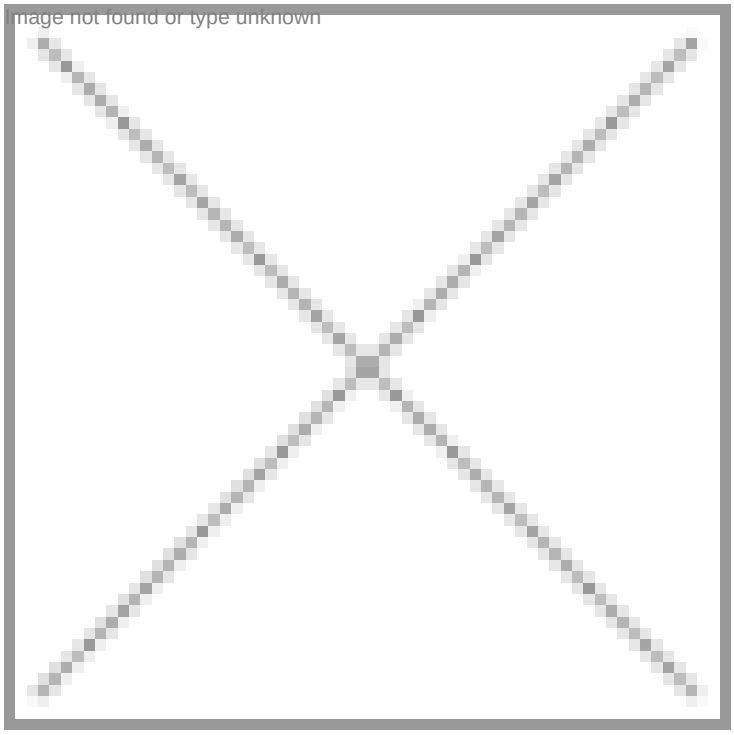
BioSpectrum
the business of | Bio & Health Sciences

"Our facility for manufacturing specialized enzymes and proteins, used in research, would be fully operational by December 2007"

06 August 2007 | News



"Our facility for manufacturing specialized enzymes and proteins, used in research, would be fully operational by December 2007"

-Rajeev Soni, president and COO, PREMAS Biotech Pvt Ltd

Dr Rajeev Soni, who has over 15 years of varied and in-depth experience in the biotechnology sector, has been instrumental in setting up several laboratories in the US, UK and India including the molecular biology facility at Naval Research Lab in Washington DC. Dr Soni is now on a mission to make PREMAS Biotech a leading integrated drug-discovery solutions company. He shares with BioSpectrum some of the plans of PREMAS.

PREMAS Biotech was set up in November 2005 to provide integrated drug discovery solutions to the pharma and biotech organizations?
In the past 20 months, how has PREMAS evolved and what are some of its key achievements?

PREMAS Biotech was incorporated in November 2005 and, subsequently, it took nearly 16 months to set up the laboratories in Manesar, one of the most structured and well managed industrial towns of Haryana. The laboratories became ready for operation in March 2007. Some of the key achievements include setting up state-of-the-art laboratories for research in molecular biology and biotechnology with requisite support facilities; filing of provisional patents for applied research technologies such as diagnostic technology for infectious diseases and proprietary vectors for protein expression in bacterial, yeast and mammalian cells; hiring of scientific personnel and securing contracts from companies of national and international repute.

What are some of your future plans?

The plan is to be a partner of choice in providing drug discovery solutions to pharma companies, biotech companies, universities and research institutes. PREMAS Biotech's focus area is to become the leader in providing customized and innovative high quality research services and products.

You also have plans to manufacture specialized proteins and enzymes. How is PREMAS Biotech progressing on this front?

The facility for the manufacture of these specialized enzymes for research purposes would be fully operational by December 2007. We will have the capabilities to produce enzymes and proteins up to the scale of 1500 liters for research purposes only. The facility would be available for contract manufacturing for companies interested to produce proteins required for drug discovery research.

You have also another important project, Applied Research for Technology Transfer (ARTT), in the pipeline. Could you share with us some of the developments on this project?

ARTT is focused on several areas:

Molecular diagnostics: Provisional patent has been filed and proof of concept demonstrated for the technology. Currently, we are performing experiments to increase the scope of the technology.

Proprietary vectors: With the increasing emphasis on the development of novel bio-therapeutics in the global biotech industry, there is a need for the availability of multi-functional/multi-cassette vectors for rapid and directed cloning, integration, expression of proteins and assay development in various systems such as bacterial, yeast and mammalian cells. We have identified this as a focus area and are in the process of developing in excess of 60 such vectors for the above mentioned activities.

Novel Bio-therapeutics: The goal here is to identify, validate and provide proof of concept for novel bio-therapeutics from bio-resources and then transfer the technology to a pharma/biotech company who can take this forward and develop the required drug. Currently, we are in the process of identifying potential bio-resources to isolate proteins that can act as therapeutics. The areas of interest entirely depends upon the requirements of our partnering pharma/biotech company to provide this technology transfer. We do not intend to have a conflict of interest with our customers by coming out with our own drug, be it a small molecule or a protein.

What is the quantum of investments that have gone into the company so far and how did you raise your funds? Do you intend to raise further funds and how do you plan to raise the funds?

We have already invested to a tune of $6 million. The funding is from a UK-based investment firm and is adequate at the moment.

What have been your revenues in 2006-07 and what is your expectation by2010? Is it the services or products that account for the largest share of your income?

As I mentioned earlier that we have started the operation in the month of March 2007, we are currently in the process of serving four customers for drug discovery services and products. We have a robust growth plan for both services and products and intend to reach significant revenues by 2010.

Could you tell us more about your product development and manufacturing strategies?

The product development is in the area on innovative research solutions as mentioned above. The manufacturing strategy is for the production of specialized enzymes and membrane proteins. In addition, the facility would be available to our customers for contract manufacturing of research products for drug discovery.

Today, every biotech company starts as a global organization. What are your global plans and expansion strategy?

Being an internationally funded company with strong international networking, and being one of India's EOU's for both manufacturing and services, we have a mandate to focus on the global biotech industry.

How many people does PREMAS Biotech have today? And how difficult is it to find people and train the workforce?

We currently have 25 people on board with most of them having both national and international experience. It has been challenging to find the personnel with appropriate expertise and risk taking ability to join a start up organization. We have been fortunate to have a talented group of scientists on board who have decided to walk the path with us on this exciting journey. The learning and experience has been extraordinary and fascinating.

What are the current challenges that are effecting your growth and what are some of the steps that the government or industry can collectively take to address these challenges?

One of the challenges is the talent gap that exists to deliver innovative, highly demanding research solutions. The government is already doing an astonishing job in encouraging industry-academia collaborations.