

FOOD FOR Thought

InVivo NSA has gone from being a medium-sized French company to a global player in animal nutrition and health.

Images courtesy of InVivo NSA

The roots of the company that is now InVivo NSA go back to 1945, when two national unions for the agriculture industry were formed—the union of agricultural supply cooperatives, and the union of grain cooperatives. Then, in 1954, the Guyomarch Group was formed in France to create a major player in nutrition. The unions had set about to help the French agricultural industry and its workers, but over time, the aim and vision changed. The unions formally became known as the company InVivo in 2001. In 2010, the combination of the two companies—the publicly listed Guyomarch, and the cooperative InVivo—gave birth to InVivo NSA (Animal Nutrition and Health).

With revenues of more than €1.4 billion annually (€5.7 billion for

the InVivo Group as a whole), and operations in over 28 countries, InVivo NSA has gone from being a medium-sized French company to a global player in animal nutrition and health. Building on its dual entrepreneurship and cooperative DNA, the company upholds the strong values of humanism, commitment, and innovation.

The CEO Magazine spoke to the CEO of InVivo NSA and Deputy CEO of InVivo Group, Hubert De Roquefeuil, about the company's growth over the years, as well as his leadership style and how InVivo NSA sets itself apart from its competitors in the marketplace. Hubert is passionate about the difference InVivo NSA is making to the world, and how its humanism guides many of the company's decisions and strategies. InVivo NSA wants to work with agriculture and feed companies to work smarter and work better, so

that with a growing global population, food shortage is not a problem. This, Hubert explains, makes for a very rewarding role as CEO.

The CEO Magazine: What was your professional background leading up to your current role with InVivo NSA?

Hubert: For 14 years I worked in the chemical industry. It was a German company called Henkel; it's very well known. Then Henkel made a joint venture with Ecolab, in Minneapolis in the US for all the B2B businesses. And I worked for five years in Germany at that time, as the Global Marketing Director for all of Europe; and then I moved back to France to be General Manager for Europe. In 2006, I joined a French company called Roullier Group—they are the ›



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biggest fertiliser company in France. I was the CEO of the fertiliser branch; they had two other branches as well. In 2010, I moved to InVivo NSA.

How would you describe your leadership style, and how has it evolved throughout your career?

I'm full of enthusiasm, and I try to capture the enthusiasm of others. I'm a great believer in people. In terms of leadership style, I would say that all through my career I have tried to surround myself with very high-calibre people. I have tried to find the right people in the right place. I'm a great believer in team spirit and teamwork; I am absolutely convinced that alone you cannot achieve anything. I've been CEO for such a long time already that I can say that it's something that is a common point in all the businesses I have worked in. Moving people with enthusiasm and working as a team is very important.

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How has InVivo NSA grown and expanded over its existence?

In 2010, the business was not in very good shape after a big takeover from InVivo. In 2010, I had just arrived with the ambition to restore the confidence in, and build a future for that company. At that time, there were nearly 6,000 people at the company—but there was lots of debt and it wasn't very profitable. What I've done is very simple; I have hired many high-calibre people, and taken lots of people already in the group with a good spirit, and we rewrote the mission of the company together. Looking through the market and all the market drivers, and saying, okay, we are not the biggest, but we have lots of competitive edge. So, let's use our competitive edge—let's set up a business model which is not the same as the others.

We established a list of all the opportunities and risks we could face—like the political risk, the

currency risk, the raw material risk—and we set up a strategy to seize opportunities and better mitigate these risks. That was in 2010, and it was like climbing a mountain without seeing the summit; but, it was great because we had some great people who built the strategy together. Everybody was supporting the strategy. Today, there is no debt in the company; we have multiplied our profit by four, and have grown from 30 per cent of our turnover from abroad, to more than 75 per cent of our turnover done outside of France. It is important to grow outside your frontier, and to grow sustainably.

What have been the greatest challenges you have faced, and how have you worked to overcome them?

One of the biggest challenges at the beginning was the confidence of people, because when you take over a company that is not profitable, lots of people don't



believe in anybody coming in. And, if you don't have the enthusiasm or the commitment of the team, you cannot achieve anything. For me, the biggest challenge was to convince people that we were going in the right direction—which isn't a challenge today, because everybody has seen what has happened since then. But, at the beginning, that was my biggest challenge.

What gives InVivo NSA its competitive edge in the market?

We have, as one of our core values, innovation. We are moving forward because we believe this is the right way. We have a long-term vision, and we are allowed some turbulences in that without having to immediately do cost cutting. That's a very important competitive edge when compared to other companies. I think we are very agile—so, for an acquisition, we can move in one month, and I am directly involved in all acquisitions. So, I'm not outsourcing the acquisition; I'm meeting with those overseeing them, and discussing with them the vision for the future. I think it's also a competitive edge to attract companies and find the right target for acquisitions. We also have a business model privileging balanced sources of revenues. We prefer to have five complementary business lines, rather than to be core-focused on only one business and be the best in the world in that business. Because, then, if you face a disaster, your company is headed for disaster. We have a more resilient business model.



How do you invest in the training and development of staff?

We invest a lot and we are encouraging a lot of cross-certification. Being in 28 countries and with a relatively small number of staff—we have 7,000—there is each and every month a symposium on our premises focused on one business. And we have lots of people from around the world come in, so they know each other; they form networks in the company. That's a huge investment for us, because lots of people are travelling for that. We also invest a lot in the young people—we have 35 young European recent graduates in all areas of our company: in finance, marketing, business development. We also have all the traditional training. The most important thing, though, is our cross-country training, where lots of people from around the world join each other.

How does the company work with partners and suppliers to achieve success?

The acceptance we have by not being the biggest in the world doesn't close the door on strategic alliances. For us, having strategic alliances in different countries, with different suppliers, is key. We have developed that already, and we hope that we will be richer, and have many more strategic alliances in the future. It helps

share training, innovation, and development costs. This is an area where we are different, and this is also an area we are cultivating—which is, having a true relationship with our partners.

Where do you see the animal nutrition and health market going in the future, and what role will InVivo NSA play in that?

Our company is contributing to humankind. I have just gotten back from India, and it is very rewarding to see millions of people having access to protein, to chickens, and eggs—and it's the same in Africa; and in many other countries. What we want to do is contribute to feeding as many mouths as possible in the world, but not in competition with the food. In other words, what we want to do, and where we can bring some expertise, is choosing products that are no longer usable for human beings, and transforming that animal protein for human consumption. This is our contribution; we want to take the by-product of grain when it's used to make bread, and use it. We need to use less resources to feed the population. What is at stake is that we have billions more people coming into the world in the decades to come, and we need to feed them. Contributing to that is fantastic in terms of mindset and in terms of vision. We are happy to do what we do. Sometimes, it is important to say that, because happiness is a form of energy in the business. ●



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