While we acknowledge the potential of AI and other advanced automation tools, we are currently focused on maintaining a strong, direct relationship with our customers. Dedicated resources ensure personalized interactions, which remain essential in such a dynamic and sensitive industry. While automation will play a greater role in the future, we prioritize human connections to meet our customers’ specific needs today.

UPS is involved in several projects here in Puerto Rico, including strong cooperation with local players. Could you elaborate further on these collaborations?

We are working on two key projects that highlight our commitment to collaboration and flexibility. The first project involves expanding our network of access points across Puerto Rico. These access points allow customers to drop off or pick up packages at convenient locations, such as pharmacies. For this, we partnered with Farmacia Caridad and PharmaMax—two local pharmacy chains with over 60 locations throughout the island. These access points operate seven days a week and have extended hours, providing greater flexibility to customers who may not follow a

standard 9 to 5 schedule. This initiative ensures that everyone has accessible options for their shipping needs.

The second project is a strategic alliance with Islandwide, a local delivery company specializing in intra-island service. Through this partnership, Islandwide customers can now access UPS's global network. Islandwide collects packages for international destinations and connects them with UPS, offering the same high standards and reliability that UPS customers expect. Both projects enhance flexibility, expand coverage, and strengthen Puerto Rico's logistics ecosystem, allowing us to better serve customers across the island.

UPS is also involved in empowering women, particularly women entrepreneurs. Can you share more about this initiative and how it is helping to support women in business?

We have a program for Latin America, managed by our district in Mexico, called "Women Entrepreneurs." The purpose of this initiative is to educate, train, and equip women with the tools they need to grow their businesses. Specifically, we aim to help them expand their operations beyond Puerto Rico.

This year, we hosted several seminars focused on practical aspects of international trade, such as navigating customs, understanding local and international regulations, and utilizing both air and ocean freight options. Many entrepreneurs are not fully aware of the logistics involved in exporting, so we provide them with critical knowledge to ensure compliance with industry standards. By doing this, we empower women entrepreneurs to take their businesses to the next level and access global markets with confidence.

Another initiative you are working on is H1 Puerto Rico. What role does UPS play in this project, and what impact does it aim to achieve?

Hecho en Puerto Rico, or "Made in Puerto Rico," is an association with over 500 members, most of whom are micro-industries or small business owners. These entrepreneurs are focused on maximizing their resources and growing their businesses. However, many of them only sell or operate within Puerto Rico. Our goal is to provide these businesses with the tools and knowledge they need to export their products globally.

Recently, the association held a three-day conference aimed at showcasing the products and services of these micro-businesses. The event attracted attendees from outside Puerto Rico, offering these entrepreneurs the opportunity to promote their offerings on a broader stage. Through our collaboration with Hecho en Puerto Rico, we help these businesses understand how to expand their reach and connect with international markets, fostering growth and opening up new opportunities.

What geographic advantages does Puerto Rico offer as part of the global logistics industry, and how does UPS leverage these advantages in its operations?

Puerto Rico enjoys the best of both worlds. As a U.S. territory, it provides seamless access to the U.S. market while also serving as a strategic hub for global connections. This dual advantage positions Puerto Rico as a critical logistics link. For example, in the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries, the U.S. is the primary market for testing, but Europe, with key countries like Ireland and Germany, follows as the second largest. Additionally, we have connections to Asia, which is another significant region. Puerto Rico’s location allows us to efficiently bridge these markets, and UPS leverages this geographic advantage to facilitate the movement of goods between these regions, ensuring our customers remain competitive in the global market.

How is the current political and economic climate in Puerto Rico affecting the logistics sector?

I believe Puerto Rico’s economic development has been heading in the right direction over the last five years. This is not about political parties but rather the collective effort of the country. There is a shared understanding that we need to position Puerto Rico as an attractive place to do business. We have a highly educated workforce, with trained professionals and a low turnover rate in key sectors. However, if we do not retain this talent, other regions will certainly capitalize on it. This makes it crucial to continue promoting Puerto Rico as a prime location for businesses to establish their operations.

