Interview with Ulrich Eggert, Managing Director, Astellas Pharma Germany

21.09.2009

Tags: Astellas Pharma Germany

ulrich-eggert-managing-director.jpg

German market for almost two decades through Yamanouchi and Fujisawa. But since 2005 it gained a new identity thanks to the merger of the two companies. Could you describe their integration process in Germany and which were the main synergies in the local market?

The main synergies between Yamanouchi and Fujisawa were in their R&D sectors. Fujisawa was very strong in transplantation and Yamanouchi was very competent in urology. Besides, their pipeline was quite complementary making sense to merge.In the German context, the main challenge for both companies was to unify their operations under one roof, since they were based in different cities. Eventually, Munich was chosen thanks to its production plant and huge R&D center. Naturally, closing down our activities in Heidelberg from the former Yamanouchi meant partially losing valuable personnel – even though Astellas gave the opportunity for all employees to migrate to the new offices, not everyone was that flexible.The merger was also a personal challenge for me since I took over as a Yamanouchi player in a management structure that was now 99 percent Fujisawa. It was not an easy process to get the people on board. Fujisawa Germany itself was build out of Klinge Pharma, which had a very long and well-established presence in the Bavarian region. Its whole management style was different; the headquarters' functions were completely different to Yamanouchi´s. Consequently, it was a true challenge to change the management style of the people that had been working at Fujisawa for a long time.

But as you can see now, this all belongs to the past.Within four years of the merger, in 2008, Astellas Germany´s turnover passed €200 million. Which were the main growth drivers and what are your expectations for 2009?

The major drivers were the transplant and urology areas. Besides, in Germany, Astellas has a very comprehensive business including OTC products thanks to the ex-Klinge activities. Klinge was also in the pharmaceutical business such as dermatology and pneumology. Besides, Astellas is working now in the clinical area with several products to come.These numbers confirm Germany as the biggest European market for Astellas, being the biggest contributor to our sales and profits. Our outstanding results give us a very good reputation inside and outside Europe. Thanks to its importance, Astellas Germany is always in focus; whatever happens here will invariably have an impact on Astellas' operations in the rest of Europe.What is your strategy to keep growing in the German market and gain market share from the competition?Germany is a very regulated market; therefore you have to be better organized in terms of sales people and medical reps than the competition in order to succeed. For this reason, Astellas Germany has an excellent, motivated and experienced team. For instance, the company's average age is 47, meaning Astellas has the most experienced people in the market. I'm a strong believer in the education of people and I put a lot of effort and money in education because only well educated employees can do a good job. This is particularly true in a rapidly changing world where, for instance, the endeavors of a medical rep today are completely different from those he or she had only three years ago. The same is true for marketing, medical, legal and so on. To educate the people and to have the best talent in place means to have the most flexible team in order to adapt and survive in such a fast, evolving environment.A few months ago, your colleague George Laitmer explained to us

how Astellas Greece is well-established in some therapeutical areas but outside of those it is not so well-known. As a very new brand, what does Astellas's name stand for in today's German industry and where do you see room for improvement?

It is true that Astellas is very well-known in transplant and urology fields but not so much in the clinical area for instance. Once you enter a new therapeutical area, you always have to prove doctors that you are a reliable partner. Thanks to Astellas's loyal and motivated team, we will repeat the success the company had in its core areas and become the leader in the new fields Astellas is entering.This means Astellas needs to build up trust and show how reliable it is. Astellas is not just a newcomer that will soon migrate to other therapeutical areas; it will stick to those areas and run for their leadership and excellence.Even though this is a long-term goal Astellas is advancing fast in this direction and is already a reliable partner in all therapeutical areas in which it is involved. It is true that in terms of reputation building to be a Japanese company with a new name in new therapeutical areas is challenging, but thanks to the quality of our products and to the reputation of excellence built in our core therapeutical area, Astellas is already making a difference

in those new therapeutical areas and improving the lives of patients more than ever.As mentioned

Astellas has a long and well-established presence in Germany, counting on more than 400 employees. In such a competitive labor market, how did you manage to attract and retain the best talent inside the company?

Besides a competitive remuneration package and attractive bonus systems, Astellas offers its employees a good human resources package such as extensive pension plans and various other social benefits. All of this plays a decisive role in the motivation of our staff. It increases their performance and commitment towards the company, creating a win-win situation.One of Astellas´ main goals in the Vision 2015 plan is to become the employer of choice and one of the best compliments I get from other pharmaceutical companies is questions such as

how can you give such benefits?

. It is a real compliment to see that Astellas is doing things differently. It cares for its customers as much as for its employees. This is one of the reasons why Astellas won for the third year the Golden Tablet of the Urology Center.If you put all of those little pieces together you will see that Astellas is on its way – if not already there – to become the employer of choice in the German pharmaceutical market. Besides, Astellas Germany is not oversized and it’s not family owned, making it a flexible company where the management know most of the people by name. In Astellas there is a very direct communication and an open-doors policy where people really care about each other.

My main task has always been to make my people successful, this makes me successful as well.Looking towards the future, what are your main ambitions for Astellas Germany for the next five to ten years?

Astellas has several products coming up in different areas in which it is not yet very well-known for. Our main ambition is to become a global player in those areas as well; to build up a reputation in those marketplaces; to show that Astellas is really keen on top quality products in very exciting and competitive new markets, spreading Astellas’s reputation of excellence and trust to all new therapeutical areas the company is entering.As head of Astellas Germany,

what would be your final message to the readers of Pharmaceutical Executive worldwide?

Come and join us!

See more interviews