Interview: Sébastien Lucot – General Manager, Uriage, France



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Sébastien Lucot, General Manager of Uriage, explains the company's product base, their line of thermal water based products and the healing properties of Uriage water from the French Alps. Lucot expands on Uriage's growing presence in France, Europe and Asia as well as their new branding strategy to grow their product base further.

You have been in this role for about a year now and have plentiful previous experience working with dermo-cosmetic lines and brands. What have been your main goals and objectives since joining the company?

I have worked in the dermo-cosmetics field for more than 15 years, for companies like Bioderma and Nuxe. I joined Uriage last May and it has been my goal ever since to grow the company as quickly and efficiently as possible. We are working to heavily boost growth both inside and outside of France.

Our previous company culture promoted the medical science side of the business much more than the retail side of the brand. In the recent years, the point of sale became very important to the company. We have seen a huge increase in dermo-cosmetic lines heavily promoting their products and we would like to do the same so that doctors, pediatricians, and consumers understand the value and uniqueness of our Eau Thermale brand. We are working to increase our brand awareness

through more point of sale trade marketing but also when relevant through print and digital advertising; an area our company was previously hesitant to focus on. We now see that it is necessary to build awareness of Uriage's wonderful skin care brand made from water and selective products that are one-of-a-kind. Our background as experts in the medical field is an asset to our company and will help it grow immensely.

When it comes to our assets, they will remain as they are today. We have our administration, marketing, R&D and general management departments in Paris; in Uriage which is located in the French Alps, 15 minutes away from Grenoble, we have two different manufacturing and logistic sites to process the water into all of our products, as well as our Thermal Center.

Uriage offers thermal water products for daily face and body care, hygiene, anti-ageing, depigmenting and whitening, and sun care. What is the goal of your project and, of these five skincare lines, which are your current growth drivers?

The goal of our project is to focus on selling the brand itself rather than specific products. Because our products are prescribed by dermatologists and doctors, we would like our patients and consumers to understand the ultimate value of our brand, while we target our product at key segments like prescription and retail. We have a lot of technically interesting products in our pipeline which are gentle and specialized to the needs of our clients. As an SME, we need to allocate our resources to specific target segments, which for us are acne, sensitive skin and atopy.

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Uriage Thermal Water is the active ingredient in all of our products. Located in the heart of the French Alps, the Uriage Thermal Center actually began operating in 1823. The spring was recognized as a public utility center in 1867, and is today attended by more than 5,000 patients annually. The treatment is prescribed by physicians and is in fact reimbursed by the French social security. Approximately one third of the clients and patients that are treated at our center come for dermatological disorders, one third for ENT disorders, and one-third for rheumatology related issues. The majority of our patients are French and we hope that in coming years we will be able to market our therapeutic center to patients from all around the world looking for natural treatment.

How are you working to raise awareness of the strength of your Eau Thermale based products?

It is very important to talk about "Why Uriage?" and explain our history, story, and how we are different from other brands. It is important to speak about the amazing effects of our natural spring

water, our thermo-center, and the uniqueness of the water. We have the best thermal water in the world. Now we also want to become the world's best and strongest dermo-cosmetics brand. The only way we can do this is to bring awareness of the strength of our products, the story of the brand, the uniqueness of our water, and how this is incorporated into our brand. We have expertise in the thermal water at Uriage and in fact own the thermal center and spring.

We worked at the beginning of the year on a visibility campaign with the launch of the new Xemose atopic line of products that are focused primarily on excessive dryness of the skin and will target areas like acneic skin, sensitive skin and irritated skin. There are a variety of different products dedicated to different skin needs that include creams with lighter and heavier textures, products with SPF and eye contour products and serums as well as rich hydrating creams. We are positioning the entire line of our products around the thermal water. The DNA of our brand is the thermal water and this is what we want our patients to understand and that fits with our new signature "Uriage, thermal water from the French Alps". Our products are perceived very well on the retail side by pharmacists because they understand the strong story of the company and the brand.

What should the Uriage brand be synonymous with?

The thermal water in Uriage has a rich concentration of minerals and trace elements and gives patients the most hydration possible. It bursts forth at an altitude of 422m, and a temperature of 28ºC; it is collected pure and naturally rich in mineral salts and trace elements. Its composition makes it the most balanced of all Thermal Waters and it enables our products to have moisturizing, soothing and protective properties. This is the image we would like to convey. Both inside and outside of France, we also want to convey the authenticity of the brand and emphasize the origin of the water in the Alps.

How much of your business is focused in France, and what is your internationalization strategy?

France is our base and will be the window to increasing market share in other parts of the world. Approximately one third of our products are sold in France and two thirds are sold outside of France. In order to become a stronger international brand, we first need to become a stronger brand inside France.

We develop products that are developed for skin conditions and adapt our lines of products based on different skin types or needs. For example, we develop products for whitening and brightening

for our customers in Asia and develop specific products for combination skin. At the moment we are targeting the European and Asian markets.

How do you choose where to develop globally and what challenges have you faced thus far?

Focus and timing are two aspects we are analyzing at the moment regarding when and where to develop globally. The development cycle of the company at the moment is to concentrate on European and Asian markets before moving to Americas and other geographies. We certainly would like to develop our brand inside the US, but before we would be able to do so it is important for us to first establish our operations in France and also Europe.

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Last year, we reached double digit growth and the EUR 100 million (USD 112 million) revenues cap. We are currently seeing a 15 percent growth rate which is accelerating and are therefore very confident in our future. We are seeing good returns everywhere, including in Asia and Middle-East, but in the US the market is harder to penetrate as it is so consumer focused. However, we would like to enter this market in the future and I believe we can be very successful there. Other targets are countries where prescriptions are not required like Korea, as well as countries like Hong Kong where pharmacists have direct access to the patients.

Many other dermo-cosmetics companies we have met with are also present in the pure pharmaceutical business, with a dedicated division. As Uriage is primarily focused only on dermo-cosmetics, do you consider this to be a weakness?

I don’t consider this to be a weakness! We focus on the dermo-cosmetics sector and on pediatric dermo-cosmetics and will continue to do so. Uriage has its own manufacturing and R&D facilities and we dedicate half of our team to being on the field in France. This differs significantly from many of our counterparts. To create our lines, we work with dermatologists and physicians to understand their needs and the needs of patients. We are a fully integrated company that manages all manufacturing and R&D of all of our brands.

Countries such as Germany and Switzerland also have great companies in the field, such as Beiresdorf and Galderma. What would you say are France’s strengths and unique points in dermo-cosmetics?

France is a unique environment for the growth of dermo-cosmetic brands. French dermatologists have a very strong background and understanding of how important the skin is and for this reason

are open to prescribing their patients with the highest level of care and products. The French environment has fostered growth for our company and many other brands like us. Additionally, compared to the US and UK, France has significantly more dermatologists. French pharmacies and parapharmacies are also very unique in the sense they manage to balance very well technical advice to the consumer with a dynamic retail approach.

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