

Interview: Antonio Avila Nieves, General Manager, Tecnofarma, Chile



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When Antonio Avila came to Chile in 2011, one of his main goals was to adapt the business model to the current needs of the market. The General Manager of Tecnofarma Chile explains the new methods implemented in the affiliate, and how to create a successful sales team in Chile.

You were appointed General Manager of the Chilean operations in March 2011. What have been the main milestones and achievements of Tecnofarma since your appointment?

In fact, Tecnofarma celebrated its 30th birthday in 2013!

I arrived in Chile in 2011 with a fresh outlook on the business. My aim was not to change the way things were being done, since Tecnofarma was performing well and was ranked 13th in the industry. My objective has been to maintain the momentum of the company while adding some new components to it. For example, we adapted the business model to the current needs of the market. We used to work with only two main business units and today we have seven. Over the years, we have launched new products to the market while focusing on our “core” products.

In addition we emphasized the professionalization of our sales force team as one of our priorities. It became important for us to communicate that we were no longer just selling our own products, but that we were also representing other companies.

On the other hand, it has been very important to have the opportunity to contribute build a team highly compromised with the vision of the company and adding value to the company.

What are Tecnofarma's growth drivers? What do you expect them to be in 2014?

Tecnofarma has a broad product portfolio, and we are currently focusing on the products launched in the past 6 years. These include products for oncological and non-oncological therapies. At the same time we continue to focus on our core products. We will continue to ensure that products are successfully launched and allow us to keep growing.

It should be noted that Tecnofarma launches about 4-5 products per year. This is challenging for a pharmaceutical company and only succeeds with a well-planned business model.

What is necessary in order to have a good sales-force?

One of our main efforts has been to improve the profile of our sales-force team. We have attracted college graduates capable of being trained as well as professionals from the medical field. The training of the recruits is always accompanied by pharmacists and doctors.

Tecnofarma's sales-force is probably one of the highly trained ones in the field since we evaluate them every month and we organize bi-monthly meetings with the team. We do not limit the resources for the training of the team, since we see this training as a very valuable investment towards our future.

Is very important to detect the talents among the sales force, and allow them to develop their skills in a way that they can contribute to the continued growth of the company and their own path. We must show a way inside the company according their compromise and work; we must retain our talents inside our company culture.

Through our interviewees we heard about serious delays in government payments to pharmaceutical laboratories. Considering that the public system is the biggest client in the country, how has Tecnofarma been coping with this situation?

To be honest, we haven't really been affected by CENABAST debt. Even though a large part of our business is dealt within the public sector, we always go through the "convenio marco," which is a platform through which any public institution can gain quick access to any medication. In fact the Convenio Marco tends to have acceptable payment times.

The government has two large tools to facilitate the purchase of products: CENABAST and the Convenio Marco. Through the Convenio Marco the institutions are invited to participate directly via

a public tender every three years. Once they are selected they are able to purchase the products directly rather than using the government as an intermediary.

What is Tecnofarma doing to comply with GMP standards and what is your attitude towards bioequivalent studies?

All of our products are created in plants that have implemented the best manufacturing practices.

I am very positive that we will meet the deadlines for improving bioequivalence standards for our products in Chile. The government created three product lists detailing the dates in which they should all be meeting the bioequivalence regulations. We are already advancing on each list and I am positive we will reach the objectives.

What do you think Tecnofarma stands for in today's pharmaceutical industry, and where is there further room for improvement in terms of the company's image and recognition?

The fact that Tecnofarma handles the products in Chile for prestigious brands, demonstrates our importance in the industry. Our partners are careful about their brand image and about always providing the best quality products.

This tells a lot about the confidence with which those companies and the doctors who use our products see us. We are actually ranked in top positions and based on the confidence ranking with which the medical field sees us.

Do you feel the industry has changed more over the last five years than it did over the past 20?

Nowadays things seem to move faster within the industry. The business model is constantly evolving; the actors are not the same. For example, back in the day doctors had the final say in the purchase of products, so most strategies for product placement and sales revolved around them. Today companies don't plan their strategies around doctors but they rather focus on the economics behind the purchasing of the products since that is what has a final say in today's industry.

If you were to be invited to give a lecture at a University for young graduates entering the industry, what piece of advice would you give them?

The heart of our industry lies in reaching out to people and providing them with a cure or in bringing them relief from pain. At Tecnofarma we are working to improve the quality of life of

people, and it is very important to not lose sight of this. Even when at times the pharmaceutical industry is negatively represented in the media with instances such as last year when the Health Minister tried to rouse the people in making them think our industry was responsible for the high-cost in medications – when in reality it is one of the lowest in Latin America.

What keeps you motivated and moving every morning?

I have always enjoyed what I do and I feel that the company is moving into a positive direction. We have several products with very complex strategies and very different business models. There is always a challenge lying ahead and this keeps me motivated.

I must say that our contribution to the society is not just into the market share, but also our social responsibility with our employees and with the society as well, and that, is very important to me.

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