

Interview: Warren Shapiro, Manager of Life Sciences

North America, Brunel, Canada



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Warren Shapiro, manager of the North American division of Brunel's life science sector, offers his insights into Canada's immense human resources capabilities as well as Brunel's footprint for contract labor in Canada's life sciences industry in comparison to other worldwide regions.

You have covered jurisdictions in Canada, US and Latin America. What have been the most marked differences between these markets?

It is important to recognize that each region in the world is looked at for different efficiencies. I have always been proud of Canada for its strong network of research-capable sites with high patient concentrations and strong urban centers across the country. Coupled with the idea that Canada has G7-trained doctors and tremendous research institutions, there is an excellent platform to do research. The challenge to doing research in Canada in recent years has been the increase of the Canadian dollar. In the early 1990s, many European countries chose to do their research trials in Canada because the cost of doing business as well as the ability to get very interesting ethnic populations was always available. Now, with a 97-cent dollar, it is not as palatable for them. They would rather go to the US where they know the researchers, or stay in Europe. If everyone is in a recession, companies would rather keep business at head offices. It allows for better discussions with their local governments.

Since becoming manager of the Americas, are there any particular key milestone achievements you would like to highlight?

Brunel has revolutionized the way contracting exists in this country. Canada has always been a very different market for contract labor. Some recent legislation in terms of the way government looks at independent contractors has made the need for a company like Brunel in Canada that much more important because labor is so transient when moving between therapeutic programs. Brunel helps companies understand that because of the way that legislation has changed, it is very important to use an intermediary. If you do not, the liabilities and exposures as well as reporting requirements become very difficult.

What are some of the key competitive advantages that Canada offers in terms of life science capabilities?

We are very driven by what comes to Canada. A couple years ago, a company looking to create a monoclonal antibody program tried to set up a manufacturing facility because of an antiquated report on great Canadian talent. Most programs had lost their promise in the late 1980s, and in the early 2000s, you could not even find these people. We are very responsive as opposed to proactive, which has a lot to do with the level of investment. I think that before a company grows to the point of rivaling Bombardier, it will merge with another company. That level of growth will come from service companies in Canada, not product-focused companies. I think we will see it in service companies. If you look at what has really grown out of Canada, like Phoenix or Cromedica, companies are buying our CROs and other facilities in Canada because of the great research offered. Canada simply does not have the capital investment to create a behemoth.

Did the financial crisis of 2008 require a need for Brunel Canada to adapt to changing market trends?

Brunel has been contacted by customers who have never required outsourced labor before, asking us to explain it to them and why it is necessary. The demand for plug-and-play labor is not being controlled by project management companies. Clients are not always asking clinical research organizations to manage projects anymore. As a matter of fact, we are seeing embedded teams that are no longer being supervised by the sponsor. Brunel has stepped into the vacuum to provide the labor. Brunel constantly focuses on the people. You look after your project, and we look after the people who are looking after your project so that they are engaged with you. The difference between using that and a project-outsourced model is that there is not as much control for the end-user employee in that kind of a model. We do not assign people. Another service provider will give

you off-the-shelf resources. Brunel stepped in to custom design those resources, because that is what the industry needs now.

The affiliate covers a number of different areas, including biotech, pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, medical devices etc. How do you manage such a broad range and adapt to the individual needs of each sector?

Brunel does this by hiring the right people internally. The company employs individuals with very strong science backgrounds in recruitment and business development. Furthermore, being at the table is very important. You will not find another recruitment company in Rx&D. Brunel cannot participate in discussions unless the company rolls up its sleeves and gets involved. That is why the asset map being developed is focused on cataloguing skills in Canada. Everyone in Canada had this lovely feeling that the problem with which we were dealing was the skills gap. If you do not do a proper skills inventory, you cannot evaluate that gap. How are you doing the inventory? Are you determining whether a clinical research associate is such, or a clinical research associate in oncology with project management capabilities? When you look at how many people we have who could actually develop protocols, are you counting the underemployed, who are protocol development people functioning as monitors? Building a proper skills inventory is probably the most important thing that Canada can do in order to identify what type of business we should attract. At least that is why I think that the asset map program, which is really being championed and funded by Rx&D, is very critical. We have done a very poor job of letting everybody know what great work we do. We are too busy focusing on delivering good work, that we are not advertising it enough. Pulling it all together is the next step.

How is Brunel Canada active in supporting immigration policy?

With its global footprint, Brunel is actually an asset for pharmaceutical companies. We employ everywhere. The company has a very unique ability to ferry workers from one country to another. That is important because some companies separate their drug development program into different parts of the world based on specific skills. Being able to effectively communicate in local languages and recruit in local countries is one of the skills that Brunel has to offer the Canadian pharmaceutical industry. We can also offer this ability to the global industry because we can recruit from anywhere, and bring skills to Canada, as they are necessary.

In terms of communication between various Brunel affiliates, is there a common language that runs throughout the organization to promulgate Brunel's vision? Do cultural differences create interesting dynamics?

It creates a lot of learning, which is very positive. You would not understand it until you started to work in an international capacity. The value of understanding and respecting culture is important. There are no two people of one culture in this office. That is important in this industry because the beauty of the pharmaceutical industry is that it is color and race blind. Brunel is a focused affirmative action employer. The industry hires skills and personalities, not ego. I like to recruit in the pharmaceutical industry because of the quality of the people with whom we interface.

Brunel's ability to integrate internationally is reflected in its global footprint. All of Brunel's clinical, regulatory, and sales program are global. The ability to pull people from multiple geographies, contract them and bring them to Canada as necessary and to assemble them on a global platform, qualifies Brunel as a staffing or people delivery company as opposed to a project delivery company. You will not find this in many other companies.

If we were to return to Canada in another five years, what is your strategic vision for Brunel Canada as it relates to life sciences?

I think that Brunel can serve as a de facto employer for all companies looking to evaluate patient and product potential in Canada. Brunel becomes a very qualified employer for companies to use as they are looking to enter Canada because it can house their staff until they decide to stay here permanently. It is the 'try before you buy' theory. We can assemble a staff and contract them too. Because of the way Brunel's business model works, at such a point where you have decided you can handle them on your own, they defer back to you.

Despite Canada's size, the quality level is so significant in that you do not see the same kind of manufacturing issues or corruption that you see in other countries. I find that Canadians are very focused on trying to find the model that works. When you look at the changes that have happened in the industry and our government's responses to those changes, I think that we have actually been a very responsible society to the industry.

The pharmaceutical industry is a necessary vehicle that has been set up by the public, not governments, who will not treat disease. If government were to treat disease, it would have to be responsive to all diseases, and the cost of any medication would bankrupt any government. Canada creates a very fertile environment and is respectful of patent and regulatory issues, and patients. With what Brunel has over here, there is a lot of potential not just for the organization but Canada as well.

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