

Interview: Francisco G. Arteaga-Martínez ^{â???} President & CEO, CPM, Puerto Rico



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Francisco Arteaga-Mart

Áñez founded Caribbean Project Management (CPM) in 1991. Since then, the company has expanded considerably, with a presence now in Florida and Panama as a leading Puerto Rican construction management provider. He discusses the history, growth and key assets of the company.

What were your intentions behind starting CPM?

I trained as an electrical engineer at UPR Mayagüez. In the late 1970s I began work at a design firm that did work for the pharmaceutical industry. I saw the planning side of the development equation. Afterwards, I worked for a pharmaceutical company in Puerto Rico in their construction management group, and there I witnessed the execution aspect of the process chain. After that I changed cleanrooms for wastewater and I became involved with the rehab of wastewater treatment plants. But then I got to work on the design management side. At one point I was involved in design, and then later in construction management, in utility operations, and then the management of the operational stage. I felt I could bring all those experiences together to avoid problems in the latter stages by becoming involved earlier in the game. With the intimate knowledge of the industry I felt that we could make a difference.

What have been some of the key steps necessary to stay competitive in this marketplace?

Technology, innovation and a very strong set of values have all been critical. We stick by these values, as well as continuing to find different ways to streamline, optimize, and capture different lessons learned and the experiences of the people who work for us. It is difficult to capture, catalogue and share lessons learned and knowledge down the line; it is very easy for these experiences to remain with individuals rather than be shared. You have to create the right environment where someone will share problems. Experience is based on achievements but in many cases it is run by the difficulties along the way. You need an open culture of sharing.

With so many changes in processes and automation over the years in manufacturing, how do you stay up to date with each client's technology?

Rather than do everything ourselves, we focus on our strengths and partner with companies specialized in other areas. We can bring knowledge to the firm through these partnerships. Some are clients, design firms, equipment firms, and contractors; the buildup of people helps to garner those experiences. Training and seminars help too.

How many people are employed across the three offices?

We have 150 in Puerto Rico, 14 in Panama and three in South Florida. 11 employees have engineering license reciprocity in the US.

How much of your revenue does life science account for?

It is about 30 percent. It is quite significant not only for revenue, but the industry with its regulation, technology and demand for exactness. It is the biggest influencer in the systemic development of people in the company. That has kept us shining bright in other less sophisticated sectors, and helped our growth abroad.

There seems to be a shift in Puerto Rico to international growth as a result of the crisis. You already have a presence in Panama; to what extent could that go beyond into other countries?

The Panama operation started eight years ago before the crisis hit and was thus a natural expansion. This allowed us to set up our first overseas center of activity in a totally different environment and start creating a hub for services that we could begin to export. It also led us to start studying the Central and South American markets more closely. The South Florida office is meant to be the springboard to continue throughout the mainland. We have taken a very close look at the services we provide our industry and we have had to separate two major components: those that are geographically dependent, dealing with local permits, suppliers and labor laws, and go for procedures and systems that can work here or anywhere in the US. Those will be offered through the stateside operation to our clients.

What aspects do your clients need you the most for?

In Puerto Rico we have the largest supply of resources to enter a pharmaceutical project. Outside Puerto Rico, it is the blend of expertise. We have the pharma experience, as well as program management experience from other sectors. We have evolved from simply creating reports to customizing them. Our consulting practice targets what happens, finds patterns and devises ways to make projections on development of capital investment projects. That is our value proposition.

What has been the reception of clients in terms of your international outreach?

We work for a pharmaceutical company in Panama, who is very satisfied with our work. For them, our regulatory knowledge is useful, and we speak Spanish. We have been there for a while so we know the local suppliers and customs. We are exporting the systems and technology, while being bi-cultural, and knowing in that location what the headquarters are looking for. We are used to delivering projects in the pharma sector.

How have you adapted to Puerto Rico's economic turbulence in more recent years?

We have had to adapt and more than in size, we have had to evolve in services. We have to take a close look at what we do. We used to do things automatically; today we study those things that work and figure out how to improve them, and then see what is being delivered in the industry and what we can do to take it a step even further, and then find ways to put it in such a way to be exported. Things are going very well here, and when things get rough you can either wait or look for ways to transform what you are doing into something different. Our Puerto Rico operation continues to operate, and we are transforming this base into the enterprise hub of support services, where our scheduling, safety and cost estimating databases lie. We do work for the Panama operation from Puerto Rico; as we continue to expand I see ourselves getting involved in specific activities elsewhere but being supported by the machinery that is residing in this facility.

What opportunities do the Puerto Rican government's recent investments in medical tourism offer for your healthcare business?

We have done work for hospitals. We have been involved in the remodeling and construction of new hospital wings, medical office buildings, parking garages, ICUs, CCUs, and ORs.

What makes CPM the competitive partner of choice for construction solutions in life sciences?

CPM is not a low-cost provider, but it is competitive. We are always innovating and trustworthy. We are our clients' trusted advisor. We are not a constructor or designer. We can be their adviser, working with constructors and designers, and the client knows that what we tell them is there. Everything is on the table.

How do you instill among your employees the important role they play in ultimately improving and saving patients' lives?

It is summarized in our business card! We know our strengths, we have a very strong code of ethics, and we are here for people to deliver what they have contracted to do. Furthermore, we are transparent. We enter negotiations and show why we assume a certain position. It is an issue of facts, figures, promises and deliveries. We will do that with contractors, suppliers and even our clients. We have been offered projects in situations, where after digging a bit, the company's ethics are not where they should be and we elected not to participate. With respect to the responsibility to eventual patients, we can go there but it starts at home. We must be responsible for those around us; we are actively engaged in pro bono work. We talk about capitalism and investments; everyone must be responsible in their endeavors. That is drilled very early on in our employees, even with our interns. The importance goes beyond the patient, the relationships we have with our clients and each other.

Where do you want to take CPM in the future?

It is not in terms of geography or volume, but rather diversification of practice, geography, risk and tapping into other sources of knowledge that can enrich the whole group. I said that this is an era of collaboration, and in that collaboration there is a lot to be gained for everyone. Ultimately, it is for the

folks who are left behind to have a life full of opportunities, and the message that success can be achieved without stepping over other people and doing it properly.

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