



NATURAL REMEDIES ON SAFE PATHS

Healthy international supply chains are vital to the pharmaceutical sector. In its collaboration with A.Vogel, a manufacturer of natural remedies, Dachser has applied its own interdisciplinary, quality-driven consulting approach to designing and implementing a value-added logistics solution.

The purple coneflower (Echinacea purpurea), a member of the sunflower family, stimulates the immune system

Nature itself is the best physician—this bit of wisdom is credited to Hippocrates, a physician in Ancient Greece often referred to as the “Father of Medicine.” The healing power of plants has been recognized for millennia. For Swiss pioneer of natural health Alfred Vogel (1902–1996), nature was his “best-loved university.” That is why the company he founded, A.Vogel, makes plant-based remedies and invigorating nutritional products and supplements based on fresh, organic ingredients, delivering them to many countries around the world. →



Fresh plants form the basis ...



... for effective natural treatments ...



... and their production

Also called phytotherapy, from the Greek root “phyton” meaning “plant,” herbal medicine has become a market worth billions. These plant-based remedies are often the choice of those suffering from the common cold, but they are also popular for treating and preventing other respiratory conditions, easing digestion, and soothing nerves.

From a logistics perspective, these products are anything but easy to handle. They are subject to the same pharma quality standard of good distribution practice (GDP) that other medications are. “We are seeing that the pressure—from various authorities, both here in Switzerland and abroad, but also especially from customers—on the companies in this field is constantly growing,” says Samuel Haller, Country Manager Air & Sea Logistics Switzerland.

Increasingly tough competition

Large pharma corporations have entire departments devoted to meeting quality standards, but this issue pushes many small and medium-sized pharma companies to their limits. Such businesses often simply don’t have the resources to map and review the quality processes in logistics, leading to higher costs amid increasingly tough competition.

A.Vogel, too, began early on with ramping up quality processes in its production operations. However, it quickly became clear that more was involved. “We realized that we need rapidly available, tailored logistics solutions for optimizing the supply chain and maintaining quality standards,” says Bernhard Bärtschi, Head International Markets at A.Vogel. And that is what drew the company to Dachser about three years ago.

“The idea was to reduce the number of interfaces and generate economies of scope so as to cut costs and ensure that the quality processes run properly,” Haller recalls. This means the consulting approach has to take all transport types into account. He emphasizes that “this did not necessarily mean that Dachser would always be handling each transport itself.” Instead, the focus was on finding a complete solution across all carriers.

“Many manufacturers underestimate the indirect costs that arise in transport at the interfaces of the various carriers,” Haller explains. Transshipment, waiting times, and delays in transmitting the data would often cost more than the companies originally wanted to admit. This used to be the case at A.Vogel, as it works with various providers along its supply chains. “In the freight forwarding business, a manufacturer can choose between normal freight and exclusive freight,” Bärtschi says. But this is not always the most cost-effective option.

Natural remedies are fragile

A large part of A.Vogel’s overseas business consists of deliveries to Canada and South Africa. GDP requirements mean that transport to either of these countries is not easy. A risk analysis of the transports showed that the focus should be on questions about the herbal remedies’



Bernhard Bärtschi,
Head International Markets,
A.Vogel AG

“ Supply chain complexity has decreased considerably

shelf life and temperature sensitivity. “We discussed this complex issue with Dachser at great length,” Bärtschi remembers.

To investigate the matter, test shipments were first placed in normal containers and the temperature of the contents was measured at short intervals. These tests discovered major temperature fluctuations of up to 25 degrees Celsius, for example on sea freight transports that cross the equator on the way to South Africa. In air freight, temperatures can become critical during temporary storage on the tarmac in, say, Dubai. Looking at these factors, the use of standard containers was not A.Vogel’s first choice. However, reefer containers alone were also not the solution, as they would have driven up costs considerably.

Dachser’s solution: maximum flexibility. Today, the herbal remedies are packed into different transport boxes depending on the time of year. In the summer months they go into reefers, and starting in October, transports to South Africa can make use of conventional containers. Goods dispatched via air freight go only via direct flight to avoid transshipping and waiting times in the Dubai heat. “Together with Dachser, we found a happy medium that was perfect for us,” Bärtschi says.

A unique and networked approach

“When implementing flexible logistics solutions, it’s imperative to also think from an interdisciplinary and multimodal perspective,” Haller advises. This meant incorporating various groups at the relevant consulting and development steps: quality and GDP experts, for example from life science and healthcare (LSH), as well as specialists in container and full truckload services from Dachser Air & Sea Logistics and experts from Dachser Cargoplus Food. “There aren’t too many logistics providers who can offer such a networked approach, and in the context of our Interlocking strategy, it really sets Dachser apart,” Haller says.

The exchange of ideas between Dachser and A.Vogel continued for about a year, covering everything from risk assessment and measures for damage control to process definitions and the formalization of those processes. Both sides provided advice and discussed, reviewed, and re-launched processes. “The customer always has the final word on what will be done,” Haller says. Bärtschi is delighted that one result was a significant reduction in supply chain complexity, a major benefit of which is lower

costs. Today, A.Vogel makes use primarily of Dachser’s sea freight services, although air freight is also in the mix. Meanwhile, Cargoplus Food services bring the goods in full truckloads to Greece, Ireland, the northern United Kingdom, and Sweden.

Overall, Bärtschi reports that the integrated solutions approach has improved the quality of deliveries. “Transport is a commodity, but Dachser’s consulting service turns it into one component of a comprehensive logistics concept,” he says. The result is an optimized supply chain in which pharma quality standards are maintained and seamlessly documented all the way to the end customer. A.Vogel has made fast and reliable delivery another one of its selling points.

A. Heintze

“No one pays any attention to them; they silently and simply blend their juices to prepare a remedy that can improve the health of many and even save lives,” wrote Alfred Vogel in his book The Nature Doctor. It is still a classic health reference work around the world. He was writing about a supposed weed growing by the wayside: “The pale, ashen cheeks of many a child would recover their ruddy glow if their parents knew what a wonderful tonic is to be found in the unjustly scorned nettle.”

PROFILE



A.Vogel AG was founded in 1963 by naturopath and phytotherapy pioneer Alfred Vogel (1902–1996) in Roggwil, Switzerland. Today, it is one of the country’s largest manufacturers of herbal medicines and nutritional products. Counting A.Vogel’s partner companies, approximately 500 employees around the world work on its product range. With production facilities in Roggwil (Switzerland), Elburg (Netherlands), and Colmar (France), the group recently generated revenue of CHF 130 million.

www.avogel-company.ch/en/