

Interview: Frederik Beelaerts van Blokland - SVP & Regional Head of Marketing & Sales Asia Pacific, Panalpina, Singapore



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27.01.2017

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Frederik Beelaerts van Blokland, Panalpina's regional head of marketing and sales for Asia Pacific, explains how the company's focus on the Asia Pacific region is a key growth driver and how Panalpina adds value for the healthcare and life sciences industry by being a reliable and forward-thinking logistics partner.

What is Panalpina's presence in Singapore and the wider Asia Pacific region?

Asia Pacific is one of Panalpina's four operational regions. In 2015, every fourth Panalpina employee worked in this region and collectively they generated more than half of the company's EBIT. It is the fastest growing region for us. The regional head office with roughly 100 staff is located here in Singapore.

Where does a small country like Singapore fit into the greater context of Asia Pacific - both as a market and as a strategic management hub?

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Singapore is an ideal gateway and place to do business. Not only is it very well connected to the surrounding region and the rest of the world, it also home to a lot of the global pharmaceutical companies that equally steer their regional operations from Singapore. In addition, Singapore is

very open-minded about new trends and approaches. This mindset is great, especially when considering that we constantly aim to develop new and better solutions for our healthcare customers, for example with the extended use of RFID technology for end-to-end temperature monitoring in the supply chain. People here embrace new initiatives; they want to learn more and are willing to go the extra mile and test new ideas.

What other qualities make Singapore such a favorable hub?

Singapore offers great infrastructure and people with the right skill sets that allow us to offer the services that our customers need. On the downside, this comes at a certain cost.

Does Asia still need a gateway with countries like China & India developing rapidly?

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I think we still need a gateway in Asia due to the fragmented nature of the region with both emerging and mature markets. India is developing, but I would not consider it a mature market yet, as we experience multiple challenges in terms of compliance, talent pool and handling capabilities for pharmaceuticals.

Logistics and freight forwarding is a very competitive landscape. Consequently, we see more and more companies specializing in the area of healthcare and life sciences. How can manufacturers leverage logistics as a competitive differentiator by partnering with Panalpina?

We do not want to be a jack-of-all-trades. We focus on the things we do best and we do them right. Compliance, quality and particularly transparency throughout the supply chain are some of our key strengths. Demand for temperature-controlled shipments in the pharmaceutical industry is growing exponentially and Panalpina has developed global expertise in order to secure the cold chain and protect the integrity of our customers' products with the right visibility and intervention tools. In general, we are very cognizant of the sector's complexities and know how we can meet the demanding requirements. One of our key advantages is also that our organization is fairly small in comparison to some of our competitors, despite our global reach. This makes us more approachable and allows us to be more customer-focused.

Increasingly, we see many pharma companies outsourcing their supply chain to experts like Panalpina. What aspects of the value chain does Panalpina add the most value to?

We are strong performers. We deliver on time, consistently and fully compliant. Additionally, we do not shy away from going the extra mile. Ultimately, our objective is to maximize our performance in order to positively impact our customer's bottom line. One way to achieve this is to look at the customer's supply chain from end to end. We can analyze entire set-ups and propose new models that take cost and time out of the supply chain.

What does innovation mean for Panalpina?

One word: customization. No two customers are the same. We want to understand our customers' pain points in the best possible way. To successfully address these pain points we tailor our services for the customer. This has a lot to do with supply chain visibility and exception management.

In Asia Pacific, in which markets are you seeing a strong demand for healthcare logistics services?

We see strong demand across the entire region but with different levels of maturity. The most mature markets are Singapore, China and Japan. Markets like Australia, India, and Thailand will develop strongly in the coming years. All in all, the growth potential across the entire region is huge.

APAC is a very diverse region; where can we expect Panalpina to allocate its resources and investments in the coming years?

We will primarily focus on Singapore and China, then Japan and India, but we are also looking at other markets, such as Australia, where the pharmaceutical market is growing significantly. After Singapore, we are also considering setting up a second center of excellence in India. Asia Pacific offers plenty of opportunities to grow and we are continuously working on increasing our footprint and expertise in this dynamic region.

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