

Interview: Ramon Navia Operations Director, Skanska Puerto Rico



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Skanska Puerto Rico's Ramon Navia discusses the challenges the sector has faced in recent years and how Skanska has adapted its services portfolio to better cater to local clients' needs. Skanska provides world-class construction management services to the life science industry.

What differentiates Skanska from other competitors and makes the group the partner of choice for the industry?

First and foremost, quality and safety are paramount. Secondly, we rely on local resources today we employ 25 people with local expertise but have the backing of an international company that leverages best practices from across the globe. I believe our expertise combined with the quality of our work, the safety culture in place and our extensive resources make us the partner of choice in the industry.

How did you start marketing the services of the company?

At the beginning, we were part of the Puerto Rico Manufacturers Association (PRMA), which is a private, non-profit organization established in 1928 with the purpose of uniting all Puerto Rico's manufacturers and strengthen the industrial/entrepreneurial culture to advance the competitiveness

of the island. In the past we were also part of INDUNIV. Besides such initiatives, word of mouth was important; even though Puerto Rico is a large market, the local pharmaceutical industry is small and everyone knows each other. Once you get a project and a client is satisfied with it, they will recommend you.

Moving forward, how do you expect to continue growing Skanska in Puerto Rico?

We have worked within the pharmaceutical industry for many years and we understand it's a very important business we need to maintain to grow the economy of the island. The consulting work we provide to our clients is our main contribution in this sense. Today, we are pursuing new markets such as the aerospace industry, especially with the establishment of Lufthansa on the island in 2014.

Could you please introduce Skanska to our readers?

Skanska is one of the top construction and development companies in the world, providing integrated construction services to the science and technology market throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. We provide pre-construction, construction management, design-build, commissioning and qualification services to projects in the life sciences sector from as small as 1,000 square feet to more than one million square feet. Our expertise and unparalleled knowledge in this market makes us a construction leader in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries as well as the research and development fields.

You were largely responsible for the beginning and development of the Skanska affiliate in Puerto Rico. Why did the company decide to establish a subsidiary on the island?

Skanska began working in Puerto Rico in 2003 following the request of a number of clients that we were working with in the US and Europe that were interested in starting or consolidating operations on the island. At that time, there was a construction boom and we started working locally with global players such as Abbott, Pfizer and Amgen, as well as providing consulting services for regulatory issues.

Since 2003 there has been a lot of consolidation within the pharmaceutical industry, with companies shutting down operations in Puerto Rico or taking their facilities elsewhere. How did you adapt to these changes and how did you maintain a sustainable level of business?

Our main business in Puerto Rico was providing construction management (CM services); however, due to changes in the market, the company began providing additional services through our Skanska Integrated Solutions (SIS), offering an extension of staff to numerous corporate and institutional clients. Today SIS is able to offer an unmatched level of service in every aspect of the construction process: planning, programming, financial analysis, design, construction, commissioning and closeout. SIS provides the same services as CM, but much more tailored to clients' needs. We leverage best practices from Skanska projects and offices across the US, ensuring consistency in project delivery. Our construction expertise leads to risk reduction, enhanced safety, and superior cost and schedule efficiency, offering a much more integrated portfolio to our customers.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are a key cornerstone of the Skanska business model. To what extent are they important in Puerto Rico?

Currently, Skanska is not considering entering the PPP market in Puerto Rico.

Fortunately, private industry seems to be doing well despite the problems the government is facing. What is your vision about the future as a Puerto Rican working in the industry?

I think the government needs to focus on reactivating the economy. Of course there is the pharmaceutical industry, but we can't forget that we also have other important sectors such as the food industry and consulting services, amongst others. At Skanska, we are deeply committed to the Puerto Rican life science industry, not only as a construction company, but as a local company. We are very proud to be part of this sector and we'll make whatever it takes to keep Puerto Rico as the number one hub for the industry.

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