Interview: Lucia Frzonova – General Manager, Wörwag Pharma, Czech Republic & Slovakia



Back in Czechoslovakian times, a few universities dominated the scientific landscape and today's industry professionals that have graduated at these universities are still linked. For us as a pharmaceutical company, the latter benefit is quite significant as it naturally results in an excellent network.

25.07.2016

Tags: Pharma, Pharmaceuticals, Czech, Slovakia, Strategy, Management strategy, Worwag, Interview, Insight, Exclusive

The general manager of Wörwag Pharma Czech Republic & Slovakia reviews to what degree the Czech and Slovak market are homogeneous and which strategies can be successfully transferred from one market to the other. She furthermore highlights the unique characteristics of Wörwag Pharma as an employer which results in highly motivated and loyal staff.

Today you are responsible for the Czech Republic and Slovakia; having worked with these markets as regional director CEE since 2013 and country manager again since 2015 what are the strongest characteristics both markets have in common?

I have been in the operational business of the Czech affiliate for only sixteen months and I am currently in the process of integrating both affiliates into one. Although there are some common aspects, I identify a lot of differences as well. Historically, as we were one country for many years, aspects such as client mentality and communication are highly similar. Furthermore, the scientific background is interconnected to a certain degree. Back in Czechoslovakian times, a few universities dominated the scientific landscape and today's industry professionals that have graduated at these universities are still linked. For us as a pharmaceutical company, the latter benefit is quite significant as it naturally results in an excellent network. This scientific link also allows us to easily transfer our positive image from one country to the other, which for a rather small company such as ours which emphasizes locality and domestic commitment is very

important. The pricing and reimbursement systems in place are also highly similar, which were the main external drivers allowing merging both affiliates.

Despite the aforementioned similarities, I identify significant differences as well. First and foremost the legislation: whereas in the Czech Republic legislation is “friendly”, existing legislation in Slovakia is rather industry hostile at times. The distribution of buying power is also severely different in between both countries. The Czech Republic is dominated by large pharmacy chains which results in highly centralized buying power among fewer players opposing a still more or less equally distributed purchasing power in Slovakia.

[Featured_in]

You’ve been general manager for Slovakia for 13 years before assuming the same position for the Czech Republic. What are the major learnings you made in your time Slovakia you transfer to the Czech Republic?

There are many learnings made in the Slovakian market applicable in the Czech market. The first one is, as aforementioned, that Wörwag Pharma is still a small company which means we’re not shaping the industry, we’re adapting to it. Since setting up the Slovakian affiliate from scratch in 1999, I have been able to establish close ties to key opinion leaders which helped finding the right niche in the Slovakian market, which is of utmost significance for a comparatively small company such as us. Currently, we’re engaging in the same partnership process with key opinion leaders in the Czech Republic. Very important is having the extensive experience in Slovakia clearly revealed the strengths of our portfolio which we make full use of in the Czech market; we know what works product by product from the Slovak market and apply it in the Czech Republic.

You touched upon that integration process, merging both organizations into one. Maybe you could give us an overview of where this process stands and what are the synergies you are seeking to generate?

> My vision was to identify the synergies between processes, management as well as marketing concepts. I am a very value orientated leader, therefore it was dear to me to transfer the productive and effective atmosphere of the Slovakian team to the Czech team.

My vision was to identify the synergies between processes, management as well as marketing concepts. I am a very value orientated leader, therefore it was dear to me to transfer the productive and effective atmosphere of the Slovakian team to the Czech team. My current priority

surrounding the integration of both affiliates is ensuring that all processes are adapted coherently. For this particular instance, we've made the decision to start with a blank sheet of paper for the new integrated processes puzzling the respective parts of both affiliates together to create one smooth system. The most challenging part is the marketing concept transmission as it requires managing people more than all other aspects. To really know the market and being able to anticipate its needs and developments takes time and our team is still in the learning phase.

[related_story]

What are your goals and ambitions in terms of growth in the Czech Republic?

Goals and ambitions are shared for both markets alike. In Slovakia we have a very substantial sales bases generating approximately EUR 14 million (USD 15.4 million) in turnover with a team of 35 people. In the Czech Republic we're only able to generate approximately EUR 4 million (USD 4.41 million). Uncommonly, my ambition is to use the sales base I have established in Slovakia in order to fully utilize the potential of the Czech market!

