



TEAM WORK Emily Humphrys and Alison White of CRB

New focus for medical research

THE global recession has given an unexpected business focus to Billingham-based Cambridge Research Biochemicals (CRB).

Where other businesses have been pulling in their horns, CRB, one of the UK's leading

manufacturers of medical research synthetic peptides, has seized the opportunity to examine its core strengths; namely, partnership working.

As a result, it is increasing its links with academic institutions, most notably Durham University, and partnering with overseas agents

to find new customers in virgin export areas as well as expand their share in existing overseas markets.

"Strategic partnerships are a good way to grow our business," explains CRB's commercial director, Emily Humphrys.

"With academic institutes, which are very research-orientated, we can offer them the selling and marketing skills that they lack.

"And when it comes to finding new customers in new countries, it's much more cost-effective to use like-minded experts, to ourselves, who are on the ground."

Peptides, which are fragments of proteins, are key to new drug development.

As synthetic peptides can be manufactured to order (unlike naturally occurring ones), they can speed up medical research.

What makes CRB, the world's second oldest peptide company, stand out from competitors, is that they make bespoke products, entirely determined by customers' needs, rather than just provide off-the-shelf solutions.

Not surprisingly, it has customers that include the top 10 giants of the international pharmaceutical world as well as world-renowned research institutes.

In March, CRB signed an exclusive deal with Japanese-based BioBridge, a pharmaceutical and life sciences marketing agency with expert knowledge and contacts in the Far East market.

"With Biobridge as a partner, it allows us to expand more rapidly in Japan," explains Humphrys.

Through a similar collaboration, with a marketing agency in Taiwan, CRB has already broken into a previously hard-to-reach market.

The company is pursuing partnerships with similar specialist marketing agencies in China, Singapore, Israel, Scandinavia, France and the west coast of the United States.

Since Humphrys and operations director Alison White acquired CRB (originally part of ICI) in a management buyout in 2000, they have made a point of building strategic alliances with academic institutions.

"These are important to us because they are at the cutting edge of investigations," explains Humphrys. "They're the innovators in our field and, as we supply a made-to-order service, they're a good match."

During the economic downturn, the company has been significantly increasing these alliances in an effort to broaden CRB's business and attractiveness.

For example, the company now has two collaborations with Durham University.

The first, in conjunction with the University's School of Biological and Biomedical Sciences and Department of Chemistry, is a 12-month project to investigate a family of proteins (chemokines) which play a key role in atherosclerosis - more commonly known as 'furring of the arteries' - a major cause of heart disease.

"The project means we've been able to chemically synthesise the chemokines which will allow us to gain a better understanding of how they work in the immune system," explains Dr Ehmke Pohl, structural biologist and one of the project's main researchers at Durham University.

"Working with CRB gives us an idea of what the needs are of commercial companies and how they work in business.

"As academics, we can be in danger of becoming too distant so it's important for us to know how they work. We want our students to be ready for the commercial world and not be in an academic bubble."

The second collaboration with Durham University gives CRB direct access to the School of Biological and Biomedical Science's Cell Technology suite and advanced analytical equipment.

These highly specialised technical facilities allow CRB to increase both the quantity and range of monoclonal antibodies that it can produce for customers.

CRB has strengthened its ties with the Medical Research Council with the renewal of a 12-month contract to supply bespoke peptides and antibodies.

"As a mature business, we're always on the lookout for complementary licence opportunities," adds Humphrys. "We're always keen to hear from people who are working on patented technologies that would fit well with our core business of peptides and antibodies."

For partnership opportunities with CRB, email: busdev@crbdiscovery.com.

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