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Puerto Rico is not just a location; it's a place to lead, innovate, and set new industry standards

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In a rapidly evolving global landscape, medtech manufacturer Copan Industries (part of Copan Group) has strategically chosen Puerto Rico as a key hub for its expansion in the Americas, attracted by the island's skilled workforce and strong institutional support. As COO Efraín Rodríguez explains, with over \$100 million invested, the company has rapidly scaled its operations, driving innovation in automation and sustainability.

What led Copan Industries to establish operations in Puerto Rico, and how has the company evolved since its arrival?

Copan Industries, a subsidiary of the Italian-based Copan Group, has built a reputation as a global leader in the manufacture of medical devices for laboratory applications. As part of its strategic expansion into the Americas, the company sought a location that would support its growth while ensuring operational efficiency. In 2018, in the wake of Hurricane Maria, Copan identified Puerto Rico as the ideal destination, recognizing the island's skilled workforce, strategic positioning, and the strong support of local authorities.

Despite the economic challenges of the post-hurricane period, Puerto Rico presented compelling advantages, and the government played a pivotal role in facilitating Copan's establishment, particularly in securing a state-of-the-art facility. Initially envisioned as a modest-scale operation, the venture quickly expanded as Copan experienced substantial institutional backing and identified

new business opportunities. This confidence translated into a significant financial commitment, with the company investing over \$100 million to solidify its presence in Puerto Rico, underscoring its long-term vision for the region and reinforcing its position in the Americas.

How has Copan Industries evolved since establishing operations in Puerto Rico, and to what extent has it exceeded initial expectations?

Copan Industries has significantly outperformed its initial projections, driven in part by the surge in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this period accelerated growth beyond expectations, the company has maintained its strong trajectory post-pandemic, achieving an impressive annual growth rate of approximately 20%.

Since its establishment, Copan has successfully transferred the production of four major product families, integrating over 40 Stock Keeping Units (SKUs) into its operations. The expansion of its workforce has been equally remarkable, with the facility currently employing 200 people and plans underway to scale up to more than 350 in the near future. These milestones reflect not only the company's confidence in Puerto Rico as a strategic manufacturing hub but also its long-term commitment to sustaining innovation and operational excellence in the region.

How does Copan's Puerto Rico facility contribute to its global strategy, particularly in the U.S. market?

Puerto Rico is central to Copan's long-term strategy in the Americas, serving as a key driver of its ambitious growth objectives. With the company targeting a 15% annual revenue increase in the region—effectively doubling its revenues every five years—Puerto Rico has been designated as its largest, most strategically significant, and preferred manufacturing hub in the Americas.

Beyond its role in scaling production, Puerto Rico offers distinct financial and operational advantages that enhance Copan's overall competitiveness. The facility benefits from highly favorable tax structures, making it not only the company's most expansive site in the region but also its most profitable. While Copan may expand its footprint elsewhere, Puerto Rico remains the linchpin of its U.S. and regional market strategy, reinforcing the company's position as an industry leader while ensuring sustained long-term growth.

How is Copan advancing sustainability in its manufacturing operations, and what steps are being taken to enhance efficiency and resilience?

Sustainability is an integral component of Copan's operational strategy, guided by a philosophy of continuous improvement and process optimization. The company views daily refinements as essential to maintaining efficiency, profitability, and long-term environmental responsibility. As part of this commitment, Copan is making a significant investment in a cogeneration system, which will allow it to generate its own electricity using natural gas.

This transition represents both an economic and strategic advantage. Beyond mitigating external risks associated with Puerto Rico's energy grid, the system is expected to reduce overall energy consumption by more than 40% and generate substantial cost savings, lowering annual energy expenditures by several million dollars. Rather than perceiving energy challenges as a constraint, Copan sees them as an opportunity to innovate and strengthen its self-sufficiency.

The company is dedicating \$8 million to this initiative, reinforcing both its sustainability agenda and financial resilience. The Puerto Rican government has played a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of this project, demonstrating strong support for investments that drive industrial efficiency and economic stability. By proactively addressing energy constraints through strategic innovation, Copan is solidifying its position as a forward-thinking industry leader, balancing environmental responsibility with operational excellence.

How is Copan integrating automation and innovation into its expansion strategy while ensuring workforce sustainability?

