What is the most significant change that has taken place within your company in the last few years?

As an international organization serving over 140 countries, Horiba-ABX is in a perpetual growth mode. With an aggressive global growth initiative, Horiba’s portfolio is in a constant state of change. The organization here in the United States is concurrent with these initiatives. In the summer of 2003, it was decided to restructure the American organization in order to address the Horiba-ABX objectives in the domestic hematology marketplace.

In the past, ABX has been known as a physician-office and OEM manufacturer. A conscious decision was made to explore all market segments congruent with product platforms. The management decision to focus on the hospital marketplace was based on the following facts.

One, ABX manufactures a full line of hematology instruments.

Two, these instruments constitute 25% of all new hematology systems sold in the world today.

And three, many of these systems are OEM and distributed through other manufacturers to all market segments — both physician office and hospital and commercial laboratory. ABX should be able to market, sell, and service its products through distribution to all market segments, including the hospital segment.

Based on these assumptions, ABX has re-engineered the sales, marketing, service, and support infrastructure to move to the next growth level.

What key industry and market trends will drive your company in the next few years?

We will seek to expand and diversify our diagnostic portfolio in order to become more attractive to group purchasing organizations. Additionally, ABX will move in the direction of eliminating full-time equivalents through improvements in sensitivity and specificity in its instrumentation. Understanding the diminished resource of highly trained medical technologists, ABX will continue to manufacture highly reliable and simple-to-operate instruments.

What challenges does your company face today — and tomorrow?

Although ABX manufactures and OEMs 25% of all new systems sold in the world today, there are challenges in penetrating the hospital market in the United States. In the existing domestic hematology-replacement market, it is difficult for a newcomer to permeate the laboratory of a pre-disposed clinician.
What challenges do you think laboratorians face today — and tomorrow?

With the drop in medical-technology training programs around the country, combined with the rampant retirement of highly experienced laboratorians, lab personnel face unprecedented challenges. The challenge for clinicians is delivering the same quality work with less experienced and fewer technicians.

How does your company address the importance of continuing education? Do you offer any programs that benefit the laboratorian, such as online training?

The reorganization of ABX in the United States will include a heavy emphasis on training. We have brought on board experienced hematology trainers from other companies with a wealth of experience. These individuals will be responsible in the future for new Web-based training and continuing-education programs.

We currently offer a complete disk-based hematology training program, “Hematovision,” and many similar product-related offerings.

Aside from automation, what other responses to the lab personnel shortage has your company made?

At ABX, we believe gained efficiencies do not all lie in automation. ID, transport, and host query with a result are nice, unless the end result is incorrect, and the sample ends up at the scope on a slide. ABX is moving in the direction of “seamless hematology;” simply put: the elimination of the smear through technological advances.

Our thinking is that if you can eliminate the re-run, turn the flag into a quantifiable result, eliminate slide preparation, and someone to review it, then you have advanced the new frontier of efficiency.

As new technologies change laboratory workflow, how do you ensure you meet your customers’ changing needs?

Since ABX is the more recent hematology entrée, we have not spent years and dollars on systems and automation development that is now antiquated. It is a tragedy to walk into a lab that spent millions of dollars on automation a few years ago only to discover that its system is obsolete.

Our perspective is in future technological development and smaller workstation modules that can be upgraded as improvements are applied.

How has the Internet changed the way your company conducts its business?

ABX is in the process of implementing some major changes as to how we employ the information highway. As we grow, we expect to be able to implement improvements in all facets of our business, from product ordering to field service and remote diagnostic capabilities.

Describe how the need to combat emerging global diseases and bioterrorism has influenced your company’s business strategies.

ABX manufactures products that span 140 countries throughout the world and already has a reputation for highly reliable systems. These instruments are easy to operate and deliver highly accurate results in environments that are far less than ideal. These attributes are essential in developing nations where instruments must be operated in much-less-than-perfect conditions. These are also the areas with the greatest concentration of exotic hematological disorders and HIV.

How has ABX Diagnostics maintained a unique corporate vision through the changes in its parent company (Roche, Horiba)?

Horiba-ABX, through its history with Roche and the integration into Horiba, has benefited from a wealth of cultural and technological assets. Many are unaware of the vast resources that Horiba brings to ABX. Together, the Horiba-ABX integration project is developing into a solid diagnostic company with its sites on the future.

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