

Interview: Krzysztof Kołodziejcki Country Manager, Santen Poland

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Krzysztof Kołodziejcki, country manager of Santen Poland, discusses the strategy he put in place to modernize the business culture of the affiliate and how this has led to great success. Furthermore, he highlights the challenges being faced by innovative eyecare companies in Poland and the entire healthcare sector, as well as t

he need to change the perception of ophthalmology through broader education.

This is your first country manager position. Thus far, how has the experience been and what was your strategy when you took up the position?

Previously, I had sales and marketing roles as the business unit head at various pharmaceutical companies, and these positions were similar to managing a smaller company. Therefore, the natural step was to take up a country manager position, and I'm thankful that Santen gave me this excellent opportunity and helped me achieve a career goal of mine.

In the last 24 months or so, we have completely shifted the business model utilized at Santen Poland, as before it was slightly outdated, and the strategy was one dimensional, always going in the same straight line. We chose to challenge the status quo, as if you do not think outside the box you will not be able to accelerate development and generate new processes.

[Featured_in]

My first move was to change the attitude and use the knowledge and experience from my past and implement this in Santen's system. Furthermore, we made Santen an attractive place to work, and started to ask an underlying basic question towards things: why? If you are curious and ask why things are done, you will get the answers required to develop effective solutions. Additionally, we promoted open and honest communication, as we always want to know the full picture. I am positive towards any new ideas and diversity of thinking is key towards driving forward a new way of working.

All in all, these changes are helping us develop the solid base for Santen Poland. A solid foundation is a good first step, and now we are constantly working to build on this for future success.

How have these changes been translated to success in the Polish market?

In Poland, we have a solid image and are well respected as an ophthalmology specialist company. Our sales accelerated quickly after the acquisitions of MSD's portfolio, helping to double our sales overnight. Also, we are always looking to develop our skills as this is key to achieving our goals, not solely having good products.

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Commercially, companies are measured in two ways: results against expectations and against the market dynamics. Santen Poland is growing more than was expected and this year we achieved double digit growth and overall we are growing faster than the market.

What is the strategic importance of Poland for the company in the CEE region?

We are a leading nation in the CEE region and Poland is the country where Santen is implementing new ideas first, due to our strong expertise and technologies, having excellent staff and the nation's huge potential for investment. Additionally, we are quick to implement new processes and are seen as a pilot market to test operations for the rest of the CEE region.

Our portfolio here is currently based around three main pillars: glaucoma, antibiotics and dry eyes, with the hope of building up our impact in keratitis. In the short term, we have some strategic products to launch, to put us in line with western countries. This includes, Ikervis[®], the first and only ciclosporin eyedrops in Europe, as well as Taptiqom[®] and Taflotan[®]. In the long-term, we aim to offer surgical solutions like Microshunt.

In your expert opinion, how would you describe the current ophthalmology treatment landscape in the Polish healthcare environment?

Patients do have some access to reimbursed products. Nevertheless, there needs to be a greater openness to increase the market penetration of innovative products as many are not on the reimbursement list. Therefore, Poles must pay for these products out of pocket, and generally this is out of the price range for the average person. Additionally, areas such as diagnosis must reach a higher level, as in areas like glaucoma, many patients are not diagnosed correctly or are diagnosed too late.

What can be done to improve the eyecare ecosystem?

Poland is looking to increase the total amount being spent on healthcare; therefore, there needs to be a political drive to improve overall care and invest in the correct areas. To stimulate this decision key stakeholders, such as companies, key opinion leaders, clinicians and patients, must be active in speaking up and voicing their opinion. This will demonstrate to the relevant people making the decisions that there are new innovative products on the market and making them easily and financially available to Poles can create big time benefits for the nation and the health of patients. In fact, it is sad at times to see how far behind Poland is in some respects to other nations, especially in eyecare.

How is Santen working to help change the perception of ophthalmology in Poland?

My past experience was in cardiology and diabetology, and in comparison, the voice of patients and key opinion leaders within the ophthalmology field is not very influential at the moment. Our role at Santen is to always give arguments and be active in the dialogue to showcase the benefits of giving out the best treatment and diagnosis to patients. Nevertheless, we cannot be alone in this mission, and we support the entire industry's move to improve Polish healthcare as a whole.

How does Santen interact with the medical community to bring forward the voice of Polish eyecare?

An excellent example is at the beginning of March, we will work with the Polish Ophthalmologic Society to implement "Glaucoma week". We will support information for patients by working with physicians, while giving patients the opportunity to have a free consultation to help improve glaucoma diagnosis.

Additionally, we conduct a workshop for young Polish ophthalmologists during their internship and support them with possibility of attending Glaucoma Residents' Course organized by European Glaucoma Society and learn new skills for their careers. We also support educational activities for young ophthalmologists closely cooperating with European School for Advanced Studies in Ophthalmology.

What message would you like to send to the key Polish stakeholders to make eyecare a priority in the future?

It is not only about ophthalmology, this is too specific. We need the attitude towards healthcare in Poland to improve in all areas by changing the focus of the entire system. This could be either reimbursement or distribution of healthcare spending, or possibly even utilizing a model that promotes both private and public hospitals. I do not have the key answer, though I do believe it is about creating systemic changes, and in turn this will improve healthcare, and a result possibly ophthalmology.

Nevertheless, if we look back over the last two decades Poland has improved a lot, for both the Polish people and healthcare industry, though we acknowledge that there is still a long way to go.

What are your aspirations for the next three years?

My dream is to build an excellent organization, so people are proud to work for Santen Poland, while being proud to promote our innovative products and see themselves having a long-term journey with the company. The three pillars are: solid company, solid people, solid future.

Being a first-time country manager, what would you describe as your managerial culture that has made you successful?

First and foremost, I am very close and open to the people that I work with, and I promote open dialogue. Secondly, I teach my team that we are here on a mission to help patients live better lives, and I truly believe this. The challenges people face when they have eye problems are immense. Poland still lags behind in terms of the patient voice, though, at Santen always do our best to ensure they are the centre of everything we do, and we achieve our goal of helping people live better.

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