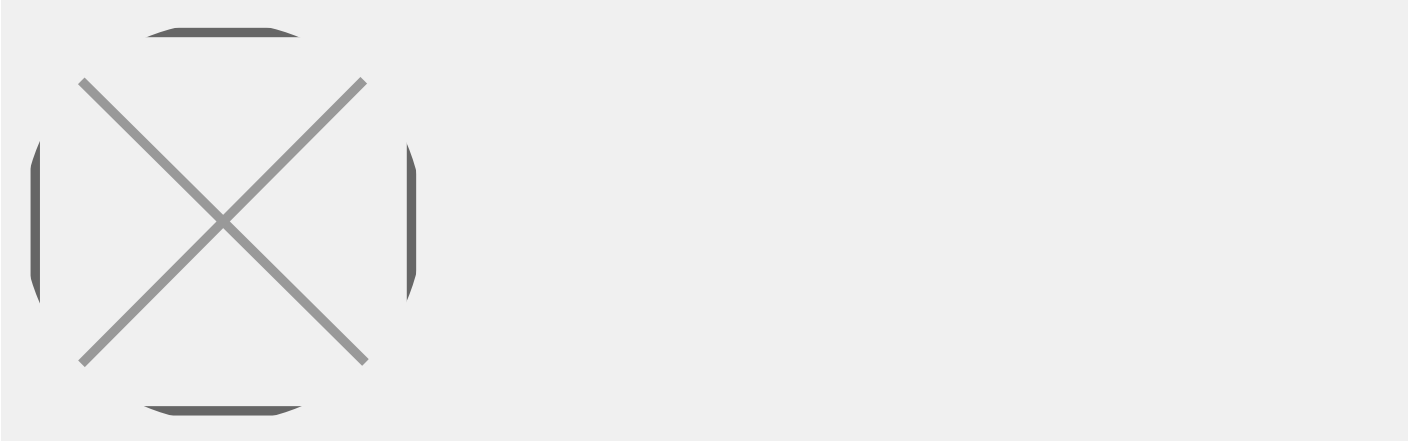
Interview: Sandro Zotti National Operations Manager, World Courier Canada



14.08.2013

Tags: logistics, World Courier

sandro-zotti-national-operations-manager-world-courier-2-jpg.JPG

World Courier's national operations manager in Canada covers the topics of moving to GxP standards, and the logistics challenges faced by being a logistics company in such a large country.

What originally attracted you to the logistics business?

I came into the business by accident, at that time it was the most interesting opportunity I had. I started in logistics, which ended up being a very good fit for my personality. On a personal level, I find that I thrive in a dynamic environment. In logistics, no two days are ever the same. Every day you are faced with different challenges and realities. The spectrum is so broad in this regard that it stays exciting.

You have been working with World Courier since 2001, and have been National Operations Manager since 2007. What has been the defining

moment of your current tenure?

The most significant milestone was when the company went GxP worldwide. It was an important undertaking around the world, and involved making every office in World Courier's extensive network GxP-compliant. This meant bringing everyone up to the same standards and with the same processes. World Courier is the only courier company to have gone through that. There was no recipe to follow; it was not like going down the same beaten path that was set by someone else. World Courier had to develop everything from the ground up. It was a challenge, but the organization has been extremely successful as a result.

What challenges did that move to GxP bring for you personally for the Canadian affiliate?

Canada has greater availability of resources than some other countries. Having monitors readily available and access to all the reports and documentation to back it up was very accessible in Canada. The challenge was therefore the rigor with which the company had to follow up on some of these items. For instance, World Courier always had equipment that maintained specific temperatures condition to protect everything that goes into the packaging. The rigidity of this process, tolerance for deviations, and amount of reporting became stricter, it was essentially an adaptation. As an example, with a refrigerator, today the company takes temperature readings every minute as opposed to once or twice a day. Data is recorded and backed up to ensure it is never lost. These sorts of procedures have been significantly enforced since becoming GxP.

What do you perceive to be the biggest difficulties for the industry as a whole, and how does World Courier overcome those difficulties?

