

## **INTERVIEW with Alberto Piombi, ACEF's CEO.**

I: Interviewer

P: Mr Piombi

### **I: In which field does your company work? What do you sell? Who are your costumers?**

P: Our company works in three fields. Pharma, cosmetics and nutraceuticals, that is to say integrators. Regarding the pharmaceutical field, we work alongside pharmacies that still make pharmaceutical preparations.

Our company was founded 70 years ago when pharmacies used to make a lot of pharmaceutical preparations and we supplied them. Then we grew as a company and grew in the pharma and cosmetics field. We also operate in the nutraceutical field.

### **I: How big is your company?**

P: Our company employs more or less 60 people, in addition we have 20 people working in a cooperative, they help us packing small packages because in addition to selling products in the original packages, we also repackage products in smaller packages. So for small quantities we need a lot of manpower and we rely on cooperatives.

Regarding our turnover, it's about 50 million euros a year.

### **I: How is your company organized?**

P: We are a trading company, so we don't really have a manufacturing process, we import products worldwide. We have a big warehouse where we keep our products and we resell them. We also resell in smaller quantities. This is our work, we repackage.

In addition, we have a small production unit called Arda Natura, it's a separate company owned by Acef. There is a small productive process, we make plant extracts. We take plants and macerate them. We obtain liquid extracts used for the preparation of hair care products. For example, we make chamomile extract and we sell it to cosmetics companies.

### **I: How long have you been working here, and how did you become an entrepreneur?**

P: I started in 1985. This company was founded in 1940. It's more than 70 years old. I started working here as a sales representative in 1985 and I gained some experience in sales. This has been very valuable to me.

I started with a small share. As the years go by there have been some changes. The old owner sold his shares and I bought some of them. The other partners also bought some. I went from being a sales representative to managing the company.

### **I: What are your responsibilities and how much do you work every day?**

P: After working in sales during the last 10 years I gained more responsibilities.

Now I'm the CEO. The company counts 4 business partners. We hold meetings to discuss issues and take decisions. Well, this is my job. I work a lot because sometimes there are issues. Unfortunately, I work from 8 to 10 hours a day.

**I: What are your company's strengths and weaknesses?**

P: Our strengths are our excellent service and our fast delivery.

Our flaw is that our prices aren't the cheapest but there are so many products we sell. Fortunately, most clients recognize our good service and they buy products from us instead of buying it directly from the manufacturer. They come to us because they know that we check the products and they are safe and then in a couple of days we can fulfil orders. We offer an excellent service and we make sure that the client keeps less items in his warehouse, often the customer prefers buying from us since we are so fast and the client doesn't need to keep items in stock because he knows that in a short time we will ship him the goods he needs.

**I: What about international trade in your business?**

P: International trade represents 5% of our turnover, but we need to increase that. We have hired a new employee to take care of that. We believe we need to focus also on international trade. There are some issues, though. Some companies, I'm talking about corporates, have given us goods to sell only in Italy, therefore we have some limits on international trade. Nonetheless we try to increase it.

**I: Do you think our area offers people enough opportunities to work better?**

P: Well, regarding our business, our area gives us the chance to work, we are a local business, we're quite important in our area, we have a strong bond with our employees, it's like a big family and they work hard. In Italy bureaucracy is not of any help, but we believe in our work and we keep on investing in our area.

**I: Do you think your company is really able to keep up with the changes occurring nowadays?**

P: Well, we try, it's not easy. Everything is so fast. We are keeping up with information technology. We want to invest in a new informatic system, it's very important. We also try to sell new items, it's not easy because in our field there is a fast products turnover.

**I: Do you think your formal education has influenced your career as an entrepreneur?**

P: Of course, it has helped me, I have a scientific subjects diploma, then I studied Business Economics at university. I didn't complete my studies but certainly they have been useful because you learn the basis and you also get general knowledge; and then, you get experience and you add it to your education.

**I: What advice would you give to a young person of our area who wants to become an entrepreneur?**

P: I acknowledge that in the past it was easier to do that, nowadays it's more difficult but I recommend to try anyway, you need to focus and to work hard but I think you can really achieve something.

I: Thanks a lot.