Could you introduce us to your existing portfolio? What are your major therapeutic areas and revenue drivers?

Our portfolio is subject to continuous development and focal areas can be different in the different markets we're engaged in. In Hungary, for instance, diabetes as therapeutic segment is the focal area. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, however, my vision is to offer a wider range of products. We need to personalize ourselves which is why our portfolio is dominated by our Biofaktors. One will never find the definition of Biofaktors, however, we at Wörwag Pharma have our own definition. Biofactors are natural substances that can influence and regulate the human metabolism. In suitable concentrations Biofactors can exert pharmacologic and therapeutic effects, thus acting as drugs and remedies.The definition includes Vitamins, Minerals, Trace Elements, Herbal Medicines, and basically all ingredients of natural origin. It also covers the categories drugs, medical devices, food supplements and cosmetics. Our core competences – diabetes and associated disorders such as neuropathy, heart or liver diseases, neurological disorders and woman's health— present on the market. One aspect unifying all mentioned therapeutic areas is that we're emphasizing a strong focus on the end patient or end customer in all areas we develop into!

Your portfolio includes different niches and therapeutic segments. What is the current shift in between the different aspects of your portfolio in terms of generating turnover?

Our Biofaktors account for the largest part of our turnover generation, however, some are classified as prescription medicines and others as OTC. Prescription Biofaktors and OTC Biofaktors together account for approximately 90 percent of turnover generation in the Czech Republic. The remaining 10 percent are coming from our generics portfolio.

Biofaktors sound like a quite unique product. How do you drive growth in this segment and how competitive is the market?

The numerous products under the umbrella of Biofaktors are quite different and therefore it can be very specific and not very specific depending on the individual product. Vitamin B, for instance, depending on which unique proposition it is used in can have different pharmaceutical and therapeutical effects. Biofaktors are very natural to the human body and for the sake of individual assessment of the product one needs to assess individual deficiencies in the metabolism of the patient. Hence why Biofaktors often find application for diabetes patients as approximately 90 percent of diabetes patients have deficiencies of Vitamin B1.

What is the unique proposition of Worwag Pharma?

> Wörwag Pharma is a unique company: decision making is easy, we enjoy a flat hierarchy, we have the luxury of highly motivated staff and are a family oriented business with a personal approach to employees.

Wörwag Pharma is a unique company: decision making is easy, we enjoy a flat hierarchy, we have the luxury of highly motivated staff and are a family oriented business with a personal approach to employees. This is why I have been in the company for 17 years already!

When we come back in five years' time, where will you have led your affiliate?



For more on Czech-Slovak pharma
synergies, click here

My personal ambition is to be and to be perceived as the specialist in area of Biofaktors, with established and proven competence with the end customers, not only with the specialists of the industry. Furthermore, I would like my staff to remain highly motivated and keep growing in double digit figures in Slovakia and the Czech Republic!

"One of the factors that led to our growth is the attitude of our employees, they shape the company, take responsibility and act self-confidently" **– Monika Wörwag. You've been in the company since 1999, to what extend did you shape the company?**

I shaped the company in many ways; I believe this is also what makes me and other employees loyal to Wörwag Pharma. I have comprehensive decision making power and full autonomy from our headquarters, obviously this comes with tremendous responsibility. Wörwag Pharma in Slovakia is shaped by my hand entirely and I believe that I strongly influenced the face of our affiliates in the Czech Republic in the last few months and as a regional director CEE Poland and Romania as well. Management here works just like a mirror and I can confidently say that if someone else would manage the operations here, the organization would look different entirely.

Looking at your career track record I believe it's safe to say that you have been very successful. What was the secret to your success in the pharmaceutical industry?

> Do it with passion or not at all.

Do it with passion or not at all. I like to try everything; you have to find out what you're passionate about. If you're in a leadership position you have to be fully believing in what you're doing. For example, there are a lot of companies out there of similar size, however, Wörwag Pharma is what I'm passionate about. Working with people, transparency and freedom are very important to me and Wörwag Pharma offers all those things to me!

See more interviews