

Interview: Poul Sorensen - Director, Geistlich Pharma

Brazil



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Poul Sorensen, director of Geistlich Pharma in Brazil, details the importance of educational activities for Geistlich's business, the affiliate's desire to bring new segments of Geistlich's portfolio to Brazil and the necessity of adapting the business strategy to each region in Brazil according to their price sensitivity.

Could you introduce the Brazilian arm of Geistlich, its history and the scope of your operations in the country?

I set up the operations of Geistlich Pharma do Brazil in 2009 with the full support of the company's Swiss headquarters. Thanks to the help of a partner we had previously registered all of our products. This allowed us to start selling our products in 2010.

The company grew very fast in the beginning and I am very proud to have established Geistlich as a preferred partner in education and the supply of biomaterials in Brazil. Moreover, Geistlich is the worldwide reference in biomaterials and education in the field.

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Although the crisis that started in Brazil in 2014 has affected our business, we expect to resume growth next year, returning to a leadership position.

Today, Geistlich Brazil employs 40 people and its main focus of activity lies in the sales of Geistlich products, education, catering to post sales customer service, and administrative activities to register new products. Furthermore, the logistics have been outsourced to ensure optimal process efficiency.

How is the business structured?

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We have a well-established dental business and have additionally started the orthopedic segment two years ago. In both segments our educational activities help Geistlich build awareness around its products and convince the Brazilian surgeons of the reliability and high quality of the company's offering

What elements will make Geistlich Brazil successful in the future?

Geistlich is a highly scientific company with a long tradition and track record of excellence. Our focus is on evidence-based product development and education, aligned with an adequate geographical coverage over the country. For example, we have a complete education program available for customers covering all therapeutic areas based on regeneration. Since its creation, and still today, Geistlich has established strong partnerships with leading universities looking to offer high-quality content to their students. Maintaining good relationships with key opinion leaders and universities is essential to us because it helps us build the company's differential advantage and to nurture our network. These partnerships go beyond dispensing medical courses. Indeed, our company is involved in research programs together with some partner's university professors and scientists.

Being located in Sao Paulo and because this state is the main center of the country, with the highest concentration of dentists and universities, we have for instance a preferred partnership with the Dental School of the University of São Paulo (FOUSP). But we also have partnerships with other universities and study centers across Brazil.

Additionally, having fully kept the development of its products in-house, we have been able to build up a unique expertise in the area of regenerative medicine. This helps us tremendously to understand our clients' needs and to deliver products that perfectly fit the needs of healthcare professionals. Moreover, Geistlich's employees are highly enthusiastic about developing such products and the company will remain a step ahead of the competition.

What has motivated you to join the company in 2010?

I have always worked as my own boss. I decided to leave my family's business in the dental area to set up my own company in the 1990s. The company I founded represented foreign implant and biomaterial companies in Brazil. Unfortunately, the Brazilian 2003 currency crisis had a severe impact on my activity. This led me to start looking for new opportunities.

Geistlich contacted me as they were looking for a distributor in the country. Eventually, the CEO Paul Note suggested I take the responsibility of setting up the affiliate. I chose to do so and my son started running my previous company alone.

Setting up the affiliate sounded like an interesting challenge where I felt I could build something worthwhile in the long term. Furthermore, from the very beginning I had the impression that the company's philosophy and mine were aligned. Indeed, Geistlich focuses more on bringing value to the patients than on the numbers. Also the company trusted me for my experience.

Finally, I appreciate the fast-paced decision-making. Being a 100% family owned company, Geistlich has short decision pathways with full transparency and enhanced communication. Employees are actively encouraged to present their ideas and implement their actions quickly. The company is supported by strong core values that give all of us a valuable guidance in our decision-making processes.

How does Geistlich maintain successful operations in so many countries?

The culture from Brazil is obviously different from that in Switzerland. It is of paramount importance the headquarters has a strategy for long term growth, even more so considering Brazil is a country with 200 million inhabitants, around 200 universities in the country and 200,000 dentists.

The headquarters in Switzerland are very understanding of the cultural differences between countries. Having historically chosen the internationalization path to grow its business, Geistlich rapidly acquired the ability to adapt its operations to specific countries. Brazil is no exception and has its own business culture. I believe we are capable following the direction set by the Swiss headquarters with some customization to the Brazilian way of doing business.

Where would you like to see Geistlich in five years' time?

I like to think of Brazil's potential on very optimistic terms. We are going to continue extending Geistlich's presence across the country, taking a step-by-step approach to adapt the way we conduct our operations to each region we target. Currently, we are more focused on the main regions but we are also considering the best options to increase our reach to customers all around

Brazil in a smart way.

Precisely, Geistlich is already operating in all the states from the South to the North through key account managers. Nonetheless I believe there still exists several untapped opportunities.

Reaching out to health professionals and offering educative courses will be part of the strategy.

The strategy is going to be tailored to each region, especially toward the more price-sensitive ones to increase our customer loyalty in the long term. Geistlich is the reference regeneration company and will become the market leader in Brazil soon.

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