



Editorials

The Wen Ken Group : From Traditional Medicine To Bio-Tech

Over the past 63 years, Singapore's Wen Ken Group has focused on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), building itself into one of the largest TCM companies in South-East Asia, with three Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) plants in Malaysia and one in Indonesia.

Its flagship Three Legs Cooling Water, as well as a range of other TCM products, can be found everywhere from the smallest sari-sari store in the most distant Indonesian province to the shelves of the most modern hypermarket in Singapore.

But in the past few years the group has undergone significant changes. While TCM still remains the core business, a new generation is branching out into biotechnology and functional foods to create a number of new life sciences companies under the Wen Ken banner.

Wen Ken, now a group with annual sales over S\$100 million, is reaching out to India and China, two of the world's largest markets, in search of natural, traditional products that can be enhanced using new technology, quality control and innovation which can improve their market potential.

MarinEx Pharmaceuticals, a joint venture between Wen Ken and Singapore Bio-Innovations, the life sciences arm of Singapore's Economic Development Board (EDB) has signed a technology transfer agreement with China's Ocean University to transfer the rights to develop, produce, market and distribute a marine-based burn cream product with a potential world market of US\$1 billion.

MarinEx has also teamed up with renowned local and overseas researchers doing work on Chitosan, a natural fibre-like substance that binds negatively charged fatty acids, allowing them to pass through the body without being absorbed. MarinEx Anti-Fat and Anti-Cholesterol capsules are the result.

The company has recently signed up a licensee in India to market the two products, as well as future MarinEx products.

Another new company, GlucosCare International Ltd, is the result of a joint venture between Wen Ken and the owner of Nawaloka, the largest private hospital operator in Sri Lanka. This company produces Gymnema Plus Herbal Tea which is particularly effective in reducing blood sugar levels in diabetics and has a range of other benefits for those in normal health.

Nor has Wen Ken ignored opportunities on its own doorstep, buying a 70 percent stake in Malaysia's Hong Siang Food last year - a move into fast-moving health food and beverage products. Hong Siang's already one of the largest reprocessors and packers of honey products in Malaysia, also produces a wide range of spices, juices, cereals and specialty beverages. The acquisition means all of these products will have immediate access to Wen Ken's marketing networks, manufacturing infrastructure and technological know-how.

Wen Ken Business Development Director Cheong Wing Kiat says the company's strategy is to develop Singapore as a hub for the development of high quality life sciences products, and to market these products overseas.

Cheong sees China and India as the other points of the triangle. He says the two countries can provide the raw materials and research for the development of these products, and can be targetted as key markets for the future.

No one to miss a trick, Wen Ken has not forgotten the value of its traditional products. Another recent coup was to establish a partnership in India to manufacture, market and distribute, and ultimately to produce, the famed Three Legs Cooling Water, albeit label designed in a different way to appeal to the Indian market.

Source :

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