

Visit to Czech Republic
17th - 19th March 2009

Ryan Swaine
International Sales

Czech Republic

In the last 9 years, Viamed has enjoyed some good sales from the Czech Republic; we have sold disposable SpO2 sensors to a number of companies peaking at (GBP) £44,000 in 2003. However, since 2003, Viamed has endured approximately 50% decrease in business year on year from the Czech Republic, due to the change in the disposable SpO2 market. After promotions, e-mails, phone calls and even face to face meetings, we have failed to interest these existing distributors in any other Viamed product lines, including our latest Pulse Oximetry product range.

Company Visited

- ASQA

Contacts at ASQA:

- Eva Maleninska – Business & Marketing Manager & Joint Partner
- Helena Pavlickova – Sales Manager

ASQA/ Viamed Relationship History

In March 2008, we received an enquiry from the company ASQA for MDI adapters, after some correspondence, they purchased some samples and then went on to purchase large numbers for use in ICU for intubated, ventilated patients with high PEEP. ASQA represent part of the Smiths Medical range and focus wholly on the Anaesthesia and ICU departments.

After continued correspondence, ASQA agreed in August 2008 to try some of our other products and purchased a small quantity of the VM2160, the Microstim and then later the VM2101, for evaluation and demonstrations. The sales of the VM2160 and MDI adapters lead to a turnover of over (GBP) £17,000 in 2008.

I was very happy with the sales of the VM2160, as ASQA have no prior experience with pulse oximetry products, although I was a little confused as to why they had not received any feedback for the Microstim, as it is specifically aimed at their target market.

I met with ASQA at the Medica exhibition in November 2009 and I had the chance to speak with the Sales Manager, Helena, for the first time. She explained that they still had yet to conduct demonstrations for the Microstim and the VM2101 in order to test their market. I gave Eva and Helena a brief overview of the Viamed products, Helena showed some interest in our Infant Resuscitation Cabinet and Tom Thumb Infant Resuscitation Unit; she explained that she would like to develop their business by expanding into other areas of the market.

Meeting at ASQA

After following up our meeting at Medica, I thought it would be a good opportunity to visit ASQA in the early part of 2009 and build on their initial interest in the Infant Resuscitation products, introduce other products, conduct sales training and gather feedback from their sales staff and customers.

It was decided that I should visit for 3 days, so that I could spend time in the office with Eva who has been our contact since we started business together, then at least a day of product training with the ASQA sales team and at least a day visiting the end-users. Unfortunately, the only meeting that was planned in the hospitals was cancelled at the last minute. The meeting was scheduled to be with the Chairman of the Czech Anaesthesia Society but he was called into an urgent procedure and sent his apologies.

The first meeting was held with Eva, I found her quite cold and very blunt. She explained that Viamed is a very small part of their business and the demonstration products she has purchased are on the shelves and it is left up to the sales team to decide if they want to promote the products or not. This information made me realize that my meeting the following day with the sales team was going to be even more important than I had first realized. Eva explained that they have 13 members of staff, consisting of: 1 x managing director, 1 x business manager, 1 x sales manager, 6 x sales executives, 1 x internal sales assistant, 1 x accounts clerk, 1 x warehouse worker and a part time engineer. I found it interesting that they are extremely sales orientated and I believe this could be a great advantage for Viamed.

I was very pleased to see that ASQA had arranged for all their sales team to be present for the entire day for our product training, as some of the sales personnel are based in the south of the Czech Republic and had traveled over 3 hours to be there. All the members of the sales team are qualified nurses apart from Helena the sales manager, who worked in the Pharmaceutical industry prior to working for ASQA. I gave a presentation on the following subjects:

- History of Viamed
- Microstim
- Pulse Oximetry
- Oxygen Monitoring
- Infant Resuscitation

Helena helped me with some of the explanations, as some of the sales team did not speak English fluently and she ensured that all the sales team understood what we had discussed before moving on to the next subject. I was very impressed with Helena's input and her eagerness to make sure that all of her staff understood the information I delivered. During our discussions, it became apparent that none of the sales team had tried to sell the Microstim, as they did not understand the product and feared meeting with a customer and not being able to answer any of their questions. This was the same for the VM2101; none of the nurses could understand where it is to be used, as their primary focus is Anaesthesia and ICU departments.

Summary

After completing the product training I had an informal meeting with Helena and Eva, they both said that the product training was really appreciated by everyone and that it has helped them realize new opportunities. They thanked me for visiting and apologized for not organizing any more hospital visits. I believe that they were a little nervous to organize the hospital visits, as they have not been very confident with the products themselves.

I have loaned them the Tom Thumb Infant Resuscitation Unit (Model: TT480) that I took for the product training. They started to organize demonstrations straight away for this and the Microstim. Helena seemed very excited at the prospect of expanding our business together and I am looking forward to working with them in the future, as I believe they have a fantastic structure for us to work with.