Francisco Coll – CEO, Quinton, Spain

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Francisco Coll, CEO of Quinton, explains the background behind the company's seawater therapies and how they are expanding this originally French brand internationally. Coll also sheds light on his strategy to leverage social media in order to market and distribute Quinton's leading products.

What is the footprint of Quinton?

The company is 120 years old and was founded by the French biologist Rene Quinton. We began as the distributor of the Quinton products in Spain in the early 1990s. Within a few months, we decided to purchase the company and move the headquarters from France to Spain. Today we have 50 employees in Spain and altogether operate across 40 countries. We are currently growing at 20 percent and have revenues in the region of EUR 6 million.

There is an important clinical background behind the company. Our products have been used in France for more than 80 years and were reimbursed by the French Social Security. In the 80s, the lab encountered a number of problems, but today we are seeing a rebound from those difficult times.

In the beginning, we tried to demonstrate how seawater can help in healthcare. The mechanism of action has not been fully identified, but we are working with different universities to find this. We demonstrated that Quinton's solutions have a very powerful effect on the human system. These are the key aims for the lab

We do not use any old seawater. There is currently a trend around seawater that is spreading falsehoods. You can go to the beach and apply some seawater, but it does not work like that. The seawater must be collected from special points in the ocean where there is a lot of phytoplankton, where the marine food chain begins. Because of this marine food chain, we can show that all of the minerals are present around these points and are available for the rest of the food chain. When the seawater is collected from these points, you can find 78 minerals. These minerals are also in the correct proportions required by the body. This was a famous demonstration by Rene Quinton in 1897.

Tell us about the leading products in your portfolio

Our main products are isotonics and hypertonics. They are ampoules and are a food supplement. While the market for seawater is very large, particularly in the field of nasal sprays, the market for drinkable products is much less competitive, but is growing fast, and we have carved out a niche for ourselves. These two products constitute 85 percent of our revenues. They are very well known in both Spain and in France. However, we are now in China, Japan, and the USA, where it is very easy to reach new clients.

With food supplements, especially in the past in France, it is difficult to claim any indications. Conversely, it is only possible to claim what FSA says about the minerals, for example with Quinton hypertonic, claims can only be made about the chloride, so it will only be for digestive problems. However, when you read Vidal [a French medical book gathering summaries of the product characteristics of drugs and some food supplements for the advanced clinical studies of pharmaceutical companies – Ed.], it is possible to find more than ten indications for Quinton isotonic and Quinton hypertonic. What we try to do is to demonstrate why a product such as isotonic works and that is usually because it will moderate your immune system. It was shown at the University of Alicante, that if white blood cells are put into this seawater, the white cells can have their lifespan extended. Consequently, there is a direct effect on your immune system.

We entered the sports market because when you are practicing a sport, you perspire and lose a lot of minerals. This means that you can replace them quickly and it becomes easy to understand the mechanism for the product in the area of sport. We have global outlets using the brand Totum sport, used by the likes of Raphael Nadal, and players in the NBA, and NFL, and football teams in Spain, France and the UK. We have also published an article in Opthalmologia, where we demonstrate the use of isotonic seawater as a better eye drop than any other product that can be

found on the market. We are selling this product in China to reduce the symptoms of dry eyes in highly polluted cities.

We are conducting research to create new indications for seawater therapies. For example, we have a new product for skin creating atopic dermatitis. Each time we can demonstrate a new indication we can launch a new product.

How do you reach your clients?

In each country we have a different method. In Spain we go through medical reps, where the patient will collect the product from the pharmacy. In France, we go directly to the pharmacy. In the USA and Japan. we can go directly to the doctors as the doctors are allowed to sell. In China, we go through social media. In Malaysia we have a contact that is working with an MLM company, and this is proving successful too. As can be seen, we customize our approach to the market dynamics.

For the last 10 years, we have been approached by partners overseas wanting us to introduce our products to their markets. There are many doctors teaching about Quinton all over the world, such as in South America, North America, and Asia. Consequently, we have received many distributional deals to make our products available globally. In the past few years we have changed some of our distributors, trying to find partners who work better with our company, our product, and our offering.

What we found in China is that consumers are ever more using social media to purchase their products, and this is becoming the most optimal platform for marketing. In China you have more than 200 platforms where we can sell our products online, which has such enormous reach. I believe this is the future worldwide and will reduce the supply chain. After all, there is no inherent reason why we should go through the pharmacies. We will be one of the first doing this in Spain when we launch on such e-commerce platforms next year.

What are some of the main challenges that you faced when internationalising?

Often, we find that our partners can display too much enthusiasm for the product. Such a product can invoke a lot of passion, so it is important to ensure that the partners have the capabilities and not just the excitement. Consequently, it can be difficult to find the correct profile amongst distributors internationally who sufficiently know the markets to be able to sell our products

efficiently.

Tell us more about the work of the Quinton Foundation?

The goal of the foundation is to raise the profile of marine therapy. We run a lot of seminars around the world and sponsor medical events. However, the main goal is to promote research into marine therapy. Anyone who wants to present their work in this area, regardless of the country or event, can contact the foundation who will help to organise this.

What are your future ambitions for Quinton?

We are working on the strategic plan for the company the next three years. We want to go faster than the last 20 years and double the size of the couple in the next three years. Now the size of the company is perfect for this expansion and can act as a launchpad.

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