The government has made commendable efforts in this regard. Institutions like the Economic Development Bank and the Department of Tourism have played key roles in showcasing Puerto Rico globally. The results are evident, as we increasingly see new companies exploring the possibility of setting up operations here. In the Caribbean, Puerto Rico remains the most stable and

attractive place in terms of politics, economics, and connectivity with both the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Have you noticed a shift in how Puerto Rico is perceived globally within the life sciences and logistics sectors? How is the island's reputation evolving?

Puerto Rico is absolutely being perceived positively, especially in the life sciences and logistics sectors. The quality of the products manufactured here is exceptional—A-plus, I would say. This reputation for quality, combined with our strategic location and highly educated workforce, makes Puerto Rico a very attractive option for companies considering where to establish their operations.

The strength of our human resources stands out, as does the dedication to maintaining high standards. Companies from both the U.S. and international markets increasingly see Puerto Rico as a viable and appealing destination for their businesses. Our education system and the proven quality of the products we produce continue to enhance our global reputation.

What talent profiles do you look for when recruiting new employees at UPS, and what strategies do you use to retain top talent as the company continues to grow?

UPS has an exceptional track record when it comes to employee retention—our turnover rate is among the best in the world. People rarely leave UPS. When you walk through our operations, you will see employees with more than 20 years of service, and we are also welcoming a new generation of employees who are eager to grow within the company.

We focus on providing comprehensive training and development tools to ensure employees feel supported and see a clear path for advancement. UPS has a unique culture, and we like to say we have "brown blood." This culture resonates with our employees, and the stability and opportunities for growth keep them engaged.

When we hire new talent, particularly for staff positions, many come directly from college or other logistics companies. They see the potential for career growth within UPS, not just in Puerto Rico but internationally. We have Puerto Ricans in staff positions all over the world, which reflects the strength of our talent pool and the opportunities UPS provides for professional development.

Looking back on your nearly four decades with UPS, how has your experience shaped your approach to your current role and influenced your leadership style?

On January 26, I will celebrate 37 years with UPS. I am proud to say that I first started as a part-time car washer while I was in university. At that time, I did not see UPS as a long-term career, but rather just a job to support me while pursuing my education. However, UPS offered a tuition reimbursement program, which I took full advantage of, allowing me to complete both my bachelor's and master's degrees.

Over the years I have held various positions within UPS across operations and marketing, working in the U.S., Latin America, and Europe. I even had the privilege of helping open new operations in different parts of the world. These experiences gave me a holistic understanding of the business and helped shape my leadership style.

Today, I see my role not just as managing operations but also as fostering new leadership and encouraging innovative thinking to meet evolving customer expectations and industry demands. Every day in this business is unique. We may have a master plan for running operations, but unexpected factors like volume spikes, weather disruptions, or special customer needs mean we must constantly adapt. I meet with my team daily at 10 a.m. to review the previous day's performance and plan for the day ahead. The experience I have gained over these years enables me to adjust our strategies effectively and keep operations running smoothly.

I am also proud to be part of UPS's mentorship program, where I mentor individuals identified as future leaders in our district. To me, this is the best way to give back to the company that has supported me throughout my career by helping others seize the same opportunities I had.

What final message would you like to convey to our global audience about Puerto Rico and its vision for the future?

First and foremost, I want to highlight Puerto Rico as a premier destination for doing business, especially in the manufacturing sector. The island has established itself as a key hub for industries like pharmaceuticals, life sciences, and healthcare. We have highly skilled people capable of driving the growth of these industries.

Puerto Rico's unique position as a U.S. territory offers an unparalleled advantage. It provides seamless connections to the U.S. market while maintaining strong ties to the rest of the world. This dual connection makes Puerto Rico an ideal location for businesses seeking to expand their reach.

I also invite the global audience to learn more about Puerto Rican culture. As Latinos, we are known for being outspoken and adaptable, traits that enable us to take an active role in solving business challenges. This cultural strength sets us apart and helps us approach problems with creativity and collaboration. All in all, Puerto Rico offers not only a strategic location and world-class talent but also a vibrant culture that makes it a unique and exciting place to do business.

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