Marc Wannhoff – CEO, Doetsch Grether



Culture outweighs strategy in sustaining long-term success

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Doetsch Grether may be 126 years old, but it is anything but traditional. With a portfolio that spans pharmaceuticals, consumer health, and retail – an uncommon mix for a company of its size – the Swiss firm is doubling down on focused expansion, values-driven culture, and long-term partnerships. For Wannhoff, lasting success stems not only from strategic execution, but from the strength of the team behind it.

What is your professional background, and what led you to take the helm of Doetsch Grether?

My entire career has been dedicated to the pharmaceutical and consumer health industries. After earning a business degree, I joined the international division of a mid-sized German pharmaceutical company, where I spent ten years and was eventually given the opportunity to establish and lead its Swiss affiliate in 2004. That move brought me to Switzerland for the first time and marked the beginning of my long-standing professional connection to the market.

Following a corporate acquisition, I joined Galderma, where I managed the German affiliate before returning to Switzerland to lead the integration of Galderma and Spirig Pharma across the Swiss and Austrian markets. Five years ago, during the second wave of COVID-19, I was approached to join Doetsch Grether as CEO. What appealed to me was the company’s unique profile. As a family-owned, medium-sized organisation, Doetsch Grether operates across three distinct business areas

– pharma, consumer health, and retail – which is rare for a company of this scale. That breadth and complexity continue to be a motivating challenge.

Founded 126 years ago as a pharmacy in Basel, Doetsch Grether has remained in the hands of the founding family and today generates over 90 percent of its sales within Switzerland. We maintain a strong local presence through our three business units: prescription pharmaceuticals, consumer health products, and high-dose nutritional supplements under the Vita Health Care line. Each reflects our longstanding commitment to meeting the evolving health needs of Swiss patients and consumers.

How is Doetsch Grether strategically positioned within the Swiss healthcare market, and what are the core pillars of its operating model?

At Doetsch Grether, we have deliberately built a broad-based model that allows us to serve both patients and consumers across pharmaceuticals, consumer health, and retail. We view the interplay between our pharma and consumer health divisions not as separate silos, but as a source of synergy that strengthens our overall positioning in the Swiss market.

Acquisitions form an essential part of our strategy. In recent years, we have expanded our portfolio by acquiring Vita Health Care, which specialises in high-dose supplements based on orthomolecular medicine, and by integrating Kalium Hausmann, a line of potassium-based prescription products acquired from Vifor Pharma. These additions complement the development of our existing brands and reinforce our relevance across therapeutic categories.

We also place a strong emphasis on innovation, which we pursue both through our in-house R&D capabilities and in partnership with external development teams. Recent product introductions such as the Magnesium-Diasporal Pro range; Vita Collagen and Protein line extensions as well as Omega Life Algae Oil liquid illustrate our ongoing commitment to bringing high-quality, science-based products to market.

Alongside this, distribution partnerships represent a third strategic pillar. In addition to our proprietary brands, we hold exclusive rights to a number of well-established international products in Switzerland. These are not treated as short-term listings but as integral parts of our offering, supported, promoted, and positioned with the same level of commitment as our own brands.

How is your portfolio structured across proprietary and distribution brands, and what strategic considerations guide your approach?

An important feature of our model is the way we treat distribution brands, with the same long-term commitment and strategic attention as our proprietary products. These partnerships are not transactional or short-lived; in fact, all of them have lasted more than a decade, with some extending beyond 30 years. From the perspective of healthcare professionals and consumers, these products are seen as Doetsch Grether brands, and we promote them with the same care and consistency. That continuity is a strength in itself, contributing to the trust we've built in the Swiss market.

Our rationale is to offer a portfolio that is both broad and coherent. Distribution brands allow us to complement our internal offering in areas where we are not yet active. We regularly analyse market data, primarily from EU countries, to identify successful brands in adjacent segments, and proactively reach out to their owners to explore the possibility of a Swiss partnership.

In terms of portfolio breakdown, OTC and consumer health products represent the largest part of our business. However, our pharmaceutical segment has grown significantly in recent years, driven in part by acquisitions, and is now nearly equal in scale. Retail remains the smallest component today, but we are actively building this area in response to a clear shift in consumer behaviour. As more people fulfil their healthcare needs through retail and online channels, we are evolving our presence to meet them where they are.

What are the key growth drivers within your portfolio today, and how have you adapted your organisational structure to manage this diversity effectively?

Our strongest growth is coming from categories where we hold leading market positions. Magnesium products are by far our largest segment, offered both as prescription medicines and as food supplements. Sore throat treatments are another cornerstone, with Neo-Angin maintaining a market-leading position in Switzerland. In the omega-3 category, our Omega Life range places us among the top three nationally, and we lead the OTC segment for haemorrhoid products. Additionally, our Vita Health Care franchise has positioned us as a key player in orthomolecular medicine, focusing on scientifically supported, high-dose supplements.

One brand that particularly exemplifies our heritage and visibility is Grether's Pastilles. Originally a UK product we distributed, we acquired it in the 1970s. Today, it remains one of the most widely

recognised consumer health brands in Switzerland, still found in nearly every pharmacy and trusted by generations of consumers.