I think the biggest difficulty, contrary to some other countries, is domestic business. Access to international markets is comparable or favorable to what you would see anywhere else. Canada is an enormous country with vast distances between population centers. The biggest challenge therefore is to keep transit times as short as

possible and costs under control over such wide distances.

World Courier has a strong focus on the emerging markets of the world at the moment. Does Canada have any advantages based on its developed status?

You would have to look at it on a country by country basis, since Canada may have differing advantages over different countries. Generally speaking, the biggest advantage to Canada is that it represents a very familiar environment in which to do business for customers with a long-standing presence. There are fewer barriers, and Canada's allows companies predictability, compared to some of the unexpected challenges of arranging logistics in emerging markets. Additionally, the infrastructure in Canada is world-class. Major international airports are readily available, the road network is excellent, and the availability of certain industry-specific resources like temperature-controlled storage is probably more available here than in most of the emerging markets.

When did World Courier establish its Canadian affiliate?

World Courier opened in Canada very early in its history. The Montreal office was founded in 1969-1970, followed quickly by the Toronto office and expanded into Vancouver in 2005.

What is the strategic importance of Canada for World Courier's regional operations?

World Courier serves its customers globally, and tries to be present to serve them wherever they are doing business. Almost every player in the industry has some kind of operations in Canada. It is important to be present in Canada to serve them here as well as wherever their head offices are. Additionally, there are many local businesses and we are here to support them and to work with them from when they are smaller, working and growing with them and being able to support them throughout that.

On a strictly logistics side, Canada is geographically well situated, and despite the domestic challenge of its vastness, it is an advantage internationally with Vancouver being an ideal gateway to get to Asia-Pacific and the Far East. Toronto has a major international airport. Montreal has fantastic access to Europe, North Africa, among other regions. Canada is therefore a good gateway to get from one continent to any other continent. For instance, Canada is ideally located to support logistics from Asia to Latin America.

World Courier is a leader in a number of services related to clinical trials. How is that translated into the Canadian pharmaceutical market, and how do you respond to changing market trends?

Part of World Courier's driving force is to constantly offer customized solutions based on whatever the project might be. The company approaches each clinical trial and project individually, whether it is moving samples, drugs or live animals. World Courier has no set logistics channels; it tailor-makes a solution every time and is thus very project specific. The company's role is to be able to adapt; it is so dynamic that it develops customized solutions on a case-by-case basis. Whatever the specific need is, World Courier is able to adapt and accommodate whatever project with which it is presented.

To accommodate certain projects, World Courier has created dedicated teams that manage the project specifically and work on them around the clock. The organization has developed specific logistics solutions for various projects. World Courier has bought equipment, such as refrigerated vehicles, to accommodate specific projects. Whatever the clientele needs, every World Courier station worldwide will adapt and develop the capabilities to support them.

World Courier was acquired by Amerisource Bergen last year, as a means of expansion and complementing its focus on finished pharmaceuticals. How has this affected Canada, and what synergies have been created as a result?

AmeriSource Bergen is planning to use the acquisition as part of an expansion plan. Their network is so well-developed and their services are so well established in Canada, that I do not think that they need or plan to expand here through World Courier. It is probably more relevant on a worldwide scale. Canada is less affected by that aspect of the acquisition. The impact has been relatively minor; there were some administrative changes, but in terms of changing operations there has been no impact. However, Amerisource Bergen does have task forces, incorporating people from World Courier worldwide, to determine potential synergies between the two organizations for technology and marketing. I am really looking forward to what this will bring once these task forces execute their work.

The transportation of biopharmaceutical products is a very delicate and complicated process. As the only GxP-compliant company in the world, what competitive advantages has this brought, given the size and scope of World Courier?

Having that network is already a significant weapon in the arsenal. A courier that has a network that is dispersed but with no common thread among different offices is fine, but it does not present the same kind of advantages that World Courier provides. Employees in Canada go through very rigorous training and work with set performance standards. I know for certain that my colleagues in Lima or Moscow or Melbourne and every other office go through the exact same training and adhere to the same standards. This brings a lot of predictability, knowing that whatever happens in Canada will happen in every other location of World Courier. That is a major advantage in terms of maintaining quality throughout the logistics chain. Customers control their environment, and once a product departs, World Courier controls everything else. From the moment it leaves the door to the moment it arrives to its destination, it is an extension of the client’s own quality controls which are GxP-compliant throughout the entire logistics chain. As far as I know, World Courier is the only company that can do it on this scope.

