

# WINNING BUSINESS

WHAT EUROPE'S  
BEST BUSINESSES  
LOOK LIKE

CASE STUDY  
COLLECTION

## COMPANY

DROGOPHARMA HEALTH &amp; BEAUTY

## SECTOR

HEALTH &amp; BEAUTY PRODUCTS

## IN A NUTSHELL

Drogopharma is Cyprus' leading supplier of natural and holistic health and beauty products

## GLOBAL REVENUE

2013: €1,812,489  
2014 (forecast): €2,400,000

## EBA ACHIEVEMENT

Reached National Champion stage in the 2014/15 European Business Awards

**IT TOOK SEVERAL DECADES** in Cyprus' pharmaceutical industry for Aristos Petrides to know what the sector truly lacked. Having seen customer after customer be prescribed medication for various ailments – pills of all sorts of colors, ointments and balms – only to suffer the sometimes powerful side-effects of those drugs, the pharmacist realised a change was needed. The precise nature of that change came after a visit to Greece, when Aristos met with a leading producer of natural products, APIVITA, and was inspired by their approach to

healthcare – one that was holistic, progressive and drew from entirely natural resources.

Beginning in 1996 in an office in the back of his pharmacy on Cyprus' southern coast, Aristos began importing APIVITA products – and indeed the philosophy that underpins the company's work; two decades later, Drogopharma has become one of the country's leading suppliers of natural products, and has helped spawn a wider movement within the health and beauty industry towards holistic self-care.



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"When we started in 1996 very few people believed in this," he says. "But we were so excited with the whole approach that right from the beginning we believed this would grow in our land." A large part of the ethos of the company – and indeed the main motivation behind its founding – stems from Aristos' direct exposure to, and knowledge of, the potential harm that some artificial chemicals can do to the body. Back in 1996, those in Cyprus who had suffered from such effects had few alternative options to turn to, hence he realised the need to strike out on a new path.

"We were among the first healthcare companies in Cyprus who believed in a more natural way of life," says Aristos. "There were people that were sensitive to these drugs but couldn't find such alternative products." The introduction of APIVITA's products – sourced from high quality Greek plants, beeswax, royal jelly, and so on – was therefore a minor revolution for the healthcare industry in Cyprus. And as per their Greek counterparts, Drogopharma sought to spread the philosophy that natural equals best.

Drogopharma saw confidence in APIVITA's meticulous approach to testing the merits of their produce – one that utilises the latest modern technology, and which invests time and energy in respecting the environment. Not surprisingly for a

Greek company, the influence of the ancient Greek physician, Hippocrates – considered by many to be the father of modern medicine – was never far from APIVITA's mind. The two companies now operate side-by-side – Apivita sourcing and manufacturing the products, and Drogopharma distributing them.

"They give products to customers that are not only natural and holistic, but effective," Aristos says of APIVITA, whose work was given high plaudits by the Chancellor of Austria when he visited their factory in Greece in June. "Their approach is a scientific one, based on chemistry. Every ingredient in their products must prove itself in the pharmaceutical way." Both companies see the strength of collaboration, not just between one another, but with other expert institutions. "We couldn't just mix herbs and leave it at that – we cooperate with researchers in universities and so on. Apivita has their own research and development department so they themselves invent products and work with other universities."

Drogopharma began in 1996 with just four staff operating out of a small backroom office in the Cypriot coastal town of Limassol. In two decades it has grown to 25 staff, and now requires a warehouse to conduct its operations. →



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→ Its growth mirrors a trend in Cyprus towards more holistic healthcare – one that started with Drogopharma, but which has evolved and grown to include a number of other similar outfits. The growing awareness of the benefits of natural products can be attributed to Aristos and his team – which now includes his wife, Chryso, the Managing Director, and daughter Stalo, who heads the administration department – and the work they have put into cultivating a positive attitude in Cyprus towards effective natural products that are free of side effects.

Stalo runs the company's Facebook page, where around 11,000 followers, ranging from 17 to 60, can both keep track of the latest produce being distributed the company, but also ask its staff questions about the positives and negatives of whatever they are purchasing. That user interaction is key to Drogopharma's success – not only are they a supplier of products, but also an approachable source for up-to-date information on the latest trends in the industry. Aristos' own good relations with players in the Cypriot pharmaceutical industry – he has been on the Board of Directors of the Pancyprrian Pharmaceutical Association for 25 years – meant that he and his team could converse directly with pharmacies across the country and educate them on the merits of natural products.

"We have tried to get pharmacies to engage in merchandising; we give them training, we tell them our philosophy; we bring in professors from abroad to teach them so they can build on their own work," he says. "We stand side by side with pharmacies – we've created bonds between them and us."

Life hasn't however always been easy for Drogopharma. It was only three years ago that Cyprus was hit by a severe financial crisis that forced a €10 billion bailout from the EU and IMF. The memories of that period are still sore in the collective psyche of Cyprus – businesses across the country were forced to close their doors, and families had no option but to queue for handouts in order to buy food and other supplies. It was a time of great concern for the economy and all those involved, but Aristos' commitment to his company, and the service it provided, saw him persevere.

"We didn't cut any credit lines to our customers, but instead told them that the crisis was an opportunity. Because we have products that are value for money then we can continue to sell them," he says.

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Importantly, the company remained confident, buoyed by a consistently healthy cash flow in the years prior to the crisis. Where others were buckling, Drogopharma stood strong. "We didn't cancel any programme events," he says. "Most companies pulled out of events because they felt the fear – we did the opposite and stuck with it and tried to give confidence and strength to our customers. We stand by them."

His career in the pharmaceutical industry was what stood Aristos in good stead to become one of his country's leading purveyors of natural health and beauty products – not just the products themselves, but the progressive philosophy underlying the whole enterprise.

"We are sensitive as pharmacists to the risks of medicine," he says. "We know what it means to use a product – to put it on your skin or to drink it. We could recognise which ingredients are not so safe to use, and those that are. And because we want to preserve the planet and its resources, and to keep the environment safe, we consider this to be something worth promoting. We want to use something that is as effective as other medicine but which doesn't cause the same harm to the people or planet."

Drogopharma is thus both a business and an ethos for the Petrides family. It's about the broader movement towards encouraging holistic healthcare as much as it is about the profitability and health of the company itself. "We try to inspire our customers," says Aristos. "For the people it is much better to accept a healthier way of life – not only to use natural products but also to try to exercise more and to be more active." In short, says Aristos, "to give them a better life" – and that's as good as any company philosophy.

#### LEARNING POINTS

- **Don't be afraid to strike out on a new path.** If you're aware of the shortcomings of traditional products, then seek pastures new – there'll be a market waiting for you.
- **Stick to your core philosophies if you're confident in their outcome.** Dedication to your belief is what separates confident companies from those that will waver when times are hard.



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