Interview with Avi Meizler, President and Founder, Meizler Biopharma

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There is little publicly available information on your personal history and the founding of Meizler. Can you share that story for our readers?

Everybody has a story – unless they're second generation, of course! I am an architect by training. Before entering the pharmaceutical industry I owned an engineering and construction company in Brazil. In the 1980s, Brazil experienced a difficult economic time. Projects and constructions were postponed: banks began to freeze investments, after a long period of rapid expansion where subsidiaries seemed to be launched nearly every day. My company's best clients were banks, as well as manufacturers of paper and cellulose, and automotive firms like GM and Volkswagen. When the business in these sectors dramatically declined, I decided to make a shift to pharma.
This shift was a result of pure accident and coincidence. In 1989, a partnership was made between six friends and business owners called Sixpar, which included a banker, lawyer, and even a local representative of Walt Disney. We all agreed Brazil had a high potential for industrialization, but what Brazil was missing was updated technologies. We recognized that if Brazil was to join a global market, which was a foreign concept at the time, there would be many opportunities to bring technologies to the country. Sixpar subsequently entered into some successful joint-ventures in energy, partnering universities and industry together. Then one day there was an opportunity in pharmaceuticals. Five of the partners said, "I don't know, I don't care, I don´t want it." So I decided to take it on myself, together with a doctor and pharmacist, we studied the opportunity. And the

rest is history.

Since then, Meizler has expanded into a laundry list of therapeutic areas, everything from biotechnology to hemoderivatives to and chronic disease treatment? Would you identify a focus linking these diverse therapeutic areas?

Meizler's focus is as much as possible on hospitals, institutions, public and private including MOH special program (e.g. haemophilia) needs. We don't have a single product available to pharmacy. The fact is that we must be competitive in all the products, because the purchasing system here in hospitals is under tender – which is the same all over the world, for example in the UK, where under the umbrella of NHSA some 90% of the country's medicines are purchased through this central authority.
In Brazil it's not any different, except that the government has elected certain areas, like haemophilia, HIV, diabetes, hypertension, etc.., to be centralized – or not, and instead pass the money to the secretaries of health of each state who make their own individual tender. But in general, this is the same system the world over.

We spoke with a prominent Brazilian manufacturer of biopharmaceuticals who had a strong view on ANVISA. He said that if there were to be a headline about their performance and its impact on Brazil, it could be summed up as follows: "ANVISA Is Killing." What's your view?

My opinion is completely different; I think ANVISA is doing a great job. I say this because I have participated in the pharmaceutical industry for 21 years, and I know it before and after ANVISA. These are two very different pharmaceutical industries! Nowadays, with the introduction of much more modern legislation and regulation, the quality of products and companies is far more professional. Today the technical people at ANVISA are very highly qualified in diverse areas including new medicines, equipment, devices, evaluation of clinical trials, biologicals, and generics. It's totally different from 10-15 years ago.
As a positive and direct consequence, the industry has become qualified along with ANVISA. And along the way, many small and medium sized companies have disappeared – only the ones who really understood the ANVISA mission, and have adapted and invested in clinical trials, bioequivalence, human research qualification, have survived. However, this requires a huge investment, and a willingness to see returns on investment in the medium-term with big possibilities to export pharmaceutical products abroad.
In the field of biologicals, Meizler has been active since 1994 and has passed through several levels of evolution. It's a very sensitive field and issue. You cannot treat biologicals like aspirin or amoxicillin, and much attention must be paid to qualifications, in-depth research, and

understanding technology before one can intelligently discuss them. ANVISA created RDC 55/10 after some years of investigations with Canadian, European, and American authorities, and in this respect I think they were wise. You cannot compare biosimilar or biologicals to synthetic drugs.

How important are Meizler's international ambitions? To this end, we've seen partnerships with Activa-CRO and GP Pharm.

Right now Meizler is at the beginning stages of its internationalization in Latin America, which has been happening for two years, and is looking to increase this international participation slowly and surely.
Meizler, as a potential partner for pharmaceutical companies in Brazil or Latin America, is first and foremost a professional and ethical company. We give very much attention and respect to our customers, physicians and patients as well to detail, technical quality, and marketing and promotion
There is another, new side of Meizler. In the beginning of 2010, Meizler decided to change the focus and vision, and while we are keeping the main range of products and concentration on institutions as I mentioned, in parallel we have decided to build a biotech manufacturing plant. Meizler wants to be among one of the first companies in Brazil in the manufacture of biotechnology products, but even this wasn't enough – and we have decided to also enter into development, which is even rarer in Brazil, which traditionally has not had the mentality for this. Brazilians usually prefer products ready for commercialization. However, Meizler decided to develop a recombinant genetic product, which is currently under development JV with European-Argentinean company. This dovetails nicely with a long-term participation in the market and the Brazilian government's policy to foster local manufacturing.

Biotechnology development in Brazil sounds risky. What is it about Meizler that makes it competitive against companies which can do their development in the US, Germany, Singapore, and merely import that to Brazil at a later stage?

Everything's risky. It's a calculated risk. First of all, Meizler was lucky to find the right people to make the development, because everything behind biotechnology is around the knowledge. The group behind us makes us feel very comfortable, with 25-30 years already in biotech, and a lot of successful experience in development, marketing, launching, and follow-up of products. Of course there is always risk, but we have confidence in this group, and we've reduced the risk by choosing the right people and partners.

You had a long career in a completely different industry before pharmaceuticals. How would you define your management style, having experienced a diversity of managerial problems?

I can define it in one word, independent of the field or activity: Leadership. With the right leadership, you can choose the right professional people to put around you, with each as the best in their field, activity, or specialty, and motivate and create leaders who can make decisions in turn. For this, you don’t have to be specialized, you can be a generalist but with leadership.
This is my style. I’m an architect, and 21 years ago I entered a field I did not understand a thing about. The secret is to choose the right people, and not to make a single decision until you understand very well. You need to be convinced.

If we were to return to Meizler in five years, what could we expect to see?

You would see a company at least five times as big as it is now. This will be achieved by expanding our biotechnology investments and continuing the expansion throughout Latin America. Several decisions made two years ago, which of course will take some time to come to fruition, will be the drivers of this growth. We shall scale up manufacturing, formulation, injectables, and API. As well, in January 2011, a new division was created in Meizler, a new line called Wellness. If all goes well, Meizler will soon be a top 5 dermocosmetic company, and we have already closed several contracts in breast implants in botox. Meizler is working with short, medium and long term plans. To borrow an expression from my architecture days, Meizler is now building a solid foundation for the future.

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