

Interview: Yoel Rivera â?? President, Ultimate Solutions Corp, Puerto Rico



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Ultimate Solutions Corp is a leading packaging solutions provider for the life sciences industry in Puerto Rico. Yoel Rivera, president of Ultimate Solutions, discusses new inventions the company is designing and their great potential for the healthcare industry.

What was the motivation for creating Ultimate Solutions, and how did you feel you could contribute to servicing the life sciences industry?

In 2002, I was providing validation services for Pfizer. The manager of this unit asked me to expand beyond validation to project management. I had many issues coordinating multiple companies and bringing them together to provide such a service. After university I started working in packaging, which strongly motivated me. Packaging projects involve lots of validation, project management, technical programmers, mechanics; you have to bring many things together and that coordination required great effort. My idea stemmed from the fact that even though Puerto Rico has many validation companies, if I focused my company on packaging we could excel in that niche. Many of our competitors do it but are not specialized. I incorporated the company in 2005.

We are currently building packaging serialization modules, and partnering with another company in Puerto Rico that has expertise in the mechanical area, whereas our expertise lies in the electronic and programming area. There are many mutual benefits in this sense, and it brings added value to our clients. We put the expertise of multiple companies together as if it was one company, and the end result is positive for everyone.

What has allowed Ultimate Solutions to grow so quickly in a competitive environment?

Other than dedication, I trust greatly in the integrity of our people. We develop our resources. Our people are the key element of Ultimate Solutions. They not only perform well but they have other relationships that are brought to the company. This brings great confidence to our clients and has helped grow the company.

How challenging is it to find the specific talent required to do the job?

Life science is in the DNA of Puerto Ricans. At Puerto Rican universities, students take lots of theory, but many students have a parent or grandparent that used to work for a pharmaceutical company. It is quite natural in that sense, and thus it is not difficult to find those kinds of people. Perhaps in newer technologies like serialization it is a bit more difficult. But we are able to train people in such areas because they are already excellent engineers. My best field engineers for serialization are those that started in validation. They understand regulations very well and what is required by our clients who are in regulatory control or audited. In that sense, essentially we are polishing a diamond with such talent.

What aspect of packaging tends to be the most difficult for pharmaceutical companies and how can Ultimate Solutions help?

The most challenging aspect occurs when companies buy new equipment and they have to integrate that equipment into their existing lines. You start with their budget, so you need to know how much capital you have in hand. You must have a very good assessment and quality of design to make sure that this new equipment is part of that new line without impacting what is already running in that line. We can add lots of value there because we know packaging equipment, OEMs, suppliers, etc. Our COO is the only person with a doctoral degree in packaging components in Puerto Rico. This knowledge combination of packaging equipment and its behavior with components can be hard to find. In terms of individual pharmaceuticals, medical devices or biotech products, the story is different. Value is added with combination products in terms of knowing the components, equipment, and their regulations. Sometimes we advise our clients to not buy certain equipment or recommend buying other equipment because of their capabilities rather than price. As useful as automation can be, it is not always the solution for a new packaging line. Whenever you implement a new vision system in a line, having that new system will create problems without proper training. Sometimes it is thus better to revise procedures. If you don't have a high-speed operation why would you bring new equipment that is so big or sophisticated? That is the sort of thing we evaluate.

As automation technology evolves, do you find a similar pattern in terms of matching those changes from the packaging perspective?

This is a very challenging situation. Automation controls and software change and become more advanced every year; this requires training people. That is why you partner with big companies to ensure that everyone is trained well; otherwise you get behind in packaging technology, which is accelerating every year.

Leading companies run training for controls, and we send our workforce to those workshops whenever there is a new release for a PLC or HMI. Our budget includes annual training to make sure everyone is up-to-date. Ultimate Solutions runs its own academy as well to share ideas across the office, thereby reducing training costs. If I have a really good programmer for control logics, I ask him to prepare a workshop. For MS Project, we have excellent personnel with PMP-certified training, and they do trainings to educate those in the company without that training. The use of Microsoft Word, Excel or PowerPoint in validation is very important too. I also do my own training as well for personal development as the business owner.

How would you define your management style?

I am a good friend, but I do have a clear vision. When something comes to my mind, I find it very enjoyable to make that idea a reality. I share my vision with everyone, and everyone else wants to participate. I studied industrial engineering but I really like entrepreneurship. A few years ago, I found that investing is a great way to expand our business. Thus I created Dream Code Capital, to make "dreams come true"; this is the future.

How can you contribute?

In Puerto Rico, there are many processes that are handwritten rather than automated. You can implement mobile apps to control the equipment and ensure that you are receiving alerts when equipment stops working or something is wrong with a packaging line. There is lots of handwritten documentation in Puerto Rico, and that needs to become electronic. Many people are making mobile apps, and we are working together here on our first mobile app to route documentation for validation. Ultimately, my goal is to combine all of that information across a variety of equipment in their PLCs and connect them through our mobile app to ensure we have all the right information. That leads to

the big data topic â?? connecting all the Pfizers around the world for example and allow the managers or investors to have the information to make the decisions that will make the changes in those businesses in future years. In that sense, there is lots of work to be done here in Puerto Rico.

Do you see yourself becoming a total packaging solutions provider for the Caribbean or Latin America?

We are developing certified serialization training and I am partnering with J&J to make that a reality. Latin America has lot serialization implementation and the company that I represent, Systech International, feels this is a great fit because we can provide many Latin countries lots of training in their native language of Spanish. Our first goal is to certify that training and that will allow us to escalate into other countries. In the US we are mostly engaging in validation and regulatory compliance. In Puerto Rico we are developing our own family of serialization machines for the first time with Systech. This will allow us to not only go to other countries but combine a company which is a service base with a product to make our business more scalable. At this point, with our locally certified training, we are in a position with Systech to start visiting Costa Rica and Chile to implement that. Being part of the US, I can bring services from Puerto Rico to New Jersey or other sites in serialization. Since we are partnering with Systech, whenever they have more needs than their capacity for serialization solutions, they activate our resources.

How do you see the collective Puerto Rican service provider industry evolving in the coming years?

It will be done, and this crisis will push us to make that a reality. I feel like we have so many great technicians. The only thing we need to change is to not think of our business in just an island, that is small thinking. We can broaden our collective mindsets, especially in a company like Ultimate Solutions where we are excellent programmers. But for some reason, we have been taught to work for other people and make their processes better rather than bringing our own systems and make them globally scalable. It is a mindset that must change in Puerto Rico. Some companies are trying to do that. We need to start developing more. I am developing my own R&D, for example. We have great universities and key opinion leaders making great investigations. But for some reason we are just thinking about staying here locally. That is not how we can create a global business. I would like to bring other people the idea that they can dream about being more global; we have been doing this for 60 years. R&D in global companies brings us their processes and we improve them. The change needs to be that we create those processes or be part of them to make sure we are owners of that technology and those patents.

Where will we find Ultimate Solutions in 2020?

We will have a family of products knocking on doors around the world. There will be other Ultimate Solutions offices as well, most likely two or three in the US and presence in Europe and South America. I hopefully will have two or three more companies and invest in companies like the ones in my site. I believe that we can help entrepreneurs to grow their business.

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