Interview: Christian Eberle – President Director, APL, Indonesia



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Christian Eberle, president director at APL, explains the challenges and opportunities within the Indonesian healthcare distribution arena as well as the company's strategy to bring more high-quality medicines to patients over the next two years.

After over two years as CEO of APL, could you provide us with an overview of your key priorities as well as accomplishments?

Our key priority is to ensure that the company is fully capable of coping with the current and future needs of our clients. We are committed to driving market reach and performance for our clients, while simultaneously achieving our shared mission of facilitating access to high quality pharmaceutical products to the communities in Indonesia.

Over the past two years, PT Anugerah Pharmindo Lestari (APL) has reinforced its leading market position through a series of strategic initiatives. We improved the level of quality and efficiency in our operations, particularly in cold chain management, compliance and access to the Public Health channel. This has enabled us to reassure our existing clients and welcome a wide range of new clients to APL. This success was only possible with a highly talented and motivated team combined with clear direction and focus.

How has your prior experience in different markets within the region been a platform for success in a challenging and dynamic market like Indonesia?

I was previously with APL's parent company, Zuellig Pharma, for around 22 years in various positions and locations including Hong Kong, Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia. I think the diversity in markets, exposure to different roles and leadership development has really helped to prepare me for this position in Indonesia. My experience in multiple Asian markets, especially in the Philippines – due to its geographic and economic similarities with Indonesia – has given me insights and experiences that I can tap into to lead APL's complex operations in Indonesia.

Nonetheless, I strongly believe that, despite some similarities, Indonesia requires a specific strategy given its scale, as well as its unique challenges and opportunities.

What are your growth targets for 2017/2018?

The growth forecast for the pharmaceutical industry is around nine percent CAGR and my outlook is positive. This has been reflected in the recent investments that we made in infrastructure, technology and human capital, which we see as core to our company.

There are obviously organic factors that will drive this performance but it needs to be reinforced with the expansion of our client portfolio. We are in the process of consolidating our national distribution centers in Jakarta into a new, state of the art facility. In parallel, we are upgrading our SAP ERP to the latest version and drive the development of digital solutions to enhance customer service and simplify processes. These investments will equip us with a solid platform to support the continuous growth of our clients' businesses.

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What do you see as the role of APL in Indonesia?

Our main **priority** is to make high quality healthcare products more accessible to Patients and Consumers. APL is positioned between manufacturers/clients, healthcare providers and retailers. We are striving to expand the market reach of our clients, ensuring that patients and consumers receive healthcare solutions in the time and quantity required. This is the purpose that we live and breathe every day.

What services are available at APL in Indonesia and where do you see most growth?

Distribution is the largest contributor to our business. It will remain the core of our business with all other services built around it. We have experienced a significant increase in demand for our commercialization and marketing services. APL has full capabilities to support our clients' growth by driving demand and increasing reach to more customers and healthcare professionals.

APL also has a unique market insight and benchmarking tool, which gives clients strategic and tactical information to support decision-making. The Zuellig Pharma Corporate innovation team recently launched ‘Infrared’, a suite of advanced analytics tools that are designed to provide clients with better, more accurate and more dynamic access to market information. Infrared is available to all APL clients.

Specialty solutions already deployed in other markets in Asia Pacific by Zuellig Pharma, comprising of clinical trial services, patient solutions and compliance programs are currently being tailored specifically for the Indonesian market. Many of these solutions have been designed to improve health outcomes and enhance the patient experience by addressing the key areas leading to patient non-adherence: education, affordability and ease of disease management. While we’re working through a complex regulatory framework, we are confident in finding suitable solutions to bring to Indonesia very soon.

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Why are commercialization and marketing services strategically important for APL?

There has been a growing demand from our clients to further drive the performance and reach of their product portfolios through the provision of commercialization and marketing models. This can encompass a wide spectrum of tailor-made services, ranging from a full agency model, to brand development, to executing an effective channel management strategy, depending on the client’s needs. Through our deep understanding of the regulatory environment and our extensive business intelligence capabilities, we are uniquely positioned to execute an effective sales and marketing strategy to help clients grow their existing or new brands.

What is your recipe of success as a distributor within such a highly competitive environment?

I believe building trust with our clients and our customers is a critical element to finding success. Beyond that, APL has an unparalleled understanding of the local healthcare market and extensive relationships with customers and healthcare professionals that we have built and nurtured over the past decades.

As a member of the Zuellig Pharma Group, APL is part of the same value sets and best distribution practices in Asia Pacific. Unlike many other distributors, we don’t look after manufacturing, but are fully committed to growing our client’s businesses by focusing on improving distribution and access to healthcare.

Indonesia, as an archipelago country of more than 17,000 islands, poses significant distribution and patient access challenges. As President Director, how do you ensure that APL reaches both the urban and the rural areas of Indonesia?

We cover Indonesia nationally through 27 branches which all have fully functional warehouses with cold chain capabilities. This is placing our client's products close to patients and consumers. The supply chain network is complemented by well-trained and motivated sales and customer service teams with nationwide reach.

The expansion of Universal Healthcare in Indonesia through JKN (Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional / National Health Insurance) administered by BPJS (Badan Panyelenggara Jaminan Sosial) has gained a lot of momentum since its inception in 2014. APL is 100 percent committed and supports nationwide access of this channel. While JKN is very important for the Indonesian people, its implementation does pose challenges for distributors and manufacturers, mainly in the areas of administration and collection management. APL is taking a proactive stand and is working with the government to streamline processes in order to provide high quality and cost effective healthcare to all Indonesians.

Technology can certainly create improvements in the efficiency of the distribution industry, such as remote tracking of stocks, and expiration date controls. How is APL embracing the latest technologies in its operations?

APL is allocating significant capital towards the deployment of new technologies. We have several ongoing initiatives that will allow us to optimize our operations and sales models, and drive cross-functional synergies across the various business units. Beyond that, our goal is to provide higher quality services and experiences to our customers and clients. Indonesia is a highly competitive market, so we are very driven to continuously innovate to improve our processes, and technology plays big role in that.

What are your priorities for the coming years?

We need to keep strengthening the APL business in terms of infrastructure, systems, and by motivating our highly trained teams to provide world-class services to our clients and customers. We have to be innovative and at the forefront of new approaches that will provide our clients with increasing market access and patients with uncompromised quality healthcare products and services.

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