

Interview: Victor Nazario - Plant Manager, Prent Thermoforming Puerto Rico



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Victor Nazario, Plant Manager of Prent Thermoforming Puerto Rico, discusses how thermoforming solutions are crucial for the medical device industry. He talks about how fluctuations in the life science sector have affected the business and how crucial it is to provide better incentives to attract business to Puerto Rico.

You came to Prent in 2010, following the establishment of Prent Puerto Rico in 2006. What were your initial priorities when you became Plant Manager five years ago?

At the time of my arrival, we were experiencing significant growth. It was my job to make sure we continued this growth, taking into account the knowledge of our customers. I had worked with Covidien for nine years, and therefore I brought to the table a good perspective of the needs of our customers as well as a good network. Indeed, knowing who's who in Puerto Rico is important for business. Puerto Rico is a very social environment. This helped Prent to focus specifically on customer's needs and understand their expectations.

Over the last 15 years we have seen fluctuations in terms of facility development, consolidations and closures. How have these developments affected Prent over the last five years?

Over the last five years, this instability has created a lot of hesitation among businesses to come and invest in Puerto Rico, especially in the life science industry where we have seen an exit of many pharmaceutical manufacturers. In general, Puerto Rico has received a substantial amount of negative publicity, which has poorly impacted the image of Puerto Rico as a place to do business. This bad publicity is not justified because we have an excellent workforce coming out of well-respected universities, such as the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. I believe that companies that are already established here see the quality and commitment of our workforce and will stay but the bad image hurts new business coming in. Despite these turbulences Prent has seen fantastic growth: last year, we grew 30 percent alone in the Puerto Rico branch and we are projected to grow an even further 30 percent this year. However, I believe that this number could be even better if we didn't have the cloud from the past hanging over our heads. We are starting to see some positive media attention but at the moment the government is going through some tough economic times. There are always aspects that make it difficult for us to excel.

Regarding Prent and its role in Puerto Rico, can you give our readers an overview of how thermoforming works and how it is adaptable to the life science industry?

Thermoforming is the number one choice for medical instruments because it provides strong packaging, which is especially suited for heavier and fragile products as thermoforming makes for very protective packaging. The packaging is made in Puerto Rico but it is used worldwide. Thus, it is important to keep products safe, especially during shipping periods. We manufacture in a cleanroom-type environment, especially for our life science clients. Prent also has the ISO9001 certification which guarantees consistency in processes and documentation. For all these reasons, thermoforming is the preferred product for the medical device industry.

What makes your product so innovative?

We have been in the industry since 1967 and our design group has been working with the medical industry for many years. We are able to design the packaging not only to hold the final product but also to improve the way the product is actually used. Frequently, our packaging becomes an integral part of the end product. We have a detailed overview and knowledge in thermoforming and not only design products but also build our own thermoforming machines and tools. Prent Corporation has been awarded an unprecedented 16 prestigious WorldStar Awards from the international World Packaging Organization for creative design, function and overall innovation. Prent also just received the esteemed 2015 DuPont Packaging Innovation Gold Award for medical packaging as well. We provide a holistic service to our clients – “from art to part” – and that's why companies choose us.

What is Puerto Rico' strategic importance within the Prent Network?

Prent's philosophy is to be wherever our customers are. That way we can provide just-in-time service, guarantee quicker turnarounds and resolve any issues promptly. The Puerto Rico plant is currently just servicing Puerto Rico itself but we are looking to export to the Dominican Republic by the beginning of 2016. Currently, almost 100% of our business in Puerto Rico is in the life science/medical device industry. As a testimonial to Prent Corporation's philosophy and ability to be wherever our customers are, Prent Puerto Rico is one of nine active strategic global manufacturing sites being leveraged for local supply chain services.

What are the biggest challenges you face on a day-to-day basis?

One of the biggest challenges in the medical industry is the agility of change. In Puerto Rico everything seems to be slowing down. The amount of paperwork increases and you have to be cautious when qualifying new products and suppliers. You need to make sure that the end product, its long-term stability and shelf-life is not affected. An additional concern is that many companies are leaving Puerto Rico. We need to think about how we can provide sufficient or better incentives for bringing new business and investment to Puerto Rico.

What would you like to achieve during your tenure here as plant manager?

We need to continue to be a leader in thermoforming. We want to become a certified cleanroom environment manufacturer to ensure higher quality and consistency in our processes. We are also looking at the possibility of certifying ourselves to the same standards as the medical industry, which would result in an alignment of paperwork and increased transparency for our customers. In addition, we want to continue to provide our customers with reliable, consistent and superior service.

On a more personal note, the medical industry is very gratifying to work in. We are providing products that ultimately contribute to saving people's lives. I aim to create jobs for Puerto Ricans and demonstrate that business in Puerto Rico can be done at a faster rate with more profit.

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