To support such a broad and specialised portfolio, we reorganised our structure four years ago, moving from a traditional sales and marketing model to a business unit-driven approach. This allows us to tailor our activities and resources to the specific needs of each market segment. Our Pharma unit focuses on prescription medicines and medical professionals; Consumer Health, our largest unit, serves pharmacies and drugstores; and Vita Health Care concentrates on scientific communication and training for more complex supplement products.

Each area serves a distinct customer base, and by aligning our teams accordingly, we are able to provide targeted expertise and remain agile, qualities that are essential for a medium-sized company competing across diverse healthcare domains.

How has Doetsch Grether evolved during your tenure, and how has the company responded to broader shifts in consumer behaviour and healthcare trends?

Over the past five years, we've seen a clear and lasting shift in how individuals approach their health. Accelerated by the pandemic, prevention has moved to the forefront, people are no longer thinking about health only in times of illness, but also in terms of staying well, ageing better, and maintaining quality of life. This trend aligns strongly with our strategy and was a key motivation behind our acquisition of Vita Health Care, whose focus on orthomolecular supplements complements our broader consumer health offering. Many of our products today contribute not only to treating conditions, but to supporting long-term wellness, an area where we continue to invest with conviction.

A particular area of focus has been the development of our training offers. Across all our business units, we provide targeted training programmes to ensure our customers are equipped to explain the value, composition, and rationale behind our products to their patients and consumers, especially in complex categories like supplements where clarity is essential.

To reinforce this, we fully internalised our DG Academy, which had previously been managed externally. Strengthening our in-house medical team has allowed us to deliver deeper, more consistent training to our field teams and stakeholders.

How would you characterise the current regulatory environment in Switzerland, and what does it mean for Doetsch Grether's market position and performance?

Switzerland has long been regarded as a well-regulated and economically sound healthcare market, but like many countries, we are seeing a gradual shift toward more regulation. While the framework remains comparatively liberal, the growing administrative burden does not always translate into clear benefits for patients. This trend warrants close attention, as it risks adding complexity without improving outcomes, a concern particularly relevant for companies operating in both pharmaceuticals and consumer health.

That said, the Swiss system still offers considerable advantages. The political structure – grounded in direct democracy – encourages policymakers to maintain a pragmatic balance between healthcare quality and economic viability. In our experience, most stakeholders across the system remain genuinely focused on delivering value to patients, and that alignment is a key reason why Switzerland continues to function as an effective and responsive market. Access to innovative medicines, particularly regarding pricing and reimbursement, remains an ongoing discussion, but overall, we are optimistic that the country will maintain its distinctive balance of rigour and flexibility.

As for our own performance, we have experienced strong, sustained growth in recent years. Doetsch Grether now ranks among the leading consumer health companies in Switzerland, with near-universal visibility in pharmacies and drugstores. According to the latest market data, we hold the sixth position in the Swiss consumer health sector, surpassing several larger multinational players. On the prescription side, we continue to outperform market growth, consistently achieving double-digit gains and steadily improving our position. Strategically, we aim to exceed market growth by at least one percentage point annually, and this is a target we have consistently met.

What are your strategic priorities for Doetsch Grether over the medium term, and how do you see the company evolving both domestically and internationally?

Our principal objective remains ensuring that Doetsch Grether stays relevant within the Swiss market—our core territory. This involves continuously adapting our portfolio to align with evolving consumer expectations and healthcare needs across our established distribution channels. One particularly notable trend is the increasing shift toward retail settings for health-related purchases, a pattern that has gained momentum in recent years. Responding to this, we are placing greater strategic emphasis on expanding within the retail segment, while also pursuing opportunities in e-

commerce, which continues to show strong growth.

That said, we remain deeply committed to our presence in pharmacies, drugstores, and physician-focused channels. These will continue to play a central role in our go-to-market approach, particularly through the Pharma business unit. To support our broader growth ambitions, we are also open to new distribution partnerships and continue to consider acquisitions as a meaningful avenue for portfolio expansion and market relevance.

In terms of international development, we have taken a focused and phased approach. Rather than pursuing broad internationalisation all at once, we are prioritising markets where we see tangible demand for our products. A good example is the United States, where Grether's Pastilles had already built a following among professional singers before we officially entered the market. The product was being used and recommended by well-known artists such as Dua Lipa and Ariana Grande, which provided a valuable base of organic awareness. We launched in the US around a year and a half ago, and the early performance has been very encouraging.

Building on this momentum, we are now exploring additional international opportunities. In particular, we see strong potential for our Vita Health Care range of food supplements in the Middle East, as well as opportunities in Greater China. While Switzerland will always be our primary focus, we believe these carefully selected markets offer promising avenues to extend the reach of our brands and reinforce their position.

As you begin expanding internationally, how would you assess Doetsch Grether's brand recognition outside of Switzerland, and what efforts are underway to raise its profile globally?

