

Interview: Daniel Leszcz General Manager, Leterago, Ecuador



“We are the commercial arm of human health pharmaceutical companies in Ecuador.”

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Daniel Leszcz, general manager and founder of Leterago in Ecuador, documents the distributor’s exceptional progression in the last 15 years to become one of the largest corporations operating in the country; all sectors included. He explains how the company has strived to deliver world-class standards from the beginning and that such attention to quality has allowed the company to become the strategic ally of some of the world’s most respected pharmaceutical companies in the world.

Mr. Leszcz, could you briefly introduce yourself as the founder of Leterago in Ecuador?

I have lived in Ecuador for the past 23 years and worked in the pharmaceutical industry ever since. 15 years ago, I realized pharmaceutical companies were looking to focus on the core of their business. Therefore, I established a new distribution model that would help them optimize their performance in a relatively small market without affecting the control they had over their business. In other words, we are the commercial arm of human health pharmaceutical companies in Ecuador.

Could you briefly present the operations of Leterago in Ecuador?

Leterago is the strategic distribution ally of some of the most prestigious pharmaceutical companies operating in the healthcare sector in Ecuador. The company is not vertically integrated; therefore, it solely provides storage and distribution services at a national level. More specifically, we do not operate an in-house marketing department, nor promote products in point of sale, rather, we allow them to bring products to the retail point and our clients keep full control over the promotion and market related activities. As a result, Leterago can offer a zero-potential interest conflict to its partners in the pharmaceutical industry.

In 2014, the company was one of the first Latin American distributors to obtain the World Health Organization's (WHO) standards of good distribution practice and is widely recognized as a leader in its category. Leterago's innovative business model, exceptional standards of service and expert professionals collaborating to maximize the success of our clients in the country have led us to become one of Ecuador's 50 largest companies. We now employ 550 people, around 150 of which are part of our outside sales force.

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What elements of your business have made you so successful?

I would say that our unmatched level of professionalism and ethics of our employees is the key to our success. The company prides itself on a stringent selection of the most experienced, specialized and motivated individuals that bring to Leterago's even more ways to grow activities offered. As a result, we are capable of addressing our client's needs like none of our competitors. Additionally, we would not have obtained international quality certifications had it not been for the work of our employees. I believe that obtaining such certifications awards have greatly influenced our business for the better and grow.

The second principle that has been guiding our operations since the company was established, was building long-term relationships with leading players in Healthcare market. Specifically, year after year our company has relentlessly invested to become an organization capable of living up to the trust pharmaceutical companies would place in us by delivering excellent (world-class) services and processes. Currently, Leterago is one of Ecuador's top three leading companies in the health sector and can provide excellent service to all types of pharmaceutical companies, and at the same time, offering reach to even the most remote locations on the territory. For instance, our cold chain processes for biotech and high-tech products have been certified. For this reason, Leterago has been chosen by international companies such as Novo Nordisk, CSL Berring, Baxter and Takeda to handle some of their most specific products.

Additionally, we pride ourselves to be pioneers in bringing a unique model to this country. Although these services are widely understood today, when I founded Leterago 15 years ago, distribution partners in Ecuador were uncommon and did not represent such an important aspect of the Ecuadorian pharmaceutical environment. In this regard, I would like to thank the companies that have trusted us from the very beginning and those who have later on, despite Leterago only being a small company, with a new unfamiliar business model and great ambitions. The fact we have exclusive distribution agreements are a proof of the trust our suppliers place in us.

Having become a leading player in the pharmaceutical industry in less than 15 years, where do you see growth opportunities for your business?

In a way, I would say that opportunities for Leterago Ecuador are tied with the healthcare market's growth. In the past, public spending drove the pharmaceutical market's growth. As clients needed to distribute an increasing number of health products, we were able to regularly double the size of our operations.

Currently, the market is propelled by improved performances in the private sector. Ecuador has one of the highest per capita health-related spending in the region. Given that large pharmaceutical companies view Ecuador as an interesting and affordable opportunity, yet prefer not to manufacture in the country, our operations should increase.

Furthermore, and this is particularly true in small markets and countries, the pharmaceutical industry has been focusing and will continue to focus on its core business. Therefore, provided that we

continues to deliver state-of-the-art distribution services and technologies our, the services that Leterago can provide to Healthcare companies are poised for success. Leterago must not lose focus of its core activities either or will risk losing the ability to deliver excellent (world-class) performance. I intend to stimulate the company's eagerness to develop services that facilitate the work of all of Leterago's stakeholders. Moreover, this is in line with the company's objective of remaining a leading player in the industry.

Rather than selling ourselves as a strategic ally for partners in the country, we have leveraged the company's impressive reach as a tangible asset to convince potential partners of doing business with Leterago. Indeed, the products our company distributed are available in the most remote locations of Ecuador and this is something susceptible to catch the eye of our prospects. In fact, we know that our model works, and we are merely looking at improving certain details.

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How would you assess Leterago's contribution to the country?

Leterago is a proud contributor to the development of Ecuador. In addition to creating employment opportunities, as one of the 250 largest employers of the country, the company is one of Ecuador's 50 largest taxpayers in the country. This means that our activity supports in high volume the current and future administrations of the country.

In addition, Leterago is highly committed to bridging the gaps between the academic and private sectors. For instance, we have a partnership with Ecuadorian universities. The company regularly hosts visits from students and our company's success story has become a case study for graduates in the medical and business fields. Our company also prides itself in helping doctorate and master students with their final researches.

How can the company utilize its internationalized client base to pursue operations abroad?

Leterago was initially a Dominican Republic company that now operates in Ecuador, the Caribbean and Central American countries. Nonetheless, each of Leterago's operations are conducted independently from one another in each of the countries where it is present. Rather than leveraging our international customer base, we prefer to adopt an individualized approach to business in each of the countries we operate in. Thus, leading the company to increase its local relevance and deliver tailor-made solutions to its clients wherever they go. In light of the company's leadership in the Dominican Republic, fast-paced growth in Central America and unprecedented success in Ecuador, this business model appears to be functioning well.

What has been your proudest achievement in these 15 years?

Overall, I feel that, despite the short existence of this company in the country, we have reached a level of trustiness that goes beyond than just internally in the company, but towards all the clients this company serves. Witnessing growth in companies that work with us is what drive our business forward, while, at the same time, gives my employees and myself a great sense of the work we are doing and how effectively is working out in a day-by-day basis.

I find that my employees do excellent work, and I see that as they portray a commitment to their company, by being always willing to perform their task to the best of their abilities. These behaviors are what makes Leterago what it is. While our recruitment process is strictly selective on the best of the best, we strive to reach more than only to the working capabilities of individuals, to the extent that we help this high value, hardworking individuals to commit to our company. I believe it is crucial to take out the best of each employee, and I believe I do a very good job in that regard.

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