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Spotlight - A company of substance

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In a rapidly growing Indian pharmaceutical and lifesciences market, TCG Lifesciences has carved a niche for itself with its innovative, flexible and integrated solutions. *Sushmi Dey* explores.

TCG Lifesciences is not just a clinical research organisation but a full-fledged one-stop shop that caters to all needs of global pharmaceutical majors. The company is poised to leverage upon opportunities available in the Indian pharma industry and meet the challenges to save lives. But it is not just a company that works to save lives but also a partner to many pharma companies which save lives. The company derives its energy from its logo which is a positive connotation to life. The logo of the company is derived from the Egyptian symbol of an ankh—a symbol of generation or enduring life.

#### Inception

TCG Lifesciences was set up by Dr Purnendu Chatterjee as part of The Chatterjee Group. While India just started tasting liberalisation and proved its expertise in providing innovative solutions for servicing the IT sector, Dr Chatterjee, an investor at heart, thought of investing in areas that will prove to be the growth drivers of economy in future.

During the 1990s, when India had already established itself as a crucial component in the growth engine of the service industry and set the stage for other knowledge based services, the global pharma/biotech industry was beginning to feel the pressures relating to high R&D investment in drug discovery. "Coupled with lack of productive drug pipeline, companies abroad were looking for ways to lower costs and enhance efficiencies," recalls Swapan Bhattacharya, CEO and Head, TCGLS.

According to Bhattacharya, this was the time when TCGLS was conceptualised. "The entire lifesciences industry in India was itself at an inception point. There were no globally established benchmarked players and the Indian product patent regime had not been enacted by the Parliament," he says. In such an environment it was quite challenging for the company to make a mark.

#### Bottlenecks

The biggest challenge for the company was to attract the right kind of scientific talent to India, one that was backed by several years of potent international experience. "Also, unlike the IT industry, the lifesciences services industry required high initial capital outlay," informs a company official. But the company took all the challenges in its stride. While the company started looking for projects, before taking a plunge into the industry, it spent almost two years to evaluate the

global market scenario and study the emerging market trends. "A core team of internationally trained personnel was also brought on-board to help the organisation in its pre-marketing efforts. It ultimately enabled us to secure initial contracts even before the facility was fully functional," remarks Bhattacharya. The three strategies which initially worked for the company were attracting the right people, retaining them and building the infrastructure. "We attracted and retained our clients with the amount of transparency we had in our system. The building of trust was very important and crucial to the business," asserts a company source.

## Business

TCGLS initiated its operations in India in 2001. The company identified the potential and the business opportunities available in the Indian lifesciences' market and hence, to capitalise on these opportunities, it soon organised its business into four specialised operating units—Chembiotek Research International, Clin-Invent Research, SilicoGene Informatics and The Centre for Genomic Applications. The company started its work in the country with chemistry capabilities servicing customers in USA and Europe. Initially, it used to undertake only custom synthesis projects. Within a year, the company added medicinal and combinatorial chemistry capabilities and soon in 2002 it became the first company in India with medium to high throughput combinatorial library synthesis capabilities.

Moving on a fast track, the company also developed molecular modelling and molecular biology capabilities which in turn helped the company to undertake more value-added and high end assignments for its customers. In 2003, the emerging opportunities in drug development space in India grabbed the company's attention and hence, Clininvent Research—a clinical trial management company was born. It proved to be a good step for the company. It was elemental in leveraging the company's existing sales and marketing efforts to offer comprehensive drug discovery and development services platform to its clients. The company in the same year also established SilicoGene Informatics to explore product development and services opportunities for computational and IT applications in the lifesciences sector.

In 2004, The Centre for Genomic Applications (TCGA) was set up as a public private partnership between TCGLS and the Government of India. The centre was set up to address the needs of a large number of commercial and academic research institutions, for commercial scale genomics and proteomics services. According to company officials, the project focused organisational structure helps the company to use their experienced leadership and management expertise in order to grow. The company believes that the Indian pharmaceutical and lifesciences market is rapidly growing and evolving. The company has designed several innovative, flexible and integrated solutions to encompass major segments of these domains.

## Services

The company aims to become a preferred outsourcing partner for global pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies by providing integrated R&D services. The company has, therefore, built a wide array of capabilities across key segments of drug discovery and development cycle which are unmatched by other CROs. Interestingly, TCGLS provides all the services to its clients. The company asserts that it is self-sufficient and hence, does not outsource but does everything

in house. This special feature of the company attracts more clients to it. This, in turn, helps the company to build strong strategic partnerships and gives a competitive advantage over the existing players in the domain. However, the company ensures that all its operations are managed by independent teams. This enables the company to test specific domains against the best in the market and hence, constantly upgrade them to maintain international quality standards and protocols.

## Expansions

TCGLS commenced its chemistry operations in Kolkata. Chembiotek has been the first endeavour of the company. After that, there was no looking back. Today, it is a premier research outsourcing services' company and is also in the process of adding new capabilities. While the company's research activities are focused on synthesis of new and improved chemical entities for its customers, to handle scale up work and supply of GMP, the company is planning to set up a new unit in close proximity. "We are more than doubling our capacity (infrastructure and scientific manpower) in Kolkata," tells Bhattacharya.

Besides, TCGLS took another initiative to launch the IBP at Pune to hand hold pharmacos under one roof. According to company officials, this was in line with the upsurge of many pharma companies in Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. Agrees Bhattacharya, "The changing dynamics of the pharma/biotech industry and an expanding client base has given rise to a compelling need to enhance our scientific strength and infrastructure. To meet this need and to increase our footprint across the country, Chembiotek has commenced operations from our second state-of-the-art facility at the IBP at Pune," he said. Apart from the organic growth, TCGLS is adding pre-clinical and animal toxicology service capabilities to be able to progress drug candidates to IND filing stage.

According to Bhattacharya, the company has plans to build a state-of-the-art animal facility in Pune, but it is also initiating pilot efforts for the same in Kolkata and Pune. While he refused to disclose the identity but said that the company has also joined hands with a GLP compliant toxicology partner in India.

At the other end of the spectrum, plans for the first phase of a cGMP facility in Pune are also taking shape. Thus, TCGLS is on the verge of establishing end-to-end capabilities across the drug development value chain. Company sources assert that it has all the key ingredients required to consolidate its position in the drug discovery services space. The company is fully equipped with molecular biology facility and offers services in computational biophysics, molecular biology, medicinal chemistry, molecular modelling, assay development and generation of biological reagents such as cell lines and proteins. Besides, the company has all the regulatory compliances, global relationships and cost advantage in place. "We are also working towards setting up comprehensive and integrated programmes with leading pharmaceutical companies utilising risk reward sharing collaboration models," informs Bhattacharya.

## Business strategies to grow

TCGLS aims to achieve its desired growth through collaborations and innovative research

activities which would be in compliance to stringent timeliness and delivery of flexible client requirements.

The company is focussing on getting projects of strategic nature, which involves calculated risks but has the capability to take TCGLS to the next orbit.

"We have already begun to witness a paradigm shift with respect to partnering models which are evolving from the plain vanilla transactional relationships to more strategic partnerships," informs Bhattacharya. While the company is constantly maintaining its eye on the cost cutting measures, it refuses to compromise when it comes on to passing value to clients.

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