The consolidation of the different markets as part of the process of globalisation in modern economies is a fact. Although the veterinary profession has resisted the change for much longer than other industries (i.e. pharmaceutical, energy, telecommunications, etc.) it has now come the time when it is spreading fast through Europe. Investors trialled these models in USA and UK, learnt from their own mistakes and refined processes and strategies. In UK they are now reaching stage III (Focus) and many of them looking to take a global position before moving to stage IV (Balance & alliance).

Change is unsettling and worrying for some but also exciting and challenging for those with an entrepreneurial attitude. While some long for those days when ‘tomatoes tasted like tomatoes’ others are thrilled that they can have tomatoes all year round in any Country around the globe.

What has consolidation brought to the veterinary industry which may be considered good or bad? That is a very difficult question to answer as what is good for someone is bad for someone else. So, let's just describe the changes brought into the profession and allow everybody reach their own conclusions of whether it is good or bad...for them.

In the UK consolidation has certainly brought changes to clients, veterinary professionals and the profession as a whole.

Clients have seen how some companies have specialised in providing basic services at extremely competitive prices. Pet owners then have access to basic health care at a purely nominal cost. Other companies have focused on providing high clinical standards at a price which also reflects the quality of the services provided. The investment in new technologies has allowed an exponential development in veterinary medicine in recent years. Most groups offer packages which will help pet owners budget their expenditure (pet health care plans) or even finance the unexpected (pet insurance) increasing in that way the affordability of high quality services. Larger companies can offer their clients extended hours of service, have opened branches where a potential market existed and offer better trained staff to look after client and patient needs.

Veterinary professionals (veterinary surgeons and nurses) have access to induction programmes when they first join the profession largely increasing their success rate. A new graduate going through one of their structured programmes will reach in 24 months a level equivalent to a 10 year experienced colleague who has developed to their own accord. They can also take a great variety of professional paths and just focus on them (general practice, surgery, ECC, clinical specialities, leadership, etc.). The remuneration packages are also developed according to their professional status and performance. There are many other perks such as relocation packages, benefits in kind, being mentored and coached by trained professionals, etc.

The profession as a whole has also benefited from corporatisation. Before 1999, year in which the law changed in UK, the standards set by the RCVS had to be implemented by each individual practice. Keeping control of all those thousands of practices was simply not possible. Nowadays corporates work closely with the RCVS and take the responsibility to implement the highest standards of practice through all the clinics in their group. These companies are run by professionals and know that good quality training of their staff and providing good quality medicine to clients is good business. Many of them also invest in research rising the standards of patient care and the public image of the profession.
What are then the cons of corporatisation. Are there any? Of course, there are. Remember? Tomatoes don't taste like tomatoes anymore.

Standardisation means that there have to be a set of rules that are applied to all. These types of businesses lack the flexibility that a small business can offer to the client. The services and products developed by these companies are standard and aim to please the majority of the clients but when it comes to tailoring services to the specific needs of a specific client, large businesses cannot provide this level of personalised attention.

The same applies to veterinary professionals working for these companies. They need to follow the rules and protocols stabilised by the company and use the drugs chosen by the company. They also need to meet the standards and income targets set by the company. The professional freedom is greatly reduced when compared with working for oneself or for an independent practice.