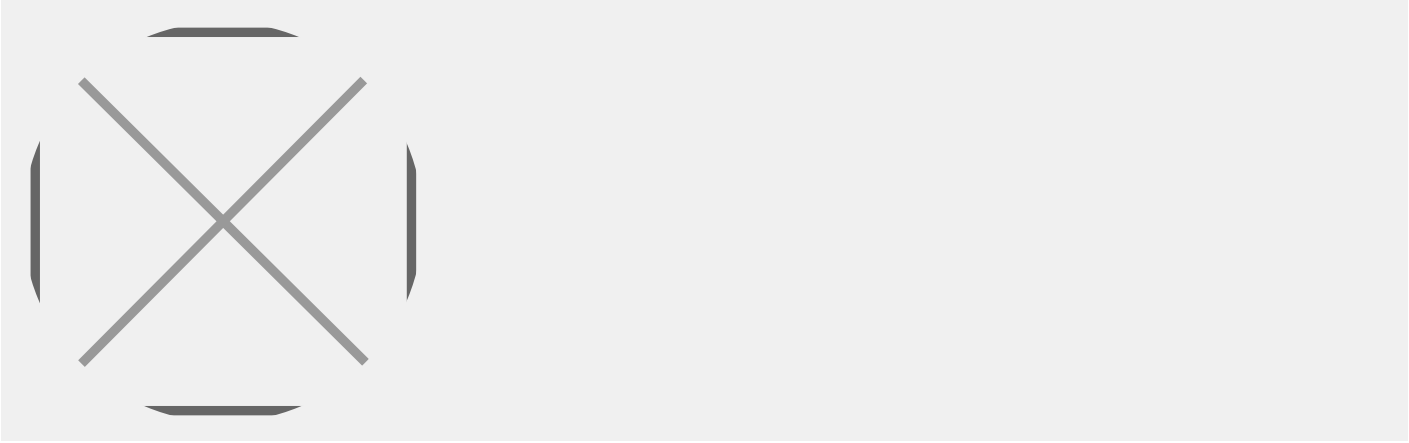
Interview with Robin Rumler, CEO, Pfizer Austria



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Robin Rumler, what is your assessment of the subsidiary's current strengths and weaknesses, after three and half years of tenure?

Pfizer currently ranks second in the overall pharmaceutical market in Austria, just behind Novartis, which includes its subsidiaries Sandoz, Hexal, and 1A Pharma. Our focus clearly lies on country customer facing and e-marketing initiatives. Products like Enbrel®, Prevenar® and Lyrica® can be named as our main growth drivers.

Every day, the Pfizer team globally works across developed and emerging markets to advance wellbeing, prevention, treatments and cures that challenge the most feared diseases of our time. Consistent with our responsibility as the world's leading biopharmaceutical company, we also collaborate with health care providers, governments and local communities to support and expand access to reliable, affordable health care around the world.

In addition, Pfizer's motivated and empowered employees clearly contribute to the company's success. Pfizer Austria has installed a 'fair play' network team, representing needs and opinions from our employees. Personal development, adequate remuneration and a family friendly working environment lead to a win-win situation for the company and its employees.

Pfizer's strong portfolio is one of the company's main success factors. The company's focus nowadays is clearly aligned with its therapeutic areas like neuroscience, cardiovascular diseases, vaccines, oncology and inflammation/immunology.

On the other hand, the innovative industry has been facing Loss of Exclusivity (LOE) issues over the last few years, and Pfizer is no exception, being particularly affected by the loss of Sortis®

(Lipitor®). These challenges have taught me that we are really in an era where we need to manage change, and position the company for the future.

Part of this change management was to merge with Wyeth over two years ago. Everything was done to move Pfizer from one super blockbuster like Sortis®, to a business that stands on different pillars; with vaccines, cardiovascular, neuroscience, pain management, rheumatoid arthritis, and oncology. Pfizer is a much more diversified biological company today, than it ever was in the past.

With respect to the cost of drugs, Austria belongs to the low cost countries in Europe. Drug costs are approximately 18% below the EU-15 average. Nevertheless sick funds and payers still put pressure on drug cost to decrease health care expenditure. The so called “block-buster” era is over; the future belongs to more targeted therapies. The industry is talking about the patent-cliff, which means that many of the block-busters are losing their patent these days. We see a clear shift to generics but on the other hand we need to improve access to innovation.

