Interview: Roland Laudenbacher – General Manager, Honeywell Building Solutions Switzerland

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31.03.2017

Tags: Switzerland, Honeywell, Building, Construction, Service Provider, Validation

With more than 20 years of experience working with the Swiss pharmaceutical sector, general manager Roland Laudenbacher explains that Honeywell Building Solutions has developed a true specialization in projects for pharma clients, including their own in house GMP validation services.

To begin, could you please introduce Honeywell Business Solutions, and give an overview of your relationship with the pharmaceutical industry here in Switzerland?

With six offices across Switzerland, Honeywell Building Solutions designs, installs and maintains systems in large scale buildings for environmental control, heating, air conditioning, security and access control, video surveillance, and other issues. Of critical importance to the pharmaceutical industry, we are not only able to install systems according to GMP requirements in line with FDA, EMA and Swissmedic standards, but are also able to validate these systems ourselves, and thus our clients do not need to have an independent validator come in afterwards.

Honeywell has more than 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry, delivering integrated solutions and special software modules. We use our building management system – Enterprise Buildings Integrator – as the foundation for our solutions. The system is a specially-developed pharmacy module that integrates not only all the climate and condition-related systems, but also all the safety and security ones.

Given the fact that the pharmaceutical industry is very prominent in Switzerland, accounting for over five percent of Swiss GDP, a significant proportion of our business in Switzerland is with clients in the pharmaceutical and also medical devices industries. From an investment perspective, we see most of the activity in the region around Basel, but also in canton Ticino.

What are the key concerns of pharma clients versus those in other industries?

We must first differentiate between pharma manufacturing facilities and R&D facilities on one hand, and office buildings on the other. There are certainly many of all three types in Switzerland. For offices, pharma clients in general have similar needs and concerns to other industries.

For both manufacturing facilities and R&D laboratories, pharma manufacturers want top quality, proven, reliable systems that will keep the building conditions they need 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For manufacturing facilities especially, that is the ultimate concern, because if those conditions are violated – the air in manufacturing spaces becomes a few degrees too hot or cold for example – it can break the GMP manufacturing environment and they have to shut down production at immense cost. Reliability is the key concern above everything else.

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With that of course comes being GMP compliant and validated. Regulations like this are a fact of life for the pharmaceutical industry, but not seen in many other circumstances.

Due to these key concerns, we see that pharma manufacturers are quite cautious when it comes to trying new things. Some of our newer services involve energy optimization for buildings, which may not always be relevant when GMP conditions must be maintained. When looking at integrating systems and leveraging internet of things technologies, pharma clients need more information on risks and counsel for when to keep systems separate and when to integrate. That said, we have clients exploring options and starting to use our new cloud-based solutions for building management.

Looking at the several new facilities and projects that the pharma industry has planned and underway in Switzerland, what are some of the new demands or concerns you are seeing versus a few years ago?

First, I would say that Switzerland really is in many ways the ‘Silicon Valley of pharma,’ so people in all sorts of industries that provide service the pharma industry have experience with meeting the specific requirements and standards. In this sense, it’s easy to set up a new facility here because there are already so many, and thus many investors are choosing to build more facilities here

because they know everything will go smoothly. In addition to new investments, we are seeing clients invest in upgrading existing facilities by replacing old systems with more effective and energy-efficient systems.

In terms of how things are changing, we are seeing increased scrutiny on value. In the past, many customers would choose a building automation system provider because they had their systems in other facilities, and choose the preferred system regardless of the cost. Today, we see that from a technical standpoint although systems may be similar, customers are seeking to keep a certain level of competition between providers on price, and thus we must focus on the value of our quality, reliability, and service provision.

Aside from cost, what are the key factors that clients look at during a tender process for a building automation systems provider?

Clients need to know with certainty that you can deliver what you agree to and without any issues. This means you need more than good hardware, but a team with the right know-how. At Honeywell, we do extensive training with our pharma project teams. Not just any employee can be used on these projects, it takes the right mindset and attention to detail to do things right the first time – sure you can correct any issues you find during the validation process, but this costs both time and money.

Second, pharma clients want to see that you have maintenance teams based locally that can respond quickly if there are any issues. While we can maintain systems by connecting to them remotely, with the unique aspects of pharma manufacturing and R&D facilities, we cannot and don’t work remotely. We pride ourselves in being able to have someone onsite within a short period of time.

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Being able to offer this whole package – high quality systems, strong references and experience teams, and attractive service proposition at a competitive price – is the key to winning these contracts.

There are several vendors of high quality building automation systems. What makes Honeywell the partner of choice for clients in the pharmaceutical industry?

At Honeywell, we go a step further than many of our competitors by having teams dedicated to pharma projects and our own in-house validation capabilities. For example, with the specially-developed pharmacy module in our building management system, all the underlying systems are

easily managed through the use of a number of management and alarm workstations and web interfaces. We have experience and a track record of success with projects for pharma clients with a strong focus and dedication to this industry.

This isn’t just in Switzerland, as the pharma industry is a focus for the Honeywell organization. We are firmly committed to delivering the highest quality service to clients in the pharmaceutical sector.

To wrap up, what will be your priorities for Honeywell Building Solutions Switzerland over the next few years?

We know our clients are facing budget pressures in their businesses and paying more attention to detail to expenses. As such, it is important that we focus on continually improving our own efficiency. Ultimately, this means further increasing our focus on the pharma sector, running continuous training programs for the employees, and ensuring that we can do our work with GMP quality the first-time every-time, so that we can validate systems smoothly. The smoother our teams run, the better for both us and our clients.

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