

Interview: Nicolas Bardonnnet - General Manager, Promega France



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Nicolas Bardonnnet, general manager of Promega France,

reveals how France hosts both their European application laboratory and European training centre, offering a wide range of courses in molecular biology, cell biology, proteomics and genetic identity. Mr Bardonnnet talks about the importance that Promega attaches to supporting the surrounding community, giving back through educational, creative and wellness initiatives and why their work as an OEM partner for pharma, biotech, diagnostic and medical device companies will only increase over the coming years.

Can you start by introducing Promega and your services to our readers?

With a portfolio of more than 3,000 products covering the fields of genomics, protein analysis and expression, cellular analysis, drug discovery and genetic identity, Promega is a global leader in providing innovative solutions to life scientists in academic, industrial and government settings. We are in a very competitive world, where there are two ways to succeed; either you offer the lowest price and a reasonable level of quality, or you provide a truly unique technology. A large part of Promega's product portfolio is unique with strong patent protection, such as bioluminescence, which enables scientists to quantitatively measure protein interactions in live cells. Innovative research and development resulted in 75 new patent filings, and 18 new products launched in 2014. Promega products are used by life scientists asking fundamental questions about biological processes as well as by scientists who are applying scientific knowledge to diagnose and treat diseases, discover new therapeutics, and use genetics and DNA testing for human identification. With our unique application lab, we provide both market specialists and expert Field Application Scientists to get insights on the best products.

What is the strategic importance of France to the Group, from both a regional and global perspective?

Founded in 1978 by William Linton in Madison, Wisconsin, Promega has branches in 16 countries and more than 50 global distributors serving 100 countries. Today we have eight European branches. We have been present in France since 1982, making us one of the first branches and one of the strongest and most important in Europe. Today France is responsible for operations in Greece, Egypt as well as North Africa and French speaking African countries. Even as we have expanded our international footprint, France still hosts both our European application centre as well as the European training centre, which offers a wide range of courses in molecular biology, cell biology, proteomics and genetic identity. The fact that our European application centre is based in France also sends a strong message about that importance which we attach to our presence here. Indeed, the majority of our competitors have such centres located either in Germany or the UK.

We have heard that while France has creativity and innovation in abundance, when it comes to services and customer relations, the Anglo Saxons are one step ahead. In your opinion, is this starting to change?

Indeed, the culture in France is evolving. Previously, scientists were not particularly open to building relationships with suppliers. Today they understand that we are there to assist them in publishing and increasing the visibility of their research. There has long been a notable difference when it comes to the use of social media, where American researchers are more open to such developments. Today more and more French scientists understand that it is important to be visible on the web, leading to increasing interactions with suppliers, like Promega, who are increasingly being perceived as partners for innovation.

Over the last few years Promega has witnessed some impressive growth statistics, with a turnover of 360 million dollars in 2014, a 20 percent growth rate when compared to the previous year. What objectives have you been given to grow this affiliate?

Within the lab supplier business, and considering the Research market, France usually represents between 3 to 5% of the global revenues and 10% of the European ones. In the Diagnostic market and due to our health insurance system, France counts for significantly more. The Pharma business which is much bigger is also well represented with several renowned companies like SANOFI, Pierre Fabre and Institut Servier amongst other. Our strong academic biomedical research and Medical Healthcare systems are also leading to the development of Biopharma companies working in collaboration with academic and pharma laboratories. If Promega is not a drug provider we see a growing demand for customized solutions and OEM partnerships to access new technologies especially in the fields of Molecular Diagnostic, Target Discovery and Target validation. As the pharma market is of considerable size, and as we possess particularly attractive technologies in these application fields, Promega has decided to set-up a strong custom and OEM expertise and capacity. Thus, these last years, we have significantly increased our R&D collaborations, built an impressive GMP production facility and set-up a dedicated commercialization team. First partnerships with companies such as Abbott are showing the validity of such an approach.

What is it that sets Promega apart from its peers?

Promega attaches a great deal of importance to its values. The success of a company is not due to a particular product; it is based on its people. Long-term sustainable success is always a result of your culture and people. Being a private company that is not listed, ensures we can always take a long-term approach. Promega also takes a long term view in developing technologies. For that we have implemented a dedicated group of scientists, Advanced Technology Group (ATG), which focus on future needs in science. The ATG scientists collaborate with pharma scientists around the conceptual challenges faced in the pharma industry. Together, they develop new ways of working to overcome such challenges. An outcome of this sort of collaboration was recently published in

Nature Communications where Promega technology was optimized to meet the specific challenge of measuring target engagement in a live cell. The collaboration went even further and found a way, for the first time in the industry, to also measure drug residence in a live cell.

I lead the French affiliate based on customer satisfaction, the best way to differentiate any business. Establishing a customer centric approach means establishing long-term relationships based on trust. As general manager of Promega France, I interact with the global business development team. The role of a branch manager is not merely to manage local operations, but to contribute to our future development as a business. Globally, Promega's ambition is not to grow through acquisitions. The emphasis is on organic growth and developing an internal innovation culture. We exist on an evolutionary frontier where the values of science, business and human well-being are fully integrated. Acknowledging these interdependencies, we look to cultivate an environment that allows our employees to flourish, developing deep and enduring relationships with all constituencies. In France, we will have a second building by end of 2017 that will allow us to expand our activities as well as hosting a fitness and wellness centre for all employees. Promega as a Group attaches a great deal of importance to ensuring that our people are comfortable and happy in their working environment.

What importance does the Group attach to CSR initiatives?

Promega assists the surrounding community by supporting educational, creative and wellness initiatives. Globally, Promega employees remain involved in their local communities. In 2014, employees volunteered 1,000 hours and provided financial support to a diversity of non-profit and community organizations. For more than 30 years, Promega has integrated the values of corporate responsibility and sustainable business practices into corporate culture and activity.

Environmental impacts are also considered across our various operations, from the design of new facilities to the ways products are packaged and shipped. Consistent efforts to reduce shipment size, weight, and material usage has resulted in a 15 percent decrease in emissions from product distribution per revenue since 2008. Continued focus on waste reduction has resulted in a 60 percent increase in recycling levels since 2008.

What will Promega France accomplish over the next five years?

We will continue to grow! Not only due to the products that we are offering today but because we are working on technologies for the next five to ten years. The future in diagnostics will evolve around cell-free DNA, helping to investigate pre-natal diseases and early-stage cancers. Promega is already active in this field and can make a telling contribution to future market trends. We will continue working as an OEM partner for pharma biotech, diagnostic and medical device companies and this will become a more important part of Promega's business in the near future. Over the coming months and years, we have many products that we look forward to launching.

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