Automation is at the core of Copan's operational evolution, not merely as a tool for efficiency but as a strategic driver of long-term competitiveness. By systematically automating its processes, the company enhances precision, minimizes variability, and strengthens its ability to deliver high-quality, cost-effective solutions to its customers. However, rather than displacing human capital, automation fuels business expansion, creating opportunities for skilled professionals to contribute to more advanced, high-value tasks. This balanced approach ensures that technological advancement translates into sustainable economic growth, reinforcing Copan's commitment to workforce development in Puerto Rico.

Innovation, too, is deeply embedded in Copan's corporate philosophy, extending far beyond leadership to engage employees at every level. The Ideas Hub, an internal initiative designed to

harness collective intelligence, empowers employees to propose operational improvements through a structured digital platform. Recognizing that transformative ideas often emerge from within, Copan rewards implemented suggestions, fostering a culture of continuous refinement where efficiency gains are an organizational priority rather than a top-down directive.

Further distinguishing its Puerto Rico facility, Copan has positioned the site as a global benchmark in lean manufacturing, pioneering methodologies that optimize workflows, eliminate inefficiencies, and accelerate production cycles. This commitment to operational excellence not only fortifies the company's market standing but also underscores Puerto Rico's pivotal role in Copan's long-term expansion strategy. By seamlessly integrating automation, fostering innovation, and refining industrial best practices, Copan is shaping a future where technological progress and human ingenuity coexist in a mutually reinforcing dynamic.

How has Copan adapted its production strategy to evolving market dynamics post-COVID, and what challenges lie ahead?

Copan's production strategy was designed with long-term resilience in mind, ensuring that capacity investments made during the pandemic would extend beyond immediate demand surges. Rather than scaling operations solely for COVID-related needs, the company strategically established redundant capacity, equipping its facilities to rapidly scale production up to five times the current output if a similar global health crisis were to arise. This foresight not only safeguards operational agility but also reinforces Copan's ability to respond to shifting market conditions efficiently.

At the same time, maintaining economic viability remains a priority. Copan has carefully structured its operations to align with sustainable business growth, optimizing resources without unnecessary overextension. The \$23 million in government funding has played a pivotal role in offsetting depreciation costs, strengthening the company's financial foundation while allowing for continued investment in operational excellence.

Looking ahead, one of the most pressing challenges will be ensuring a robust pipeline of skilled technical talent in Puerto Rico. As the demand for engineers, technicians, and specialized mechanics grows, workforce development will be critical in sustaining Copan's long-term competitiveness. Investing in technical expertise and talent retention will be essential to maintaining operational efficiency and reinforcing Puerto Rico's strategic importance within the company's global framework.

What initiatives is Copan implementing to attract and retain top local talent, and how are younger generations approaching career opportunities in Puerto Rico?

Copan is deeply invested in strengthening the link between academia and industry, recognizing that talent development is essential for both business sustainability and the broader economic landscape. A key focus is fostering direct collaboration with Puerto Rican universities to ensure that educational programs are aligned with the evolving needs of advanced manufacturing. As a board member in multiple industry organizations, I actively engage in initiatives aimed at equipping students with the technical expertise required to succeed in the sector.

One of our most impactful programs involves hosting students from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM), providing them with hands-on industrial experience through structured internships and capstone projects. Just recently, we welcomed eight students who will complete their final semester at Copan under my mentorship, gaining practical exposure to process optimization and operational efficiency. Beyond offering real-world experience, we provide financial assistance and direct career opportunities, reinforcing our commitment to cultivating local talent and encouraging them to establish their careers on the island.

However, talent retention remains a complex challenge. While many students express a strong desire to stay in Puerto Rico, the reality is that a significant number seek opportunities on the U.S. mainland, given their ability to seamlessly transition into roles in states like California.

Nonetheless, when we engage with students and expose them to the possibilities within Puerto Rico's industrial sector, we see a shift in perspective. By fostering mentorship, strengthening career pathways, and demonstrating that a fulfilling and successful career can be built locally, Copan is actively working to inspire the next generation of professionals to contribute to the island's long-term growth and innovation.

In what areas is Copan collaborating with the industry to strengthen Puerto Rico's position as a business and manufacturing hub?

Collaboration across Puerto Rico's industrial sector is fundamental to sustaining its global competitiveness, with energy and workforce development emerging as key priorities. Given the persistent challenges in the energy sector, companies actively support one another, sharing expertise and working collectively to implement solutions that enhance resilience and operational

stability. Ensuring reliable energy infrastructure is critical for maintaining Puerto Rico's attractiveness to high-value industries.

