Interview: Gent Hoxha – Founder & CEO, Aspelab, Mexico



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Gent Hoxha, founder and CEO of lab equipment specialist Aspelab, explains the company's growth strategy in Mexico, the intricacies of the Mexican medtech market, and how Aspelab's solutions enhance both the quality of life of patients and the efficiency of laboratories.

Could you please introduce our international audience to the key activities and operations of Aspelab?

We started Aspelab with two partners and me in 1995 to provide high quality laboratory equipment with a strong focus on scientific research, quality control and pathology labs. Our company is positioned as a leader in lab instruments and our solutions strongly enhance the efficiency in the labs while increasing the accuracy of the results. Expanding on our portfolio, our equipment is sorted out in four major business divisions: forensic, academia and research, clinical, and industry. We are currently headquartered in Guadalajara with offices in Mexico City, Monterrey, Merida and Celaya as well as sales executives to support our operations throughout the rest of the country. Aspelab has a matrix organizational structure with field managers in each office and division managers in each segment that we are stepping into in order to ensure the success in our business decisions.

What have been the main accomplishments of the company during the last five years?

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We have enjoyed a steady growth since the inception of Aspelab. We started as three people and

currently we have more than 130 employees that serve our customers with the highest level of quality. Aspelab was mainly focused on offering laboratory equipment solutions for research and academia; however, we have been able to identify the market trends to adapt our offering according to the current industry needs. These factors coupled with our longstanding history have positioned Aspelab as the partner of choice for laboratory equipment in Mexico.

Aspelab serves different markets, such as education, automotive, healthcare and others. How strategically important is the healthcare market within your entire business?

The healthcare and life sciences division, which includes clinical and research solutions, has been our traditional business line. However, in the last 10 years, the healthcare market has gained in relevance, due to growth of investments in public and private sector.

Nevertheless, every market that we are currently stepping into has a strategic relevance, such as pharma, automotive and aerospace.

What has been your strategy to ensure the success of Aspelab considering that Mexico is a quite dynamic and challenging market with highly fragmented public health institutions?

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Our strategy has always been based on offering high quality laboratory equipment to our clients fully tailored to their needs. Our objective is to offer an integral solution including training, service and support to the healthcare professionals, focusing to pathologist, patient flow and patient impact, which finally enhance the patients' life quality.

What has been the biggest challenge in your operations?

Our mission is to standardize the end-to-end processes in the histopathology labs implementing the best practices while deploying the best solutions. Indeed, it has been highly challenging due to the dynamism of the industry and the number of processes that are present in the labs. However, we have strong expertise in this area and we are currently introducing cutting edge solutions such as immunohistochemistry instruments, digital pathology and molecular biology, that will help the physicians to detect important pathologies such as oncology.

Aspelab divides its operations into four main business divisions: clinical, industrial, research and academia, and forensic. What is the breakdown of revenues per business line and where do you foresee more growth?

As aforesaid, healthcare division (clinical and research and academia) is our traditional segment and it represents approximately 70 percent of our revenues. Notwithstanding, we have perceived strong growth from other divisions such as forensic, which used to be USD 500,000 and now it is up to five million dollars. We always focused on identifying the industry trends in all the different

segments that Aspelab is targeting in order to ensure that we are fulfilling the market needs and taking advantage of such opportunities.

Expanding on your healthcare and life sciences solutions, what is your footprint in the public and private market?

70 percent of our healthcare business is in the public market and Aspelab enjoys strong footprint in the national public institutions such as IMSS, ISSSTE and others. Indeed, Aspelab has an important of market share in pathology labs. We have perceived that private hospitals are experiencing interesting growth in our business as they are looking for new technologies that will improve their efficacy and efficiency ratios in the labs.

In addition, we are just starting to commercialize immunohistochemistry solutions for cancer detection; it is one of my main objectives and I expect to reinforce our leading position in both the public and private market since such solution targets are one of the main challenges of the national health system. Our role here is to help the government and the private market to advance towards prevention and early diagnosis practices in order to minimize the cost of treatment as well as to enhance the life quality of the patients.

When we met with Mikel Arriola, he told us that one of his main objectives is to ensure the financial sustainability of the IMSS, which is quite challenging considering that the government does not have enough resources to treat the national patients' needs. However, the cost of treatment could be minimized through fostering prevention and early diagnosis practices. As Aspelab's business is focused in preventive and early diagnosis, could you expand on how are you helping the government to overcome such challenge as well as enhance the quality of life of the patients enlarging the market access to such health solutions?

Aspelab has presented a plan to the public market to implement technologies that will help the national health system to advance towards preventions and early diagnosis. The entire health system is fully aware about the benefits that could come from such type of solutions but there are some financial challenges in its deployment as a consequence of the current budget shortage in the public institutions. In this sense, Aspelab is defining and designing specific plans with financial forecasting in order to help the public health institutions to overcome such challenge as well as enhance the patients' market access to our sustainable, cost attractive health solutions. I strongly believe in public and private partnerships (PPPs) in order to enhance the entire national health system helping the government to reach as many patients as possible.

Technology is breaking health boundaries through digitalization and telepathology in the equipment industry. As one of the leading companies in your niche, what are your conclusions on that?

It is a fact that technological improvement is important for both hospitals and patients. Digital pathology has two important impacts since it helps healthcare professionals to provide better and faster diagnosis while also permitting remote diagnosis, which is a breakthrough in a country like Mexico where the population has sometimes limited access to points of care. Furthermore, telepathology is used to get second or third opinions from other national or international healthcare professionals to ensure the best treatment to the patient depending on the situation.

How is Aspelab partnering with international companies in order to ensure that your portfolio remains at the forefront of the latest technological developments as well as the Mexican needs?

We are partnering mostly with Leica Biosystems, which is headquartered in Germany and also collaborates with other companies from different countries such as UK, Spain and the US. I am proud to confirm that we share the same vision with our partner; I would like to use the words of Leica Biosystems Latin America Manager, Rodrigo Cervantes: “The mission of Leica Biosystems is advancing cancer diagnostics in order to improve the quality of patients’ lives. We try to implement our vision on how cancer diagnostics must be in the near future: enable patients to get their diagnostics within 24 hours from biopsy. The advantages of this are multiple such as decrease the wait to receive critical information and start being treated sooner. This can be achieved by aligning and integrating the workflow to enable same day diagnostics and with the support of a company that provides presence on every step of this workflow this future vision can be achieved.”

We are also the best partner for them since Aspelab has strong local market knowledge to identify the market trends as well as the international network to select the company that offers the best solution fitting those needs.

In this sense, we organize shows, exhibitions, congresses and our own showrooms to put together supply and demand; in fact, we sometimes invite national and international key opinion leaders to such type of events in order to showcase the benefits that can be obtained through our solutions. It is worth to mention that Aspelab invests around USD 150,000 annually in such type of events and medical education.

What are the key objectives that you would like to achieve in the upcoming three years?

Firstly, one of my main objectives as CEO of Aspelab is to ensure the proper development of an integral solution for histopathology laboratories to standardize and optimize every process. Secondly, after obtaining ISO 17025 to our service company, we are in the final stage of obtaining ISO 9001 to have an international quality certification. Finally, we have just recently invested USD 500,000 in a new facility, which will obtain almost 80% needs of energy form solar pannels and want to position Aspelab as a “Best place to work” company while being environmental friendly in our operations.

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