

'We've the best outlook for China'

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-Albert Liou, Chairman & CEO, Apex International

Earlier this year, Apex was listed on the Emerging Stock Market in Taiwan. The company headed by Albert Liou assists more than 150 pharmaceutical, biotech and medical device companies worldwide. In an interview with BioSpectrum, Albert Liou, Chairman and CEO, Apex International Clinical Research, elaborates on how the company is meeting the key challenges in the CRO business.

Apex assists more than 150 pharmaceutical, biotech and medical device companies worldwide. How does the company handle all the clients?

Just within Apex, we cover 12 countries with 350 employees, and this means that within this region there are more than 10 different official languages and more than 50 different dialects spoken within the Apex team. Apex in itself is very appreciative of culture diversity, culture recognition, and understanding of different perspectives. Therefore, as we serve all our clients worldwide, we apply the same attitude. There is always a common goal between the client and us, i.e., the timeliness, quality, and cost-effectiveness of clinical research. As we keep these three priorities in mind, we are able to satisfy our client's needs.

In addition, even though we appreciate the cultural differences, we do keep a very standard set of operating procedures in place. For example, for project management, we keep 16 plans in place to allow our project managers to maintain everything

in place and on time. Plus, we focus on planning and strategy setting. We can take IND submission as an example, for every specific project, we would develop a unique regulatory strategy and planning to ensure we can smoothly implement the trial in Asia Pacific.

Furthermore, we also proactively provide solutions to our clients based on our local know-how, experience, and expertise in this region. Lastly, it is truly important to remain in close communication with our clients, and the information must be transparent and easy to understand. By sticking to the above points, we can definitely offer good quality services to any clients worldwide.

What according to Apex is the most competitive location for conducting clinical trials in APAC?

Each country has its strengths and limitations in conducting clinical trials, and it definitely requires extensive knowledge of the requirements from the product development side and what the country can offer. For example, not all countries share the same standard medical practice or national medical insurance policies; these factors may well impact the selection of countries to participate in a global trial. Having said that, we still have the best outlook for China. According to IMS, China will become one of the top five pharmaceutical markets in the world due to its forecast pharmaceutical growth in the next three to four years. Therefore, many pharmaceutical companies will aim for that market and continue to develop products there.

How challenging is the CRO business and what is Apex doing to meet those challenges?

The key challenge for any CRO is primarily the resources issue. It is essential to have the expertise and professionals within the organization to deliver excellent service to our clients. Apex deploys many different strategies in building the team. For example, since 2006, Apex established a CRA training academy. For each tier, Apex selects from over 300 resumes to pick out the most suitable candidates, based on their related background trainings. We require them to go through English proficiency test, intense interviews, and orientations to ensure we pick the best ones in the group. We then train them with three-week in-class training with assessment examinations and then take the trainees to go through a mentoring program for another three months before they can formally graduate from the academy. Basically, it is the first and only program, which provides solid training for the CRAs. We have many requests from pharmaceutical companies asking us to train their staff for them. This is only one of the few programs, which we establish within Apex to overcome the challenges we face.

Hasthana Rajappa