Interview with Alain Moureau, General Manager, World Courier

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alain-moureau-general-manager.jpg

Noel Foucart, looking into your background, we see that you have accumulated almost 3 decades of experience at World Courier. Can you tell our readers what it is that attracted you to join the company in 1986 and what defines your loyalty to the company today?

Noel Foucart (NF): World Courier was initially founded and operated as a family owned business. As such, the company was, and still is, providing highly specialized services to its clients with a strong commitment to addressing their needs while continuously adapting its offerings to those needs. It is this premium service offering that first attracted me to join the company in 1986. In other words, compared to the big integrators, World Courier is more of an ‘a la carte’ service provider that makes every effort to exceed customer expectations in terms of safe and rapid package deliveries. Furthermore, we also have extensive experience in the packaging and cold chain management fields specific to our customers’ requirements.

In addition to listening carefully to our customers’ needs and expectations, World Courier also boasts a globally integrated network that is able to exercise control over the entire supply chain. This uniquely positions us as the logistics provider of choice for industries challenged by complex supply chains and valuable shipments. More specifically, when I first came on board 26 years ago, the company had a network of 48 fully owned offices worldwide. Today this figure has grown to over 150 across 52 countries. In sum, these qualities have shaped World Courier as a personalized provider of premium value added services and I believe this to be the right approach.

Alain Moureau (AM): My motivation to join World Courier was quite similar to that of my colleague, Mr Foucart. That is, when Mr Foucart joined the company in 1986, the pharmaceutical industry formed only a small part of World Courier's business. Mr Foucart developed this business segment of the company by organizing various meetings and pharmaceutical seminars with the industry's leading organizations. In this respect, it was interesting for me to be involved in the logistics side of operations of the life sciences industry. I consider this role to be very challenging and exciting since we are always in contact with patients at a given stage of the supply chain. Hence, having always been intrigued by the pharmaceutical world, it was a personally rewarding experience to be part of a family owned business that is genuinely doing its part to help patients around the world as opposed to some of the larger integrated operators.

When did World Courier transition into the pharmaceutical business and make it its primary activity?

AM: Naturally, the transition into the life sciences business was a gradual process that happened over time. It is worth noting however that about a decade ago, World Courier in Belgium was generating about 80% of its revenues from the pharma business. Today, this figure has grown to 99%.

NF: I would say that the transition first started in the late eighties and early nineties following the adopted changes in regulations pertaining to clinical trials that internationalized the practice within Europe. As these policies were implemented, we observed the emergence of large central laboratories across the continent since the trials no longer needed to be carried out in each individual country. That was when we jumped on the train and began filling this emerging demand for sensitive shipments.

Earlier in 2012, World Courier was acquired by AmerisourceBergen as a separate business segment within the AmerisourceBergen family of companies. Can you give us an insider's view of the strategic motivations behind the acquisition and what synergies do you expect to derive from this consolidation?

NF: One of the primary reasons for the sale of World Courier was the fact that the company's founder, had been active in the industry for a very long time and was well past his retirement age. Following several months of scouring for potential buyers, AmerisourceBergen stood out as a clear candidate. Although the company is ranked 29th in fortune 500 with over $80 billion in revenues, it was primarily active in the North American markets. As the company wished to expand its operations, the obvious solution for them was to buy into these activities and World Courier proved to be the ideal candidate in many different aspects. In addition to this, since World Courier is active in the clinical trials segment, we stood to complement AmerisourceBergen's services that were more focused on the distribution of finished pharmaceutical products to pharmacists and the like.

What synergies do you expect to realize from the acquisition for either companies?

AM: As a key player in AmerisourceBergen's newly-formed Global Specialty Logistics Group, World Courier will draw on the resources, expertise and infrastructure of its parent company to drive growth and penetrate other areas of the pharmaceutical product life cycle. In turn, World Courier will also strive to introduce customers to the many exciting and complementary services offered by AmerisourceBergen.

What is the strategic importance of the Belgian market for World Couriers operations and what is its contribution to the company's regional performance?