Equally crucial is the continuous development of a highly skilled workforce, which remains one of the island's greatest competitive advantages. Unlike labor-intensive manufacturing hubs, Puerto Rico excels in technically sophisticated, highly regulated production, particularly in sectors where expertise in Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and compliance with U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations are imperative. This specialization positions the island as an ideal destination for companies prioritizing precision, quality, and regulatory excellence over low-cost production.

To reinforce this strength, Copan and other industry leaders actively collaborate with academic institutions, ensuring that education aligns with industry needs and cultivates a steady pipeline of highly qualified professionals. By fostering innovation, technical expertise, and a resilient industrial ecosystem, Puerto Rico remains a premier location for advanced manufacturing and high-value industries.

How has your transition from Sartorius to Copan shaped your leadership approach, and what drives your motivation in leading such a transformative project?

Leaving Sartorius at the peak of my career to join Copan was a pivotal decision, but one driven by a profound sense of purpose. The opportunity to establish a Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) facility for a European company in Puerto Rico was more than a career move—it was a chance to contribute meaningfully to the island's industrial development. This transition pushed me beyond my comfort zone, particularly as I stepped into a startup environment during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period fraught with uncertainty and logistical challenges.

One of the most defining moments was traveling to Brescia, Italy, then the epicenter of the pandemic, to immerse myself in Copan's operations. Upon returning, the real challenge began—we needed to hire 300 employees in just six months, spanning engineers, supervisors, and specialized personnel, all while operating under strict pandemic restrictions. With travel and in-person interactions severely limited, we had to conduct recruitment, onboarding, and training remotely, relying heavily on digital platforms. Despite these unprecedented obstacles, Copan placed its trust in us, not just through financial investment but through unwavering confidence in our ability to execute the vision. That trust strengthened our sense of commitment and responsibility, propelling us forward even in the most difficult circumstances.

My leadership philosophy is rooted in vision and inspiration. It is not enough to have a vision; a leader must ensure that the team embraces it. I motivate people by showing them the broader impact of their work—how their contributions fuel industry growth, attract investment, and create jobs that sustain families. When individuals see tangible progress and understand that they are part of something greater, their motivation deepens. Leading by example, working alongside my team, and fostering a culture of shared purpose have been central to my leadership journey, first at Sartorius and now at Copan, where the challenge has been immense but deeply rewarding.

How are recent political developments in Puerto Rico and the U.S. shaping the future of the island's manufacturing sector?

The political landscape in Puerto Rico is entering a period of stability and strong pro-business alignment, creating an optimistic outlook for the manufacturing sector. With Jenniffer González-Colón assuming office as governor and Donald Trump returning to the presidency, conditions are increasingly favorable for industrial expansion. President Trump has consistently emphasized the need to repatriate pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturing to the United States, with Puerto Rico positioned as a key beneficiary of this strategy. His administration's policies are expected to attract further investment, bolstered by Governor González-Colón's commitment to strengthening the island's industrial base.

Energy policy is another critical area where these political shifts could bring meaningful improvements. President Trump has acknowledged the challenges surrounding energy costs and infrastructure in Puerto Rico, signaling a focus on policies aimed at reducing industrial energy expenses and enhancing reliability. With strong support from both federal and local leadership, Puerto Rico stands to reinforce its position as a premier hub for high-value, highly regulated industries, ensuring long-term economic growth and industrial resilience.

What makes Puerto Rico an attractive destination for global businesses, and how is Copan positioning itself for long-term growth?

Puerto Rico offers a compelling environment for companies seeking both profitability and strategic market access, particularly in high-tech and highly regulated industries such as medical devices and pharmaceuticals. Beyond its favorable tax structure, the island's greatest asset is its highly skilled workforce, deeply experienced in Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and U.S. Food and

Drug Administration (FDA) compliance. This expertise, combined with Puerto Rico's proximity to the U.S. market, positions it as an ideal hub for businesses that prioritize quality, regulatory excellence, and operational efficiency.

For Copan, the focus over the next three to five years is on expanding its footprint, driving revenue growth, and increasing its market share across the Americas. The company's ability to achieve these objectives is anchored in its commitment to innovation and product excellence, reinforcing its reputation as an industry leader. However, beyond financial success, Copan recognizes that businesses bear a broader global responsibility—one that extends to ethical leadership, environmental sustainability, and the well-being of the communities in which they operate. True success is not measured solely by growth but by the lasting impact a company leaves on society and the industry it serves.

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