

Interview: Eduardo Loyola, General Manager, Heel, Chile



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Eduardo Loyola has been at the helm of Heel's Chilean affiliate for almost a decade. Prior to his appointment at Heel, Loyola was part of a working group that is responsible for the current regulatory framework for natural products. Loyola elaborates on the

innovative marketing strategies Heel has undertaken to convince Chileans that natural alternative medicines are beneficial to Chileans health.

Mr. Loyola, could you start by giving an introduction to Heel Chile and the development of the natural alternative medicines in the Chilean market?

I have been involved in the natural pharmaceutical business for a long time. In fact, I was part of a working group that is responsible for the current regulatory framework for natural products. At the time there was a huge gap between pharmaceutical and natural products, especially regarding registration. We entered into a dialogue with the government and eventually established a solid regulatory framework.

Later on, while I was working on my own projects, I was approached by a head-hunter for a job opportunity at Heel. The head-hunter mentioned that I was successful in the industry but challenged me to proof myself by leading a company to better results. After a meeting with Heel's President in Germany I decided to accept the offer and signed a two year contract with Heel Chile. When I joined the company the Chilean subsidiary was not performing well. I was given the task to

turn around the situation and grow the subsidiary.

Our medications gently promote the body's processes of self-healing, helping it combat illness and recover its biological balance. And it was the founder of Heel, a Medical Doctor, who believed in the human body's capability of self-healing. Subsequently he studied the processes through which the body could heal. He combined homeopathic medications in new ways and introduced a comprehensive therapeutic system called Homotoxicology. Homotoxicology and homeopathic combination medications have formed our approach to healing as intended by nature ever since. In fact, I was in Germany earlier this month where I was introduced to Heel's therapy 2.0, which will be launched in the short term. The company has been investing significantly in research and is committed to an evidence-based approach.

What were the strategies you implemented as General Manager for Heel Chile?

When I joined very few people in Chile were involved in the area of alternative medicine. Therefore in order to increase our sales we needed to start approaching medical doctors and not pharmaceutical stakeholders. Due to Heel's significant investment into a broad international program of basic and clinical research, I felt we could truly make a difference in the Chilean market.

By approaching the medical doctors we realized that, even though our products were science based, the doctors were reluctant prescribing alternative therapies. In response to this, we decided to train and educate the doctors about our products. Continuing medical education is essential if they want to keep abreast of scientific advances and new insights into diseases.

Our efforts in training and educating doctors have really paid off. The year prior to my appointment Heel Chile's sold half a million USD, and we have been growing at a rate of over 20 per cent per year. I believe that when I joined Heel, only 30 doctors were involved in alternative therapy. Today there are 3000 doctors involved and this number is increasing.

Lastly, we have been extremely active in the marketing of our products. For example we have educated key opinion leaders, to give a face to our products and get our message across.

Does Chile provide any academic courses in regards of alternative medicines?

Having originated about 200 years ago, homeopathy is a relatively "young" discipline compared to conventional medicine, and not all universities cover the topic. But as the advantages of this gentle method of healing are becoming more widely known, many institutions are expanding their curricula to include it.

In Chile we have designed a post-graduate program in collaboration with Universidad Mayor, which has definitely increased awareness for the industry.

What innovative marketing strategies has Heel undertaken to convince Chileans that natural alternative medicines are beneficial to Chileans health?

Generally the person taking family decisions is the mother. She decides on the type of treatment for the family. Having that said, we focused our marketing strategy on paediatrics, which is also one of the largest if not the largest group of doctors in Chile. From the doctors we learned that mothers were often looking at a less aggressive cure for their children's illnesses. Doctors were not able to provide such an alternative. This was a huge opportunity that we have grabbed. We educated paediatricians about our products and consequently reached the doctors.

Additionally we have seen an increase in sales as more consumers turn to digital channels to purchase our products. With more consumers purchasing items via the internet, adding digital marketing into an existing strategy is an obvious choice for additional exposure.

The Chilean pharmaceutical market is characterized by the vertical integration and dominance of three major pharmacy chains in the country. How have you managed to get foot into the pharmacy chains?

This has been an interesting development for Heel Chile. When I arrived here, Heel was not selling its products through either one of the large pharmacy chains. The reason behind for that was that we did not obtain registration for homeopathic products. Meanwhile, as we were waiting for approval from the Public Health Institute (ISP), the regulatory agency for the pharmaceutical industry, Heel decided to open its own pharmacy in Santiago.

When I arrived at the helm of Heel Chile, I established a dialogue with the Ministry of Health in order to speed up the approval process for our products. We managed to obtain the proper registrations and broadened our product portfolio. Initially our efforts were directed towards the independent pharmacies, which covered around 10 per cent of the market. However in my second year as General Manager for Heel we started negotiations with one of the pharmacy chains. There was a certain interest but we did not progress. At the same time we started negotiations with Pharma Lider, a small pharmacy chain belonging to Lider supermarkets, part of Walmart. As a result of those negotiations our products became available in 60 stores of Pharma Lider. Along with this development we reached an agreement with Salcobrand, one of the largest pharmacies, to sell our products. And, a few months later Pharma Lider merged with Pharmacy Ahumada, another big chain. Ending up in two of three major pharmacy chains in such a short timeframe was definitely

part of the serendipity factor.

What has been the most rewarding part about building a company like this and bringing it to where it is today?

Through my work at Heel Chile I want to make a meaningful contribution to society. I am blessed that I have been given this opportunity. Our medications gently promote the body's processes of self-healing, helping it combat illness and recover its biological balance. And, hearing positive feedback from people using Heel's products makes me a happier person.

I would like to add that it was the great motivation of our employees that turned the Chilean affiliate into a success. We woke up and went to bed with the intention of introducing our products to Chileans in order to provide them with an alternative.

Although we are now quite established in Chile, we have a long way to go. Our greatest goal is help people, and whether we are a start-up or an established organization, our ambition does not change.

How do you expect the industry and Heel's role evolve in the future?

Frankly the reality about pharmaceutical pipelines may not be as rosy as some think. Pipeline success rates across all phases of development have been slowly worsening or at best staying flat. Therefore I believe much depends on how pharmaceutical companies will react to this situation in the future. They might need to start looking at alternatives and considering the high mergers and activity of the recent years; it would not surprise me if pharmaceutical companies join efforts with the industry for natural alternative medicines.

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