Interview: Abdon Nevares – General Manager, Ci Medical Technologies, Puerto Rico



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Abdon Nevares, General Manager of Ci Medical Technologies discusses the importance of teamwork, how the recent name change of the business has opened new business opportunities and how Puerto Rico can act as a gateway for expansion into the Latin American market.

You became general manager of Ci Medical Technologies in Puerto Rico in 2012, following other positions within the same company. What were your main priorities upon taking this position?

I have been with the company since 2009, which was called Classic Industries at the time. I started as a project manager and gradually worked in all departments within the company. When our CEO Robert Subasic and COO John Pearson approached me in 2012 to become general manager, I seized the opportunity. As a company, we purely service the medical device industry, including clients like Medtronic.

As the quality requirements in this industry are extremely high, our main focus in recent years has been to establish quality standards that set us apart from our competitors on the island. This also mirrors in the way we empower our operators to make quality decisions while they are working in the production floor.

Last year, Ci Medical Technologies changed its name from Classic Industries as part of a re-branding exercise. Why was this done and what durable changes have you seen as a result?

In the past we have received many enquires from our suppliers about contract manufacturing in other sectors beyond medical devices. The name change was introduced to accentuate that we are solely focused on the medical device industry. Now, our existing and new customers understand that we are purely focused on this sector. The results of the name change have been great. A lot of new doors have opened for our business, especially in Puerto Rico.

Ci Medical Technologies provides injection-molded components for medical, pharmaceutical and healthcare applications. What makes Ci's products so innovative?

We work directly with our customers to understand their needs in order to help them go through the process of having a simple idea to having a final product. Working side-by-side with our customers means that we basically become an extension of the engineering department.

Currently, we are doing a lot of injection molding and assembly. Our committed and knowledgeable workforce is a key factor in setting us apart from our competition in both areas. Further, making sure that our customers receive a good quality product puts us in a special position in Puerto Rico. The island of Puerto Rico is very small and the pharma and medical device industries are almost like a big family. Therefore, positive word-of-mouth is very important in retaining existing and attracting potential new customers.

The positive feedback from our clients is also the result of our great workforce. Overall, we have about 600 employees of which 80 are based in Puerto Rico. Since 2009 the same team is running the key departments, showing their commitment to the plant. We are very focused on keeping our people happy as they are our strongest asset. Indeed, we are a big family; we help and support each other. Decisions are generally taken by the team and not only individuals.

The medical device industry, while smaller than pharma in Puerto Rico, has been growing at a faster rate in recent years. What opportunities does that offer a company like Ci? How have you been able to take advantage of that?

Over a decade ago the Asian injection molding market was growing and a lot of businesses left the island because it was cheaper to manufacture in China or Singapore. However, right now these companies are coming back to Puerto Rico. The reason for this move that these businesses haven't considered freight or inventory costs. With increasing petroleum costs and bigger inventory costs it

is not more cost effective to manufacture in Asia anymore. Therefore, we have been able to observe a booming business landscape in Puerto Rico with many new possible clients requesting quotes on a weekly basis.

As part of its international coverage, Ci also operates in Mexico and the UK. How can Puerto Rico act as a springboard to extend the company's presence throughout the Caribbean and/or Latin America?

We currently serve the Domincan Republic, China, Japan, the UK and also France from Puerto Rico. Besides, we are currently studying and evaluating the Latin American market. We are looking at opportunities for how we can expand into Latin America and more specifically Costa Rica. As a general rule in our company, we are focused on having plants close to our customers. That's why we established a plant in Puerto Rico in the first place.

Looking ahead to the future, in five years we aim at having doubled our current capacities, offering our customers the latest technologies and always being where our customers need us.

On a more personal note, what is left for you to achieve?

Personally, I want to take the company to the next level. Ci Medical Technologies has been going through a lot of adjustments in terms of culture: before my time the culture was centered on production, now it is quality culture. This shift has opened many doors for growing our business. Every year we acquire very selected customers and we are working with new possible customers as we speak. I want to no only grow the plant but also continue to reinforce the team spirit. We work as a team, using everyone's expertise to provide our customers a holistic offering.

What distinguishes us from our competitors in a very complicated and cluttered market of medical devices is that we are to go out of the box to meet our customers' needs.

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