

Interview: Alfredo Gutierrez - General Director, Anfitriones, Mexico



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Alfredo Gutierrez, general director of Anfitriones, documents the company's heightened focus on creating a true experience that goes beyond traditional business events and congresses, its expanded geographical reach to Colombia and the upcoming rollout of services to North American companies.

Over the last 31 years, Anfitriones has managed to establish itself as the market leader in corporate tourism and organization of conventions, congresses, executive meetings, events and product launches for the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries. How has the demand for your services evolved over the past few years?

The market has changed a lot over the past years and pharmaceutical companies' expectations have been substantially evolving. Although we have been steadily diversifying our activities, pharmaceutical and healthcare companies still make up the largest share of our clients, and most of them are international organizations. In this industry, the heightening of compliance and budget constraints has year after year altered the way these companies interact with their partners and suppliers; Anfitriones has understood such evolution and it has proactively enlarged its offering into a more comprehensive set of solutions to fully meet the client's needs.

Anfitriones has been continuously growing over the last 31 years, and, if we want to maintain this tradition alive, we are left with no choice but to tirelessly upgrade our offering. Although we fundamentally remain a meeting planner specialized in the organization of industry events and

congresses, helping our clients to communicate through events their objectives in each meeting. Therefore, we have been focused on expanding our scope of action over the last years to resolve the necessities of the market.

How are you developing your offering to meet the evolving needs of your customers in the pharmaceutical industry?

There is a huge difference between simply attending a nice event and truly becoming part of an experience that has been designed to have a real impact on the attendees' personal or professional lives. Creating and offering this experience stands as the extra-mile Anfitriones now strives to go.

In this regard, we have been developing our marketing and communication capacities, because we identify this area as being strategic to more deeply integrate the attendees to the experience we are building. By improving the communication around a given event, we can for instance further raise awareness around the event's objectives and content, but also increase attendees' engagement before the actual day of the event. In a similar manner, we need to enhance the follow-up process and better accompany the participants once the event is over, in order to ensure a greater continuity of the experience before, during and after the event.

In this endeavor, we do not want to impose our own ideas to our clients, but on the contrary to work closer with them to better understand their needs, as well as the reasons and rationales that drive them to organize this event. As soon as you consider that the marketing and communication channels need to be enhanced in order to build a more comprehensive experience, you cannot adopt a "one-size-fits-all" approach that will be replicated to all events, be they medical conferences, motivational or management congresses or product launches. In our objective to provide our customers with an experience that goes beyond a simple conference, we want to develop a unique set of solutions for all of them, created specifically to match their needs and expectations.

How are you progressing in the internationalization of the company?

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We opened an affiliate in Bogota, Colombia in October 2015. We chose this country as the first step within our internationalization strategy for many different reasons. First, Colombia has been one of the fastest-growing Latin American economies over the past few years. Furthermore, we identified there was no company in Colombia offering a similar, broad scope of services in just one meeting planning as all competitors in this country are very specialized in one part or another of the value chain. As Anfitriones truly stands as an integrated, "one-stop-shop" service provider, we identified a great opportunity to bring a unique value to Colombian clients and our first customers' feedbacks are particularly positive. Finally, Colombia also is particularly strategic from a geographical point of view, as it shares common borders with five other South American countries, including Brazil.

Our first customers in Colombia have been particularly impressed by Anfitriones' value proposal, and they acknowledged our entry into the Colombian market has truly bridged a gap between customers' expectations and the unsatisfactory offering of the local industry. Although we have been warmly welcomed and are rapidly expanding our client basis in Colombia, North America and other Europe countries, we however need to remain careful and continue to consolidate our promising successes in this new market.

Do you envision entering new countries in the upcoming years?

We currently look at entering the North American market, which will also stand as a critical millstone for our organization. In such a competitive market, our positioning however will be different than the one we are implementing in Colombia, as we will take the opportunity at organizing events in Mexico as well as Colombia from incentive trips to international meetings and not in the US. Considering the current exchange rate between the Mexican peso and the dollar is extremely favorable to American customers, we expect this new service offering to rapidly gain momentum.

Of course, developing a customer basis in the US implies to develop a sales force in the American territory. We want to set up an agile, flexible sales force that will concentrate its efforts on the most strategic locations of the country and cover the most important economic hubs in the US. Developing our American client basis is one of my first and foremost priorities in the mid term and I want to ensure we have our first American customers within the next three months.

In parallel to pharmaceutical activities, we are increasingly working with the automotive industry, which encompasses many Japanese companies. This sector could also become the intermediary step that will allow us to deepen our presence in Asian markets, which still stand as an untapped growth opportunity for Anfitriones.

Anfitriones stands as a thriving family business. What is the company's value you absolutely want to preserve as you are expanding its geographical reach?

One of our company's main specificities and key competitive advantages undoubtedly is its great flexibility. But working with corporate governance with politics and process that make Anfitriones unique in the market. As a privately owned, customer-focused business, we hold a larger margin for manoeuvre than most of our competitors, as big as they can be. We can also take strategic decisions that larger companies cannot take at all or at least not without passing through many different layers of corporate authorizations. For a service company, being agile is absolutely paramount, especially when you are operating in such a rapidly- evolving industry like the pharmaceutical sector, where cost-pressure makes it evermore important to quickly adapt to clients' changing needs, requirements and expectations.

This is exactly the kind of added value and service customization Anfitriones can easily offer to its clients. We can take this kind of decision extremely quickly, and ensure our company and our customers continue to move forward on their different projects without experiencing any kind of disruption. In the grand scheme of things, our company's approach not only is to go the extra-mile, but also to do it more swiftly and easily than our competitors.

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Anfitriones has been consolidating its positioning as the partner of choice of the pharma industry over the last thirty years. How do you explain such success and long-standing relationship with the industry?

Of course, the quality of our delivery absolutely is paramount in preserving the outstanding relationship we enjoy with most of our clients, but level of services alone is not enough to nurture this kind of long-standing relationships that go over four decades.

As a company, we work hand in hand with our customers, and we see ourselves more as an extension of their offices than as basic service providers. Finally, transparency and ethics truly are at the core of our customer approach: we collaborate to reach a shared objective, and we are perfectly transparent in the way we fulfill this mission.

What is your vision for Anfitriones' development over the upcoming years?

Anfitriones is a family business, working under corporate governance with a solid structure that will foster the access to new markets consolidating our high added value in each event or business trip. Anfitriones always ensure that our clients feel full confidence in all our value change and advisory service

Offering a true experience is at the core of our current development approach, and I will personally focus my efforts on further developing this aspect in the upcoming years. Overall, I want Anfitriones to become a true transnational company, which will have been able to upgrade its capacity in terms of marketing and communication, in order to remain ahead of the competition and better meet our customers's needs.

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