

Phenomenex India looks forward to strong customer service

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In its third year of business in India, Phenomenex India is continuing to expand on its original position for moving directly into the Indian market, namely unparalleled customer service and support. To that end, Phenomenex has strived to hire the astute and technically trained application specialists in the industry.

In an interview to Raj Gunashekar, Nicholas (Nick) Mitchell, Managing Director, Phenomenex India Private Ltd, Hyderabad, outlines the plans of the company and market opportunities.

What are the current market trends for separation science industries in India?

The current market trends in India's separation science market are incredibly competitive. With the recent significant decline in the rupee (and a two year trend of the same since 2011), all of the major import suppliers are facing similar issues with regard to ever-eroding margins. Although quick advances in market share might seem appealing to some of the smaller players, it is the responsibility of the MNC Life Science suppliers, domestic distributors, and our good customers in India to help maintain a strong value for our high technology products and resources we employ to support them. Our customers in the Indian market must continue to recognize that in order to provide the newest advances in separation science to the Indian market; customers must be willing to make the investment for these solutions to their most challenging separations.

The alternative can lead to disastrous consequences for the export-oriented Indian firms capturing global market share. If the quality of these products comes into question because of the lack of validation of proper testing platforms provided by internationally recognized MNC's in the Life Science market, a key segment of the Indian export economy could be at risk.

How do you see Korea as an emerging market for Phenomenex? Which are the other global territories that Phenomenex is willing to explore, invest and establish?

Phenomenex's business is increasing throughout the Asia Pacific region. Strong distribution relationships coupled with the addition of the Phenomenex India office to contribute local support (resources for technical and product related inquiries) are strengthening our footprint throughout the region. Brazil, Russia, and China are, of course, three other countries showing significant growth.

What are the expansion plans charted out by Phenomenex? How is Phenomenex planning to expand within the Indian sub-continent?

As Phenomenex India prepares to enter Q3 of our third year in business here in India, we are continuing to expand on our original position for moving direct into the Indian market, namely unparalleled customer service and support. To that end, we have strived to hire the most astute and technically trained application specialists in our industry.

Further, we have promoted technical seminars throughout all of the major markets in India, and within the last year we have given technical presentations in some of the smaller Tier Three cities, where attendance at hotel seminars has been fantastic. Compliment these technical seminars with on-site demonstrations, where our trained scientists actually stand side-by-side with our customers during their challenging method development activities and help them to implement our latest technologies, and the awareness to this new level of support is clearly beginning to be recognized by our customers.

Further to these initial advances, we now have our sights set on satisfying some of the more recently emerging market segments, namely food and beverage (safety and quality), environmental, and energy (mainly petrochemical and other Gas Chromatography [GC] related application markets).

Who are your competitors and how do you manage to handle fierce competition in the Indian market?

Our major competitors in India are primarily the same as those we compete with throughout the rest of the world, namely Waters Corporation and Agilent Technologies. Additional competition in the market comes from a few of the European and Japanese firms that used to hold reasonable market shares in the western world ten to fifteen years ago, and at that time put more focus on capturing market share in the developing Asian laboratories.

At the same time (late 1990s and early 2000), Phenomenex put an incredible amount of our resources into research and development, and for the past five years we are truly seeing the fruits of our investments.

In both the mature markets of the west, as well as those in the emerging Asian region, our "first in class" products are gaining incredible momentum. Since 2006, Phenomenex has won no less than seven "R&D 100 Awards" for new and innovative products (across all major product lines; namely Liquid Chromatography, Gas Chromatography, and Solid Phase Extraction) and these new advances coupled with our unparalleled customer support are helping the organization reaffirm our position as the global leader in separation science consumables.

What kind of growth do you see for your industry in the middle of a recession hit market?

There is no doubt that the global recession has affected all of us in the life sciences arena-and Phenomenex is no exception. However, because of our corporate culture, we were well prepared for these tough times as far back as 2008, when our senior leadership predicted these market changes and prepared us for the coming storm.

As macro-economic pressures have decreased business in the west, we have realigned some of our European offices to be even more productive and cost-conscious than ever before.

Our corporate officials have learned from our European expansions of the late 1990s and through 2010, and we are building on this knowledge-base for the most efficient and practical advances into the Asian markets. Conscientious spending, cost control, and accurate return on investment predictions are critical components to each and every investment we consider today.

What are your latest innovations and product creations? Any new patents filed/received?

Although the product line is now reaching approximately five years since inception, our Kinetex Core Shell Technology UHPLC columns are still introducing new phases across an entire range of particle sizes, from the smallest and most efficient particle in the market (1.3 micron) to the incredibly popular and widely used (5 micron) offering, this newest LC column

technology is gaining traction faster across the globe than any we've ever seen.

Some of the other products that are also gaining acceptance in the bio-separation market are our Aeris and Yarra HPLC column lines, and our Phree Phospholipid Removal Products in the solid phase extraction category.

Recently, the FDA's new guidelines on conducting clinical trials emphasizes that FDA now will not insist on 100% on-site inspection of clinical trials by sponsors. FDA has said that inspection needs to be done only in sites where there is potential risk of data manipulation. What is your opinion on this? Please elaborate.

Phenomenex is tracking the FDA's guidelines put forth toward our customers in the clinical trials arena very carefully to assure our customers the full support we can afford as it relates to supporting the use of our product technologies.

As an ISO-9000 certified organization, Phenomenex clearly recognizes that changes in compliance are a regular part of doing business globally. Our teams of Quality Control and Quality Assurance professionals in Torrance, California, have proven that self-analysis and internal inspection afford continuous improvement of the organization.

Are there any advantages to the above new guidelines of FDA? Explain.

These guidelines will ensure a level of quality across the industry that will necessarily weed out any companies that are not committed to the highest levels of quality throughout the drug development and approval process. As Phenomenex is naturally aligned to doing business in this way, it sets the stage for easy acceptance of new regulations, and it positions us to help our customers that are interested in a similar end-game.

What are your major current areas of investments?

Phenomenex's major investments are in expanding research and development activities, increasing production capacity for some of our high-value medias, and further advancing column packing techniques and other novel formats for these unique medias. We also continue to invest in Phenologix, a method development services group introduced to offer solutions to our customers' most challenging separation science applications.

And, we continue to make big investments into further refining the customer experience. Specifically, we have committed a tremendous amount of capital and resources to the Phenomenex website and other e-platforms which will allow customers to streamline their interactions and enjoy the best possible customer experience our industry has to offer.

Can you elaborate on the profits achieved by Phenomenex in the Indian market in 2013 so far?

Phenomenex India is here for the long journey ahead with our customers in the Indian market. We have made significant investments in formalizing our Indian operations, and we are still in the early steps of the journey.

That being said, we are hopeful that those that are responsible for the continued growth of the Indian economy do not lose sight of the global market beyond our borders and begin to take the necessary steps to improve the domestic economic conditions to make India a nation of choice for continued pharmaceutical and biotechnology innovation.

Strengthening of the rupee, more open-mindedness toward global collaboration, and a renewed effort to reach international consensus on intellectual property issues will all help India to keep its place among the most rapidly expanding nations in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and life science sectors.

What is Phenomenex looking forward to by the end of this year?

Phenomenex India looks forward to celebrating another strong year of strong customer service and support leading to increased business development within the Indian market. We look forward to meeting with our loyal customers at both the Analytica Anacon India in Mumbai in November and at the Indian Pharmaceutical Congress in Delhi in December, and we look forward to establishing new relationships with customers that are just getting to know us for the first time.