Community pharmacy in Poland
Where some have failed, many have found their unique offer and are not only thriving but are also leading the way in reshaping the industry.

In Poland, the pharmacy industry has experienced extremely high growth in the past decade. In 2005 alone, more than 1000 new pharmacies were opened and an estimated 13,650 stores were operating throughout the country by 2008; one pharmacy per 2800 people, in comparison to Australia’s 1:4,400 ratio.

However, this rapid boom caused an oversupply in the market which left many small independent pharmacies struggling against larger pharmacy groups and resulted in approximately 470 pharmacies closing down in 2009. It is estimated that there are less than 13,000 pharmacies in operation in the country today.

Pharmacy owners in Poland are not required to be a qualified pharmacist (although many are), however a pharmacy must have a qualified, registered pharmacist to manage the pharmacy. Pharmacies also employ dispensing technicians (who have completed a two-year course) and they are permitted to dispense and supply basic prescription medication, requiring a pharmacist’s intervention only for more regulated items such as strong pain relievers and sedatives.

Polish pharmacy layout is modelled around direct dispensing and almost all stock is located behind the counter (including all OTC items) and must be requested by the customer. Dispensing, service and payment are all provided to the customer at the same individual workstations. Pharmacies in Poland also stock a wider range of SKUs (on average approx. 3000-4000 SKUs), compared to the Australian market (on average approx. 1500-2000 SKUs), and turnover is relatively equally distributed between dispensary and front-of-shop. Adequate storage areas with specific requirements and a separate designated compounding room, cleaners closet/room in addition to toilets, staff rooms etc. Therefore pharmacies are often a lot larger than they appear from the front-of-shop to the customer.

Polish pharmacy unique brand and service offer
Last edition we looked at how the Azca Pharmacy in Spain differentiated itself from its competition. This month I would like to take you on a journey to Apteka Centrum II near Lublin in Poland.

Apteka Centrum II opened in August 2009 and is part of the ‘Just Good Pharmacies’ chain. The pharmacy’s customer base is a mixture of elderly, mothers with children and those with chronic illnesses and is also frequented by people passing through the area. The pharmacy is part of a newly-established shopping strip/mall which is not yet particularly busy. Despite this, the pharmacy has grown quite popular in the short time it has been open – leaving other pharmacies in the area wondering what its recipe for success is.

The interior of Apteka Centrum II was designed by Malgorzata Milkowska. With many years of experience with ‘Just Good Pharmacies’, her brief was to build ‘something innovative’ with ‘a modern feel’. A lot of thought and planning has gone into the flow of traffic and this, combined with the use of high quality materials and the integration of cutting-edge storage equipment to prevent clutter, has resulted in truly spacious design for both staff and customers.

An integral part of the
banner’s brand and philosophy is offering unique services and incorporating the latest health care technologies available. In keeping with this, the pharmacy offers the latest in weight management technology and also offers consulting services for its specialised skin care ranges by a trained in-house ‘Dermo-Consultant’ who uses an advanced skin diagnosis system.

Consumers in Poland often focus on the price of pharmaceuticals and the pharmacy in Leczna leverages the benefits that come with joining a strong pharmacy banner to offer highly competitive pricing to attract customers. In addition, the pharmacy regularly runs special promotions which provide customers with health information packs and the opportunity to have their blood sugar, blood cholesterol, weight and body fat measured free of charge. This combination positions the pharmacy as a quality service provider at a competitive price, rather than solely as a discounter.

The pharmacy has a CONSIS robotic dispenser which automates 85 per cent of the pharmacy’s prescription medication. The clients are impressed by the modern and professional feel of the pharmacy and the robot plays its part in portraying ‘theatre’ in the pharmacy. However the predominant reason why customers prefer to shop at the pharmacy is the fact that there are no longer queues to wait for medication.

Initially, management was worried that the modern appeal may actually decrease the pharmacy’s traffic as potential clients may have perceived that the price of goods would be high – but they have been very pleased to see that customers have not been deterred by this and in fact their client base has grown extremely well in the first year of business, despite the fact there are three established pharmacies operating in the area.

High quality materials and cutting edge storage equipment allowed for a spacious design for staff and customers.