

Interview: Earl Stanley Perez, General Manager, Meyerf, Philippines

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Earl Stanley Perez, General Manager of Meyerf Philippines, explains the importance of focusing on a few niches to succeed in a growing in a competitive market such as the Philippines, stressing the need for local companies to raise brand awareness and not only target the private sector but partner with the government as well.

Meyerf Pharma is a private corporation that started its operations in the Philippines under the Solar Group of companies in 2006. How has Meyerf positioned itself within the competitive landscape of the Filipino pharma market today?

After the acquisition of Meyerf by the Solar group, the company made special focus on OTC products that were locally-manufactured. A few prescription products for hypertension and anti-infectives were also made available and sourced from Taiwan. This mix of OTC and Rx products were marketed under the brand "Meyerf" (unibrand). Nutraceuticals was another area it went into with products like Evening Primrose Oil, Garlic Oil, and Cod Liver Oil. It also partnered with three multinational companies for medical devices: Japan-based Nipro, as the country's exclusive distributor of American-made glucometers having the "Prestige," and "TRUE" brands (TRUEread and TRUEbalance); an Australian company for distribution rights to Glucoflex and Betacheck; and a French company, Terraillon, to exclusively distribute clinic grade weighing scales, BP monitors and thermometers.

Today, MEYERF has a product mix of 13 branded everyday medicines, nutraceuticals, premium diabetes monitoring systems and home diagnostic kits.

What are MEYERF's main areas of interest?

An area of particular interest is diabetes. Our entry into the diabetes market started with our partnership with one of the more reputable medical devices companies in the world, Nipro, which is based in Japan and has manufacturing facilities in the US. Thru this partnership, we were able to make available Prestige, TRUEread and TRUEbalance meters and strips. Looking ahead, we are very excited to launch TRUEresult and TRUEresult Twist. These products offer accuracy and precision as well as simplicity of use and compares very well with the current leading brands. TRUEresult will be launched thru the relevant medical societies, partnerships with retailers, and a direct-to-customer program. Having this product as our "anchor", we are also now looking at expanding our diabetes portfolio to include basic diabetic products that meet the needs of most Filipinos.

Another area of interest is maternal and paediatric healthcare. We see an opportunity to bring better health to more pregnant women and their new-borns. We currently have nutraceuticals that are being used by more and more pregnant women. We are also looking at expanding our range of products and services, which can be used by obstetricians, mid-wives, and other allied health personnel who can help ensure that more Filipino patients have an affordable nutrition option throughout their pregnancy.

In paediatrics care, we are interested in delivering important basic medication as well as vaccines that can be within reach of more Filipinos. To achieve this, we need to ensure quality and affordability, and partner with both the government and paediatricians in the private sector. As a small player in the company of giants, the challenge remains to be the establishment of Meyerf's credibility among customers, and I believe our products, once tried, will be able to do just that.

Considering the market status at the moment, we witness a rapid growth of generic products in the Philippines and MNC's struggling to expand because of price competition. What advantage do you have as a local company against MNC's?

We are small and nimble, and I think this is an advantage. We have people who are passionate about what we do, and we have products that patients can truly benefit from. We have marketing policies yet adjust in response to identified needs. We are a Filipino company aiming to serve first and foremost the healthcare needs of the Filipinos.

The MNCs are much bigger and have more resources than us, and this is truly a challenge. To compete we need to focus on certain segments like those earlier mentioned, understand these segments, identify key people in the medical community and partner with them, and engage them, their patients, and other stakeholders.

Companies that compete well are the ones who manage to establish a strong distribution strategy and partner with the right companies. What have you been prioritizing?

With our relatively small field force, we are currently operating in Metro Manila and nearby provinces, and are aiming to have our products available nationwide very soon. We have our own distribution team and may partner with a distribution company when the opportunity to work with the right company comes.

We are also looking at partnering with some of the big pharmaceutical manufacturers, local or MNC, who have product lines that are complementary to ours.

We are working at having a strong partnership with retail chains to ensure that our products are within reach of most Filipinos.

And to establish ourselves among peers in the Philippine Pharmaceutical Industry, we are also working at getting affiliated with some of the industry's organizations like the PHAP and PCCI.

We understand the need for Meyerf to increase its brand awareness and be recognized amongst the industry. In a few words, what would you like Meyerf's footprint to be in the Philippines?

We aim to be recognized as a serious player in the markets that we participate in, but more importantly, we would like to stay true to our vision of becoming a trusted healthcare partner of the Filipino community.

Looking ahead, what would you like Meyerf to accomplish in the next five years?

We aim to double sales every other year in the next five years. We are also boldly aiming to have a significant 20 percent share in the BGM market by 2017, or an estimated USD 3.5 million.

We must be established in the markets we have identified and keep our focus. This is the only option to thrive in a competitive yet growing market where MNCs are strong but also where local companies are catching up.

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