AM: As a country with a deep history in the pharmaceutical industry, boasting some of the industry's biggest players and a strong positioning in clinical trials, Belgium is undoubtedly an important component of World Couriers business. That is, as a leading provider of premium full-service, value-added, GxP-compliant logistics services for global clinical trials, World Courier currently operates in close partnership with over 500 (bio)pharmaceutical companies – including each of the top 50 global players – as well as with all major CRO's, clinical trial suppliers and central labs. Since most of these companies have a presence in Belgium, the country plays an integral role in our business operations and is a strong contributor to our revenue stream.

As the clinical trials global supply chain continues to grow increasingly complex while being subject to more stringent regulatory and security scrutiny, what role does World Courier play in helping its clients overcome these challenges?

AM: For a company like World Courier, a premium courier service provider delivering individual transport services, it is interesting that the more stringent the regulatory requirements, the better. That is why we have made it our motto to adhere to the GxP guidelines over the last five years, representing a critical component of our success. In addition to this, we strongly believe that observing the highest regulatory and quality standards can have a significant positive impact on World Courier in the foreseeable future with regards to transporting investigational drugs, finished products and API's. This is particularly true in the pharmaceuticals industry since those products are continuously undergoing increasing levels of quality assurance and packaging requirements such as temperature controlled transportation solutions.

To put it into perspective, one area of concern in the industry today is the mastering the transportation of goods in ambient environments; whereas two decades ago the main challenge was -80 degree temperatures. That is, since the transportation chain cannot be broken at any one point, maintaining goods at ambient temperatures of 15 to 25 degrees Celsius is proving to be a challenging task, especially in none temperate environments. As a result, this is one area that we have paid close attention to and have developed a whole new battery of packaging equipment that we intend to introduce to our customers globally.

Building upon that, to what extent has World Courier been able to introduce new innovative solutions in order to provide your customers with more comprehensive solutions?

NF: To my knowledge, World Courier is the only specialized courier company that is accredited with GxP standards. In order to maintain this level of compliance, we have also employed many professionals from the pharmaceutical industry, among them quality advisors. In fact, we do so in a proactive manner, implementing the various GxP requirements well before they are enforced. Again, this is very important for us since the pharma industry is increasingly undergoing regulatory changes and we must ensure we are able to comply with these strict requirements at all times. This represents one aspect of our value added services. In other words, our clients can confide in our services since we are absolutely dedicated to maintaining the industry's highest standards and are frequently audited across our entire network.

Another unique characteristic of World Courier is that we are the only company to have invested in the construction of as many as 13 depots for clinical trial supply chain services (CTSCS) since 2005. These depots are client driven GMP-compliant investigational drug facilities with locations in Latin America, Asia Pacific, Africa and Europe continuously experiencing ongoing expansions as a result of high demand.

In your dealings with your clients, how do you ensure that you both speak and understand the 'same language'?

NF: We have access to a very strong team of pharma industry professionals that are able to serve as a bridge between us and the industry when necessary. In each of our 13 depots, for instance, World Courier has a handful of fulltime pharmacists. Furthermore, this figure is multiplied once you take into consideration AmerisourceBergen's network of professionals with a background in pharmaceuticals. In this regard, I believe our customers choose to partner with us because we take on a professional approach, using standard operating procedures with a strict quality assurance team. In this way, I believe World Courier operates in a similar manner to that of a pharmaceutical company.

AM: In addition to this, I think it's interesting that many of us at World Courier have a specific interest in the life sciences industry. Similarly, when we first meet with our customers, we first inquire about the stability of their products. The idea here is to really understand what the needs of these customers are which can vary from one customer to another. For instance, Big Pharma companies only tend to approach us for temperature controlled logistics services, while CRO's and central labs place a lot of emphasis on turnaround times in addition to temperature control.

Needless to say, the transportation of bio-pharmaceutical products is a very delicate process that involves maintaining a strict control environment and cold-chain management systems. In that respect, how do you ensure that World Couriers network consistently

meets these requirements?

AM: I believe the concept of logistics and transportation relates to risk management. It is not the case that the higher you pay, the less risk you face, with the exception of packaging equipment. As a matter of fact, high quality packaging is the best of control we can guarantee to our customers and that is why we only invest in state-of-the-art packaging. Moreover, most of the goods that we transport are observed by an electronic monitor device throughout the entire process, allowing us to verify that the product has been transported under the right conditions.

