

West APAC VP & GM Stewart Campbell on Meeting Asian Biopharma's Evolving Packaging Needs



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Stewart Campbell, Vice President and General Manager, Asia Pacific, West Pharmaceutical Services, highlights how the drug containment and delivery system industry is evolving to meet the rapidly changing needs of Asian biopharma; West's crucial role in the fight against COVID-19 and how it met surging demands for injectable packaging in 2020/2021; as well as his ambitions for the company's future in APAC.

Stewart, could you begin by briefly introducing West and its footprint in APAC?

West is a company with almost 100 years of history and a global leader in the manufacture of drug containment and delivery systems. We manufacture 40 billion components and devices every year with the philosophy that every single one has a patient's name on it; anyone that has ever received a vaccine or an injectable drug has probably had contact with a West product. We are a trusted partner to both established and emerging drug developers, and our products are very much the industry standard.

The APAC region is active, dynamic and promising. It is home to 60 percent of the world's population and [its top 50 biotech companies are worth over USD 8.6 trillion](#). West has had a growing

presence in the region since more than 40 years ago. Today, we are proud to have over 1,500 employees in 15 sites across APAC with manufacturing facilities in Singapore, India, and China, as well as a partner in Japan.

APAC is an enormous and highly heterogeneous region, with vast differences in infrastructure, regulation, and economic development across its countries. What are some specific challenges that West is facing in APAC that might be less prevalent in other geographies?

You are right in saying the APAC is highly complex and not at all homogenous. The diversity within the region and the region's speed of change has gained prominence due to the pandemic. Specifically, there is an increasing regulatory focus on product quality, a growing demand for innovative packaging and delivery solution for sensitive molecules such as biologics, and an accelerating competition on the speed to market. We must navigate these challenges with agility and cultural sensitivity.

While West views APAC as a region, we very much adopt a customer-focused, and market-led approach. This means that we look at what is needed in each market, which can vary significantly, and build up our capabilities to ensure we can serve our customers there to the best of our ability.

For example, the North Asian biopharma and biotechnology industry's growth requires us to support their drug development efforts through innovative containment and delivery solutions. In India, well-known to be the pharmacy of the world, our expertise is tapped to consistently deliver trusted high-quality containment solutions around specific requirements in injectable drug packaging, both for medicines produced for the local market and those exported to regulated markets in places like North America and Europe.

In terms of manufacturing within the region, we have been making and will continue to make, significant investments to ensure our capabilities evolve in tandem with our customers' needs. In Singapore, we have a manufacturing plant that is catered towards our High Value Products (HVPs). The local customers' efforts in both complex and sensitive biologic molecules development and expertise in areas like cell and gene therapy (CGT) generally demand higher quality standards than those for generic drugs.

Ultimately, our approach is to provide best-fit products and services for individual customers based on their needs.

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Presumably, the innovation happening in the biopharma space has to be met with a certain level of innovation on the packaging side. What do you see as the key trends in the drug packaging industry today?

In addition to the fast growth that we are witnessing in biologics, the biopharmaceutical industry itself is complex, resource-intensive and highly-regulated. As mentioned earlier, West prides itself on being able to provide and ensure that patients have access to the safest and most comfortable

treatments available and this can only be achieved through a constant pursuit for innovation.

For example, we are seeing a change in modern drugs from chemical-based, to biologics and now to CGT. This change requires a very specific nuance in packaging requirements. A good example of this is a recent case we encountered during a Phase III trial. Our customer reached out for help in overcoming the challenges associated with providing a unique therapy that was to be delivered by a viral vector. This rare genetic disease therapy required a containment system capable of -80°C cold storage. While the customer was using cryovials for storage during trials, they felt that the therapy needed a traditional system able to maintain container closure integrity during cold storage to make it to the market.

After our analytics team assessed this challenge, we created a solution combining a Daikyo Crystal Zenith[®] vial, a NovaPure[®] stopper with FluroTec[®] barrier film, and a customised Flip-Off[®] seal. This proved to be a good choice as a containment system for this therapy, with the readily available Crystal Zenith system enabling the customer to overcome challenges associated with glass breakage and cold storage, and rapidly bring the product to market once Phase III trials were completed.

