

# Interview: Sanjay Singh, General Manager, Torrent, Philippines

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*Sanjay Singh, General Manager of Torrent in the Philippines, talks about the decision behind entering the Philippine market, the company's strategy for increasing the influence of Indian pharmaceutical companies in the market, and how Torrent is contributing to the general awareness of patients with schizophrenia and psychosis, conditions that are still extremely stigmatized in the Philippines.*

**Torrent is a well-known Indian branded generics manufacturer that has successfully expanded internationally. The company, however, only has a full presence in a handful of countries. Why has the Philippines been one of the chosen markets to enter?**

Indian companies still have a lot of learning to do in the real 'unbranded' generics markets, where they are still trying to understand how to negotiate, tie up, etc. The entire Indian market however, is covered by branded generics, so entering the Philippines is a logical next step. For any Indian company, it is quite a natural move to operate in a branded generics market like the Philippines.

Looking at the ratio of on patent to off patent products in the Philippines, this market is fairly balanced. Looking at branded generics alone, there is one very large player, a mammoth, and practically no one else. This was precisely the reason for Torrent to start its operations here.

**You have been with the company in the Philippines for quite a while already, with a short stint in Sri Lanka. How have you observed the political push towards generization**

## **in this market?**

PhilHealth aside, political measures like the Cheap Medicines Act or MDRP, have played a very positive role in increasing the acceptance of branded generics. Indirectly, the MDRP has worked in favor of the Indian companies.

When we used to approach the prescribers and clinicians, before the MDRP, making inroads was particularly difficult. There was a need for us to prove our worth in terms of quality to get a space in the prescription list of the doctors.

As prices were lowered with the MDRP, it was made clear that even though prices would go down, quality would be maintained. The MDRP helped to eliminate the dilution in the relationship between price and quality.

Since most Indian companies used to face the prejudice of bringing in low quality products, the perception change due to MDRP mostly benefited us Indians.

## **That was PhilHealth aside. What does this big new stakeholder mean for your market approach?**

Currently, we have not changed our approach, as we have not yet seen much impact from PhilHealth on the market. We do expect this to change. If coverage will change, we expect to see the market expanding. Both branded and unbranded generics manufacturers will benefit from this market expansion.

## **You mentioned that the perception of Indian product quality changed. Does this also mean that the regulatory environment has become friendlier?**

The regulatory authorities do not pose a significant challenge if you align with the necessary requirements and documentation. The challenge existed in the perception of the clinicians and the patients. This perception has changed strongly in the favor of branded generics over the last five years.

As an ethical player in the prescription market, we have also engaged actively in addressing captive clinician groups all across the Philippines. Our marketing staff has been involved in increasing the awareness of Indian products, as well as the presence of Indian pharmaceutical companies internationally.

The fact that the market share of Indian companies is growing in the US market correlates to the quality that Indian companies bring to the market. Talking about US presence is always well

received in the Philippines.

**Torrent has CNS and cardiovascular as its two key therapeutic areas. What do you see as Torrent's contribution to Filipino patients in these niches?**

Our key strength is CNS, within which we strongly focus on the psychiatric segment. Our greatest contribution goes to patients with schizophrenia and psychosis, where we have been able to reduce the cost of therapy drastically.

Our product Clozapine, an anti-psychotic drug, for instance, only had one originator present in the market. When we came in, we saw that the doctors appreciated the lower cost of therapy. A lot of patients that were previously going untreated now came under the treatment umbrella.

More and more neurological products have been made available in the last three years, from different branded generics players. When we moved into the Philippines, we were the only competitors vis-à-vis the innovators. This has resulted in a higher number of patients being treated for illnesses such as epilepsy and psychosis.

**Many of these illnesses are still hard to understand for the less educated. In many cases, they carry a strong social stigma. What remains to be done in the Philippines in terms of patient awareness?**

Just like in many other places in the world, patient awareness is still low. Together with a number of clinicians, we have participated and supported in educating the population. We are also tied up with the Philippine League Against Epilepsy (PLAE), which awards exemplary epileptic performers, to spread the awareness around treating epilepsy.

The prevalence of epilepsy in the Philippines is quite high, but the problem is that the percentage of the epilepsy population that is being diagnosed and treated is only 30 percent in the Philippines. There is still a large share of undiagnosed and untreated patients.

We need to support general awareness campaigns and play our role in enhancing awareness in the country.

**What is your approach to establishing alliances in this market?**

We have just started working on creating alliances here. Most branded generics players have only entered this market recently. Up till three years ago, we were practically the only player. For us, it was more important to make less noise and avoid attracting additional competitors.

Looking at the current pace of entry of branded generics players in this market, however, it is time to pick up on cooperation as part of our strategy. We are now doing the groundwork to establish alliances in this market.

**Without going into the details of the exact companies you are already looking into, what would characterize a good partner for you?**

Since the Philippines is a branded generics market, we are looking at organizations with good marketing muscle. The pace of entry of branded generics is increasing, and many of the players will be looking for alliances. For us, however, it is important that these partners are strong in marketing.

Additionally, we are also emerging as a good marketing organization and therefore are more than keen in collaborating with companies looking to enter this market that may have limited portfolios. From a geographical perspective, we are now mainly looking at partnering with companies from Europe, the US and Japan.

**What do you see as your biggest contribution to Torrent in the Philippines?**

I was fortunate to arrive in an organization that was already doing well. However, I am pleased to see that we continue to do well and even succeeded in increasing our growth rate. I feel my contribution is related to this growth increase.

I am also pleased to say that we have established a culture where we empower one another. Our staff members here are able to express themselves and come up with new ideas and strategies. We now have a field force of around 120 representatives and another 40 people in the office.

**The industry is growing in favor of branded generics in the Philippines. What is the maximum potential Torrent can reach here?**

Currently, we are growing at 40 percent in the Philippines. We have been introducing one to two new products every year. Even though we have not yet launched any new products in 2013, we are still growing very rapidly as the numbers indicate.

We expect good growth and see ourselves expanding our product portfolio, not just through partnerships with marketing organizations but also by sourcing in products. I believe that we have a very good medium to a long-term future in the Philippines.

Adding new products and expanding our marketing team will be primary strategies for our organization to grow.

As more players come in, the market for branded generics will mature in the Philippines. The acceptance of branded generics will increase, and the number of players present here will contribute to that overall cause. You will see more and more of those players taking away market share from the originators. We continue to encourage an increase in branded generics players in the Philippines.

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