Within Switzerland, our brands are well established, many of our products are present in virtually every pharmacy or drugstore, and consumers often recognise the brands even if they are not immediately aware they belong to Doetsch Grether. That embedded presence is a strength, but internationally, we are not yet widely known, which makes brand visibility a clear opportunity as we grow abroad.

We believe our success story in Switzerland positions us as an attractive partner. In the consumer health space, we rank among the leading companies, even outperforming some much larger multinational players. That speaks to the strength of our product quality, our operational model, and our deep understanding of the Swiss market.

To support our international ambitions, we marked our 125th anniversary last year by revisiting our corporate values and using that milestone as a springboard to refresh our brand identity. That process led to the launch of a new corporate identity, one that aligns with our long-standing heritage but also reflects the direction we are heading as we build visibility and credibility beyond our home market.

How would you characterise the culture at Doetsch Grether, and how does it influence both employee engagement and your approach to long-term partnerships?

One of the defining features of working at Doetsch Grether is the high level of individual responsibility. As a Swiss-based, family-owned company with our headquarters here in Basel, we operate with a level of autonomy that allows for quick decision-making. If we are aligned and convinced of a direction, we can act on it without delay. That speed and ownership are, in my view, real competitive advantages. Of course, we remain accountable to our shareholders, but as long as we deliver, we enjoy a great deal of freedom, something I personally find highly motivating, and which resonates strongly with many of our employees.

This culture is reflected in one of our core values: “We take responsibility and shape the future.” It is a value we genuinely try to live every day. In fact, we continue to attract strong talent from large multinationals, our current CFO joined us from Roche, and the Head of our Pharma Business Unit came from Novartis. These individuals were drawn by the opportunity to leave a more visible mark on the business and to contribute in a setting where ideas translate into results more rapidly. That desire for impact is something I frequently hear during interviews with candidates from larger companies.

We are also very mindful of our responsibilities as an employer. While I believe we already offer an attractive environment, we continuously seek to enhance the experience. We provide flexible working hours and maintain a fully equipped gym on-site, which ties directly into our company purpose: *Experience health simply*. This is more than a slogan, it guides how we work, interact, and support one another. We even organise sportive activities such as company-wide exercise day to reinforce our purpose even internally.

This mindset extends to how we build external relationships as well. When exploring new distribution partnerships, cultural alignment is just as important as commercial fit. Many of our partnerships are longstanding, based on trust and mutual respect, so much so that in some cases, the formal contract is secondary to the relationship itself. We strongly believe that shared values

are the cornerstone of sustainable, successful collaboration.

How are sustainability and environmental considerations reflected in Doetsch Grether's strategic priorities, especially given your outsourced production model?

Sustainability is an integral part of our strategic framework. Around ten years ago, we made a conscious decision to exit in-house manufacturing and fully outsource production, enabling us to focus more effectively on areas where we add the greatest value. Naturally, the largest share of environmental impact lies within the production process, and although we are not directly manufacturing, we remain fully committed to minimising our footprint.

We work closely with our production partners – most of whom are based in Switzerland, with a smaller share in other European countries – to ensure that environmental protection is not just an afterthought but a core selection criterion. When evaluating new partners, sustainability performance is among the top factors we consider. Even without owning the production sites, we take an active role in ensuring that our partners uphold the same high standards we demand of ourselves.

As a leader, what values do you most seek to instil in your team, and what would you consider your greatest achievement in that regard?

Respect is foundational to my leadership approach, regardless of hierarchy. I strive to embody this principle in the way I interact with everyone across the organisation, and I believe that setting that tone is essential. At Doetsch Grether, we have cultivated a culture where this mutual respect is more than just an aspiration; it is embedded in how we operate day to day.

What gives me the greatest pride is not a specific milestone or project, but the environment we have built; a cohesive, motivated team that works hard and also takes time to celebrate shared success. In my view, culture outweighs strategy in sustaining long-term performance. That is not to say that strategy is unimportant, but without a strong, values-driven culture, even the best strategies can falter. In my experience, it is cohesive, empowered teams that drive enduring success, and fostering that kind of team dynamic has been my most meaningful contribution.

Looking ahead, what are your key priorities, and where do you hope Doetsch Grether will stand in three years' time?

In an increasingly dynamic healthcare environment, our foremost priority is to remain a relevant and trusted partner for pharmacies, drugstores, and physicians. This means continuing to adapt our presence to where consumers seek to meet their healthcare needs. I anticipate that in the coming years we will be active across even more distribution channels within Switzerland, always aiming to stay as close as possible to the end customer.

At the same time, evolving our portfolio remains an ongoing and strategic focus. This involves not only introducing new products but also making deliberate choices to sharpen our core focus, such as last year's decision to divest a cosmetics brand in order to concentrate fully on healthcare. In parallel, we are committed to expanding our international footprint by building new distributor partnerships. If we speak again in three years, I would hope to have established several additional collaborations and completed at least one acquisition, most likely within Switzerland, as our M&A strategy remains primarily domestic for now.

Doetsch Grether has a strong heritage, but we are also a future-oriented organisation. We are well positioned to navigate today's challenges and those on the horizon, with a clear strategy grounded in agility, partnership, and focus.

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