This experience is also a testament that innovation can be inexpensive and catalysed through collaboration.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for stakeholders across the biopharma value chain and, with the world still racing to vaccinate itself against the virus, there has been an enormous surge in demand for injectable drug packaging. What have been the main impacts of the pandemic on West's business in APAC?

The pandemic has indeed generated an extraordinary global demand that is not easily met and it does not seem to be abating. This has been a major focus for us, as well as for everyone working in our industry. Our involvement in the majority of COVID vaccines provided us with a precursor to the magnitude of the impending demand and our responsibility to quickly respond to this critical life-saving need.

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Given the level of support West has given to the global vaccine program, the pandemic is a testament to the company's ability to adapt its capacity to meet the surging demand. As soon as we were able to ensure our people were safe and able to work, we looked to build up existing facilities and move to 24/7 operations where possible, added 2000 new staff members across our global network since the pandemic, and made new investments into capacity. West has committed over USD 300 million to building up capacity in key product lines to support both COVID and non-COVID related demand; it must not be forgotten that we have many important customers creating equally critical life-saving medicines in other areas.

Looking forward, we are confident that our expansion of production capabilities across our global operations in the form of manufacturing and digitalisation of our operations will enhance supply chain agility for our customers and better address their needs.

Was there work to be done to convince West's manufacturing staff of the benefits of increased digitalisation, given the anxieties that exist around automation and job security in manufacturing?

Our digital transformation started pre-pandemic, going as far back as 2018. West made a conscious decision to take the company from analogue to digital across manufacturing, employee experience, and customer experience. In the past three years, we have hired over 400 staff to aid this digital transformation across two centres in Bangalore and Taiwan.

During the same time, we have been consciously and concurrently investing in the upskilling of our employees to facilitate the move towards automation. After all, the development of technology must be accompanied by adoption across the business. Our employees in AP receive upwards of 11 hours in training and development. It includes digital enablement to adopt West's IIoT (Industrial Internet of Things) initiatives which are gradually being rolled out. These support structures are well-received and reflected through our strong talent retention outcomes and positive employee satisfaction feedback.

During the pandemic, many governments looked to localise their manufacturing footprints to decrease reliance on international sources. Do you see this trend as a knee-jerk response to an unprecedented crisis or something that is here to stay?

This is a key question that has been raised across many different industries, not least ours. In essence, I believe that international trade will continue in conjunction with an increased emphasis from governments on self-sufficiency in production, supply chain, and homegrown innovation. While developing self-sufficiency is a positive trend that will continue in the post-pandemic era, it is hard for any single country to do everything alone. Therefore, there still will be a significant amount of global trade.

West's response to the pandemic and increase in demand, is not limited to the near-term support of our customers. It also includes investing in our network and determining where we should invest. The USD 300 million capital investment I mentioned earlier has been spread reasonably and evenly across ten global sites, demonstrating our global commitment and desire to be in the right place with the right products for the right markets. This also boosts our ability to source an identical product across multiple sites, circumventing supply chain constraints.

Packaging is not necessarily the most glamorous part of the pharma value chain, but its importance has been foregrounded by the pandemic. Do you foresee a reappraisal of your industry moving forward?

Our industry supply chain is large, complex, and broad; and every aspect is crucial. Any gaps in this supply chain can lead to serious problems. While I am not sure if packaging will be seen as more glamorous, we are happy with being recognised as a crucial partner to the industry. The capabilities that West is building up around the world certainly support that.

Looking towards 2022 and beyond, what is the outlook for West in APAC?

In 2021, we witnessed robust growth in all three of our proprietary product market units, particularly the high-value product portfolio. Looking ahead to 2022, we are well positioned with the right growth strategy and our committed order book remains robust.

Therefore, while we remain committed to supporting the fight against COVID, we are also actively supporting the delivery of other life-saving drugs. Our investments and energies directed into capacity building and capability enhancements across the past 18 months continue to turn operational and will act as force-multipliers to our efforts.

Enabled by our recent strong performance, we are further increasing our planned capital investments in AP and enhance the development of our people capabilities. Through these, we are confident that our commitments and investments will continue to drive innovation and growth within our organisation and the industry at large.

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