World Courier offers a number of innovative software applications, such as Bio-STAR and CTM-STAR. What added value do products like these bring to Canada?

CTM-STAR is used for handling logistics specific to drug storage and distribution. As World Courier does not have a depot in Canada, the impact for the affiliate operationally has been relatively minor. On the other hand, many Canadian customers have been able to take advantage of the benefits that CTM-STAR offers, in terms of facility usage. World Courier has customers in Canada that have drugs in the organization's depots in Melbourne and Singapore, allowing them to take advantage of those software facilities. CTM-STAR's advantage is that it is tailor-made and specific to drug storage and distribution. Similarly, Bio-STAR is a facility that is specific to clinical trials. It allows World Courier to participate in a clinical trial in a way that other couriers cannot because the system is specifically designed for that purpose. The company can preload data into Bio-STAR and can control those elements and the logistics chain. For example, if a shipper contacts World Courier and provides a protocol number, all the information is preloaded. The company can ensure that the destination address is correct, that the packaging provided is always the same, and that it is always exactly what the sponsor has required. World Courier can ensure that the pickup schedule adheres to the sponsor's requirements, and if there is any deviation it can be addressed ahead of time. Rather than simply using what individual sites may be providing as information, World Courier can help the sponsor to ensure that there is conformity throughout the entire protocol from all sites worldwide.

You mentioned that World Courier applies the exact same principle at all of its locations worldwide. How do you adapt to cultural differences in management when dealing with branches in other regions?

Personally, this drives me. It is very interesting to speak one day with a colleague in Tokyo and the next day to another in Rome. The cultural differences jump out at you when you deal so closely with people. But it is very easy; as everyone adheres to the same standards and there is a common goal. That means we are all speaking the

same language and it is thus very easy to move forward in the same direction. Those cultural differences in approach are consequently dampened. Decentralization of management allows local management to control and run its own operations without having to check with someone in another country that does not have the same culture or understand local realities. It allows them to be able to take action and solve problems more quickly. Shared goals worldwide with local expertise makes the impact of different cultures positive.

How important is the Canadian affiliate for the global network?

I would say that the Canadian affiliate probably handles a significant enough proportion of the business. In terms of its role in the operation, World Courier Canada is able to support clients locally and provide them with the same level of service they would expect in their headquarters location. Being able to use Canada as a transit point is also important.

What would you say are your strategic goals for the next five years?

In five years, I would like to see the industry, particularly regulatory bodies, include transportation and the logistics chain into its framework. There is a lot of attention being paid right now to the different parties involved in pharmaceutical research and manufacturing and so on. A little bit of attention is starting to be paid on the last mile, meaning the pharmacy and the end user. It seems like everything that happens in between is not as regulated. World Courier has gone through many efforts to become GxP-compliant. It is important for regulatory bodies to recognize that the same rigorous standards that customers apply internally should extend throughout the supply chain. If I could accomplish one thing in the next five years, it would be for Health Canada and other regulatory authorities around the world to bring transportation providers into that process and framework, and to ensure that the same standards apply in transportation as much as in manufacturing and so on.

What keeps you awake at night?

It is very personal. World Courier is setting the standard in the field, rather than following, and that comes with a sense of solidarity and pride. It is a driving and motivating force on its own. World Courier's constant innovation means that to some extent other companies are always trying to catch up. I enjoy the pressure to always stay on top, always stay ahead, and to be in a company that values that. It is extremely motivating, and that is why I have enjoyed my twelve years here enough that I would like to keep going for many more.

What is your final message to the Canadian and international pharmaceutical community?

From a logistics perspective, transportation and logistics are key elements in the pharmaceutical process. Integrating the transportation aspect further into the rest of the industry's planning for drug manufacturing and distribution is very important.

See more interviews