

# Argenomics – Alberto Saul, President – Argentina

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12.08.2014

Tags:

[commercialization](#), [clinical trials](#), [R&D](#),

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*The President of Argenomics highlights the position of his company as the bridge between science and business in Argentina.*

## ***Could you please provide an historical overview of Argenomics?***

Several years ago, during my time as an employee of a multinational pharma company, I met a medical doctor and a biochemist in a pharmacokinetic project. Today, they are my business partners at Argenomics. At that time, we realized we had exactly the same vision: there was a gap between science and business in Argentina. 11 years ago, our society was created, initially as a foundation, to be able to become a bridge between knowledge and pharma industry.

After some investments and some projects on drug bioequivalence, drug monitoring and so , we discovered an opportunity in the genomics field, more specifically the clinical application of genomics tools. That was when Argenomics was born and transformed into a commercial company, exactly six years ago.

As in any beginning, our first days were very modest. It was only the three of us, with the help of an assistant, in a very small office. Our strong focus in personalized medicine was our main growth driver and was the reason behind our increasing portfolio. We never wanted to be a regular laboratory. We positioned the company as the only local laboratory with an exclusive and strong focus on personalized medicine. Looking back to those days, it is fair to say that the combination between our three very different backgrounds (medicine, biochemistry and economy) was, without any doubts, our main competitive advantage as each one of us complimented the other two perfectly, and more importantly, still is!!.

## ***What are your current activities today?***

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Argenomics is today focused on integrating its services. We recently opened an institute of personalized medicine called MoBi (after Molecular Biology) Buenos Aires, where we offer what we call genetic counselling. This practice is absolutely new in Argentina: it is a necessary step right before performing a genetic test. We provide a medical advise who does the diagnostics or assess the risk of inherited disease for the patient and drives decision for the patient eligibility and indication for genetic testing.

We are an innovative company dedicated exclusively to research, development and commercialization of molecular biomarkers services for personalized medicine related to both diagnosis and prognosis of many diseases, such as predictive of therapies response. The breakthroughs in the development of genomics research in recent years have opened a new paradigm in medicine, allowing us to characterize patients, guiding their therapy and dose individually.

***How difficult do you find it to successfully join science and business in Argentina?***

It's been quite a complex and intense journey! For instance, here at Argenomics, we converge many disciplines. There are different egos, capacities and backgrounds. Today we employ more than 50 physicians, biochemists, pharmacists, biotechnologists, and economists; then, there also the different specialities within the sphere of medicine. It is not easy to interact and consolidate everything all together. Nevertheless, our diversity is our main competitive advantage. The complexity makes the success. We saw an opportunity and we gave our best to make the best from it. We are constantly trying to navigate and envision what is going to be the next step forward. That is why, for instance, we are attending every interesting pharma conference either as a participant or as exhibitor.

***2014 has been the ninth consecutive year where Argentina brought a delegation to BIO 2014. This year, Argenomics has been one of the top three companies representing the country. What does this represent to Argenomics?***

Argenomics has already a wide portfolio and put together some in license and out license agreements unrelated to the BIO 2014 conference in San Diego; nevertheless, the impact of BIO San Diego 2014 was huge and extremely positive for our company. The invitation received from the Ministry of Science and Technology to participate was a direct consequence of our work over the last years. We currently have six different projects presented and approved at the ministry. That is the reason why we were eligible to be part of the Argentinean delegation of BIO 2014. We presented some projects with the sole intention of fostering innovation and research and development in Argentina. At the end of our day, and as per our philosophy, investing in research and development is the most critical element of success in what we do. If you want to differentiate yourself, you have to invest in R&D. There is no other possible way.

***How would you rate the receptiveness of the diagnosis of the Argentinian market and to what extent are you looking to develop in Argentina or even at an international level?***

Argenomics is focusing all its energy in bringing its markets access to the three different existing health channels in Argentina: Public, Social Security (obras sociales) and private health. Although it was very difficult to introduce our products and philosophy to the assistance medicine, I am very proud to say we managed to change the mindset.

In terms of internationalization, we are going to open local branches in Colombia, Peru and Uruguay. Why those countries? Because that is where we know reliable local partners. Actually, our new pipeline of products will be simultaneously launched both in Argentina and at a regional level. In any case, our idea is to first consolidate everything that has been done in Argentina, which is a lot.

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## ***Is Argenomics working on clinical trials in Argentina?***

Argenomics is currently working on developing its activity in clinical trials: not only working on original trials, but also conducting trials for other sponsors. We have a whole team of principal investigators and staff that work with conducting several mid-late fase clinical trials. As a new approach, we are now fostering an early fase trials unit, this practice is also unique in Argentina as before us almost anybody had ever worked on a Phase I or Phase II a trial. We are trying to draw the attention from multinationals to bring early phase clinical trials to Argentina.

Besides being a company that provides therapeutic optimization and genetic markers associated with drug treatment effectiveness, Argenomics has a team consisting of both medical professionals and researchers in the field of biochemistry and molecular biology, which jointly with researchers from the University of Buenos Aires develops research projects to study various molecular markers associated with diagnosis, prognosis and follow up of responses to different drugs. The multidisciplinary approach of this scientific platform allows us not only to deliver a result, but a complete clinical interpretation.

## ***Where does Argentina stand today when it comes to its level of R&D?***

When it comes to research and development, Argentina started from a very low base line. Back in 2003 Argentina was almost at the point of collapse. The state of science, technology and research was pretty weak. Today, especially since the creation of the Ministry of Science and Technology, in 2007, the situation looks much brighter. After many initiatives, and time and money invested, we are on a good path. Today, we have the perfect basis for success.

## ***How do you expect to see Argenomics in five years and what are your ambitions at a country level?***

Argenomics will probably go on to several spin offs. Early phase clinical trials are a huge project by itself, that probably needs to be spun off into a specific company on its own. Nanotechnology drug delivery system is also another big project with great potential. Moreover, we have high expectations for our institute of personal medicine.

At a country level, we hope to one day be a hub for companies in the same way as South Korea: medically, the quality of our work is outstanding. Even more, it is perceived as extremely good and the conditions and the facilities can be as well.

## ***As part of the new generation of business leader in the innovative medicine industry, what would be your advice to the new generation of future executives in Argentina?***

First, be determinate to your ideas and second, be surrounded by the right people. Third, don't panic: sometimes perfection is the enemy of good. You can rely on good every now and then. And last, the more passion you put on your work, the more luck you will have!

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