Interview: Fernando Silveira F° – Country Manager, ISDIN, Brazil

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Fernando Silveira

F°, country manager in Brazil of ISDIN, documents the successful market entry and rapid development of this dermatology focused company in Brazil, while ISDIN has managed to establish itself as the partner of choice of Brazilian dermatologists and patients and moreover holds exciting growth prospects moving forward.

As it is our first meeting with ISDIN, could you briefly introduce the company to our international readers and provide insights into the history of the company's operations in Brazil?

With more than 42 years of experience in skincare, ISDIN was jointly founded in 1975 by the international business groups Puig and Esteve, which both stand as benchmark companies in the cosmetic, perfume and pharmaceutical industries. Today, it proudly stands as Spain's leading dermatological brand and has direct operations in 15 countries around the world.

While our products were already available in Brazil through a distribution agreement with a local company, ISDIN fully entered the Brazilian market two years before I took over the helm of this affiliate in 2012. In this regard, some of our brands were already well known in Brazil before we implemented our own structure in the country, which enabled us to build on this emerging reputation to accelerate our market entry and more swiftly bring new products onto the market.

Over the past seven years, we have been able to very successfully develop the company in Brazil, where its positioning as an innovative and patient centric company exclusively dedicated to dermatology is greatly valued by our stakeholders and partners.

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In this regard, we have developed great relationships with the Brazilian Society of Dermatology. Innovation is at the core of ISDIN's DNA, and this aspect is extremely relevant in a country like Brazil, where dermatologists are particularly eager to access innovative dermatology solutions for their patients – and the same actually applies to Brazilians overall.

What is the importance of Brazil within the global operations of the company?

After only seven years in the market, Brazil already stands as ISDIN's second largest revenue driver for the company globally, while Brazil overall is the fourth largest dermatology market in the world after the US, Japan, and China.

What would you highlight as your key achievements since you took over?

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Over the past five years, we have been able to triple the affiliate's revenues and expand our product portfolio from 20 to over 60 brands, whereas Brazil was experiencing an unprecedented economic crisis *[the Brazilian GDP contracted by 3.8 percent in 2015 and by 3.6 percent in 2016, while the OECD recently forecasted 0.7 percent and 1.6 percent grow rates for 2017 and 2018 – Ed].* Although the country's pharmaceutical and healthcare markets have remarkably weathered the crisis, one should not believe that the latter were totally spared by the recession. In this regard, a major consequence of this economic and political turmoil relates to the country's private healthcare market, which concerns around 25 percent of the Brazilian population.

In Brazil, the vast majority of health plans are contracted by employers, which means that the share of the Brazilian population having access to the private health market is directly correlated to the evolution of the unemployment rate. Over the past three years, this aspect has gained a tremendous importance in the eyes of pharmaceutical and healthcare executives, as – according to data provided by IQVIA – the number of Brazilian lives covered by HMOs decreased from 50.4 million to 47.5 million between 2014 and 2016, while the unemployment rate grew from 5 percent to 13.7 percent. In this context, Brazilians who lost access to their private coverage are less likely to visit their doctors, which in turns drives down the number of prescriptions.

Although we have been able to triple our revenues over the past years, we still need to redouble our efforts and further gaining market shares. In this regard, we plan to keep up our current strategy, which implies – on one hand – bringing our most innovative products to Brazil in order to be consistent with ISDIN's global positioning, while – in the meantime – remaining extremely precise in the execution of our commercial strategy. Developing a dermatology business essentially relies on finding the right balance in our relationships with three key stakeholders: dermatologists, distributors, and the final customers – and these relationships and the importance given to each of these stakeholders vary from one product to the other.

In a tropical country like Brazil, skin cancer holds a particularly significant importance among the country's healthcare ecosystem. How is ISDIN Brazil positioning itself in this critical area?

ISDIN is actually Spain's leader in the sun protection field, which provides our company with an unrivalled expertise that we can now leverage in Brazil, a country that receives more than 2.500 sun hours a year. Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most frequent cancer in Brazil and makes up around 30 percent of all malignant tumors registered in the country. As a matter of fact, Brazil's National Institute of Cancer (INCA) registered 175,760 new cases in 2016 alone. With regards to skin diseases or cancer, sun protection stands as one of the most powerful prevention tools available. As a matter of fact, the lack of protection habits among population that are particularly exposed to the sun is always detrimental – sooner or later. In the meantime, one should not think that sun protection is exclusively related to summer holidays spent on the beach. For skin and melanoma cancer, pollution also stands as major issue that has an impact on skin aging and also raises the risk for skin cancer.

In this regard, ISDIN has already been able to truly establish itself as the partner of choice of physicians and patients in Europe and other Latin American countries such as Mexico, and we are now trying to replicate this approach in the Brazilian sun protection market too.

As a tropical country, Brazil is also particularly exposed to mosquito-transmitted viruses such as the Zika fever, dengue, the yellow fever, chikungunya, among many others. Some of these infectious diseases still have no treatments. Based on the works of experts and scientists in this field, mosquitoes could be the main vectors of upcoming health crises, as mosquitoes could transmit more than 150 different infectious diseases overall. Although the recent media coverage in Brazil has mainly revolved around the Zika virus, the Chikungunya, or the yellow fever, the importance given to mosquito protection should not vanish overnight as these diseases' outbreaks were recently controlled.

ISDIN holding one of the leading product lines globally for mosquito repellents, we decided to bring this product line to Brazil a year ago. In the meantime, this specific portfolio also showcases the holistic approach embraced by ISDIN, which covers all areas of skin protection from hydration products, sun protectors, and mosquito repellents.

Given this threefold market approach, how do you want the company to be perceived in the country?

Hydration has historically been ISDIN's core niche, we are leader in this area and will continue to bring game-changing innovation to Brazil moving forward. However, our company's philosophy is to take on all challenges faced by dermatologists in the country, whether it relates to the healthcare or the cosmetic side.

Our objective moving forward is very clear: continue bringing innovation in all our areas and make ISDIN a strong reference in the Brazilian market. We have already managed to catch the attention – to say the least – of the Brazilian medical community, which truly sees ISDIN as a serious, committed, and innovative dermatology company. Our vision is to build on this increasing market reputation to have an ever-expanding impact on the lives and the well-being of Brazilians.

After the impressive growth that you have fostered since taking over the affiliate, what are your objectives for the next five years and the main challenges you foresee?

We should be able to double our revenues within the next five years by consolidating our leadership in the hydration area and expanding our footprint in the sun protection field. The most impactful challenge ahead is not specifically related to ISDIN or to the dermatology industry in particular, but to the economic recovery of the country and the evolution of the unemployment rate. In 2018, general elections will be held in Brazil, and economic challenges will have to be tackled in priority by the new government.

However, if you adopt a long-term outlook to Brazil, one should admit that the country has been consistently growing. As matter of fact, the 2013-2015 crisis marked the first time since the 30s that Brazil experienced economic difficulties for two years in a row. Overall, Brazil has historically suffered from very short periods of turbulences and the healthcare market has been truly delivering on its premises for several decades already. This means that with the right positioning and a focus on strategy execution, international healthcare companies that are fully committed to the country have been able to reap the rewards of their efforts in Brazil.

What would be your final message to our international readers?

Believe in your teams and do not lose faith in Brazil – a great market that holds eye catching opportunities and talented professionals. Our country is bigger and stronger than the recent political and economic turmoil, and we will certainly succeed in the long term.

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