

Best Antibody Manufacturing Biotechnology Company 2023 - Europe

SICGEN Antibodies (SICGEN) is a European company that develops, manufactures, and markets polyclonal antibodies for cell biology research. We find out more from Dr Ramalho as the company celebrates recognition in the Business Excellence Awards 2023.

SICGEN Antibodies produces polyclonal antibodies for leading national and international institutions, including universities, research institutes, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and biotechnology distributors worldwide with its main market in North America, Europe, and Far East. The company develops, produces, and markets polyclonal antibodies that have been successfully used in several life sciences research areas. For example, the antibodies against fluorescent proteins such as GFP, mCherry, tdTomato have featured in many life science research publications, such as Nature, Cell and Science.

The firm was founded in 2009 under NEOTEC Portuguese Initiative as a spin-off from the University of Coimbra by Dr José Ramalho, a Portuguese scientist at that time, and two other co-founders. In the same year, Dr José Ramalho moved to NOVA University of Lisbon where he continues carrying out his research related to cell biology and the development of new antibodies.

SICGEN is based in the district of Coimbra where it has a production unit that comprises lab space and animal house with a capacity for producing hundreds of antibodies raised in goat (*capra hircus*) per annum. By taking full advantage of cutting-edge biotechnologies, SICGEN is committed to becoming a global producer of polyclonal antibodies and antibody-related products and services of the highest quality and at competitive prices.

In February 2017, a UK investor acquired 50% of the shares with the other 50% being owned by CEO, Dr Ramalho.

By 2022, SICGEN's product line had increased to nearly 300 products, the antibodies mostly being used for research purposes, with a particular focus on Western Blotting (WB), Immunofluorescence (IF), and immunocytochemistry (IHC). Although many are also utilised for ELISA, immunoprecipitation, and other biochemical techniques.

"SICGEN uses a combination of marketing methods, including direct sales, working through a countrywide distributor or using OEM system," Dr Ramalho explains. "Our main strategy of marketing is to relay on our and distributor's e-catalogues. Scientific papers that mention the use of its antibodies on their research also has a high impact."

The antibody industry has expanded significantly in the last decade and it continues growing. The offer of antibodies produced in large animal companies can pose some challenges to relatively smaller companies in terms of prices. However, what small companies like SICGEN can lose in price competitiveness can easily be won in flexibility and response to individual needs of customers.

"Overall, there are challenges for all antibody producers that result from the scientific and technological developments in the

biotech industry," elaborates Dr Ramalho. "For example, in my opinion, the most significant challenge for the near future will be to use advances in vitro technologies, using non-animal-based approaches for antibody generation. It will offer greater versatility and reproducibility over animal immunisation, and it will also alleviate ethical concerns."

SICGEN invests as much as possible in R&D due to the competitiveness and demands in this industry. By investing on R&D it can develop new antibodies and improve existing ones.

Stagnation is a big problem for most of the businesses that do not innovate often enough. During this phase, the product team designed and assessed the viability of new antibodies to decide whether it is worth taking to the market. This applied research involves specific activities in the process and is focused on the development of antibodies. Bringing innovative antibodies can fill gaps in the market and could give SICGEN a competitive advantage.

SICGEN started producing and selling the first few antibodies during previous financial crisis. Crossing difficult times and fighting against large companies that dominate the market, SICGEN has increased the number of antibodies produced to few hundred. With some of the antibodies produced already reaching nearly 100 references on the most prestigious scientific journals.

"Our constant challenge is to continue developing, producing and supplying globally high-quality antibodies."

Recently, for its pioneering work, SICGEN Antibodies was recognised in the Business Excellence Awards and named Best Antibody Manufacturing Biotechnology Company 2023 – Europe.

Now, as Dr Ramalho looks to the future, he tells us that SICGEN continuously strives to develop new antibody-related products and services for applications in industry and research.

"We have been working on our strategic plan that is to continue to increase the number of antibodies available on our catalogue and to better characterise the ones already available for using on different biochemical techniques," he states. "In addition, we also are working on developing/producing/marketing of new conjugated antibodies. These modified antibodies with fluorescent molecules are extremely important as they allow speeding up experiments and are therefore highly sought after by researchers."

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