NF: World Courier delivers its specialized logistics services across the full 'life cycle' of the clinical trial process, beginning with the pre-trial coordination between biopharmaceutical companies, investigational sites, CRO's and central labs. The company then manages the scheduling, routing, cold chain, packaging, logistics and transportation of all trials materials. Once a trial is underway, World Courier assists with the regulatory and permit issues and manages the import of bulk drugs and supplies into centralized CTSCS storage depots. World Courier also proactively handles intra-country distribution from investigational drug storage depots to research sites, coordinates patient sample logistics and manages drug return and destruction procedures. What's more, every shipment for every trial is handled on an individual basis, with in-transit services such as temperature monitoring, data logging or refrigerant replenishment implemented as required.

What is the importance of technological innovation and cutting-edge IT systems as an extension of your value-added services?

NF: At World Courier, cutting-edge technology is used to support customers and staff as well as to optimize communications, minimize risk and maximize control.

For instance, Bio-STAR¬¬sm is a proprietary single-entry software application that integrates the many details associated with managing an international clinical trial and be accessed by research partners around the globe. It uses real-time technology to efficiently manage the clinical trial process from any location, helping clinical trial customers anticipate and avoid costly transport errors that can disrupt a study.

CTM-STARSM is another state-of-the-art clinical trial software application developed by World Courier that permits real-time inventory management and stock control of inventories residing in any of the company's 13 CTSCS investigational drug storage depots. With this software application, authorized users can instantly view and verify inventory, shipping schedules, original documentation and storage conditions, 24 hours a day using a live password protected internet feed. With all World Courier depots linked by CTM-STARSM, clients can switch from one protocol to another and from one depot to another, using the same program to prevent inventory mismanagement within any active clinical trial.

High quality, standards and reliability are all central themes when it comes to finding the right service providers, something that is especially true for the life sciences industry. In that regard, how does World Courier go about ensuring that it satisfies the latest quality standards, locally and internationally?

NF: With a fully GxP-compliant transport and storage supply chain system in place, World Courier meets the most demanding industry expectations for managing time- & temperature-sensitive clinical trial materials used in global studies.

Moving forward, World Courier will continue to invest in the ongoing development of its global network as driven by customer demand rather than rely on external suppliers and sub-contractors. It will also continue to support the ongoing training of staff and enhance its technology to improve the customer experience.

World Courier prides itself on its global network of over 150 company-owned offices. Bearing in mind the recent merger with AmerisourceBergen, what is World Courier's internationalization strategy?

NF: As mentioned earlier, most of the services we offer today have been to some degree client driven. That is, we are always open to customer suggestions with regards to responding to their unmet needs, as was the case with our CTSCS depots and Bio-STARSM for instance. In that regard, World Courier always has been, and will continue to be, client driven and as such, will remain open to the possibility of expanding our geographical presence or service portfolio, depending on their needs.

AM: I believe that the success of World Courier today is largely attributable to the company's client driven nature. In the UK for instance, our branch was approached by a key account that was interested in specialized temperature controlled ground transportation services. In response, World Courier acquired a company focused solely on the specialized transportation of pharmaceutical goods. This in turn led to the creation of World Courier Ground, a specialist in intra-European temperature-controlled ground transport for the pharmaceutical, biotech and healthcare industries. Interestingly, this new business unit will also allow us to penetrate a new business activity of transporting finished pharmaceutical products as well. Although this brings about great opportunities, I believe that one challenge for us will be the expansion of this ground network given the density of the pharma industry in Belgium.

In conclusion, where would you like to take the Belgian operations of World Courier over the next 3 years and what personal goals would you like to achieve?

AM: As just mentioned, one of my primary goals is to successfully develop World Courier's Ground services in Belgium. In addition to this, we have recently launched a new type of package with vacuum insulated panels, named GTC boxes, which is developing rather quickly within the pharma

market. Having launched the boxes rather recently, another one of our objectives is to gradually introduce this new technology to all the major pharmaceutical companies. Finally, we also intend to gradually expand our workforce over the foreseeable future, in order to supplement our long term growth.

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