The industry focus lies on personalized medicine, and this approach nowadays becomes true mainly for oncology products. For instance, soon Pfizer is launching a specific product for the treatment of a special kind of lung cancer. But in future, personalized medicine will also become very important for diseases like Alzheimer’s, pain, neurological disorders, diabetes and many others.

Since you became president of PHARMIG, you manage a double agenda. What are the challenges and opportunities of this position?

Indeed, this is a challenge, and a balancing act. Although there might be some overlap between Pfizer’s view and the rest of the industry’s view on a particular issue, it is not always the case. Thus, it is always important for me not to mix up interests.

It is my intention, to bring all the players of the health care system together, to define goals and future targets to finally improve health and find ways to support active and healthy ageing.

How do you assess the level of competition for Pfizer Austria and what are the company’s comparative advantages in this increasingly competitive environment?

Pfizer currently spends about 7 billion USD annually on research and development (R&D). The company has a strong pipeline with 87 compounds in clinical development, focusing on vaccines and biologics – about 70% of all late stage development projects.

Since 2011, Pfizer has been offering generics of its own products after patent loss. This strategy provides the unique opportunity to contribute to local cost containment measures by offering the well-known Pfizer product quality, at a lower price.

Many speak highly of Vienna's geostrategic location between the Western World and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as well as its excellent staff and infrastructure. To what extent has Pfizer leveraged these elements and developed Vienna as a centre for the group's regional operations?

Indeed, given the geographical position of Austria, a leading strategic centre of regional operations seems to be obvious. In practice, such a position depends on the company's structure. Europe in geographical terms is not congruent with Pfizer's view. As a result, the former CEE countries belong to Pfizer's so called Emerging Markets portfolio. Although Vienna does not serve as management hub for the region, global functions are based here.

First, Vienna is a centre of excellence in e-marketing solutions for the Pfizer group.

Secondly, the Global Generics Regulatory Affairs organization was established as a separate yet fully integrated regulatory organization within Pfizer in April 2012. These functions are globally focusing on Pfizer's in-licensed generic products.

Lastly, other strategic operations are run from Vienna, including Pfizer Consumer Health (PCH) Commercial and Operations for South Eastern Europe, Russia, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Turkey, Israel and the Middle East.

Through its services, investment, and recruitment, Pfizer plays undoubtedly a role in Austria's economy. More generally, what can be the pharmaceutical industry's role as the engine of economic recovery and development?

About 10,000 people work in the pharmaceutical industry in Austria; 270 of them work at Pfizer. Therefore Pfizer plays an important role as employer and is a well-perceived partner in the Health Care System. For its employees, Pfizer is placing a high value on health protection (free vaccinations, health workshops, health assessments, etc), a good work-life balance, training and education, and employee surveys to evaluate the work-place-satisfaction.

Moreover, about 40 clinical trials are currently running in Austria. It is our aim to help treat, cure and eradicate diseases.

Pfizer opened in Vienna in 1956. This long history of leadership in the market surely comes with special responsibilities. How would you describe the company's commitment to the population?

Pfizer's Purpose – Working Together for a Healthier World – means looking outward to build productive long-term alliances with organizations in our communities that share our goal of better health for more of the world's people. Our initiatives and programs include Pfizer Kids, Summer Camp for children suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, Partnerships with Haus der Barmherzigkeit,

Corporate Volunteering Days, amongst many other initiatives.

Also, since 2009 Pfizer Austria has been an official member of the United Nations (UN) Global Compact.

The Pfizer Corporate Volunteering Days take place once a month. Under this initiative, 2-4 colleagues get half a day off to spend time in several selected charitable institutions and to help by supporting several activities. 45 employees joined our volunteering days in 2010 and 2011, which lasted a total of 1028 hours from 2008 until today. During these events, we serve meals to homeless people, organize excursions with young adults who suffer from mental or physical impairments, and we support activities at a women's residence.

The Pfizer Kids program is also a very rewarding initiative. It is a project of Pfizer Austria in cooperation with Caritas Vienna since 2004. Poverty and the threat of homelessness are on the increase in Austria, and often related to the experience of trauma and violence. In most cases, kids are unable to process violence and homelessness without meaningful therapeutic support – the kind of support that was unavailable in the past.

Pfizer closes this gap and, in cooperation with Caritas, offers a new therapeutic program for socially disadvantaged kids and adolescents threatened by homelessness and poverty. The Pfizer Kids initiative provides care for these children and helps them build trust in their future and taking an active part in their lives. Up to now, 80 kids and adolescents have received a total of more than 7,300 hours of therapy, helping them to master problems in their everyday life and to build a perspective for their future.

Looking at your background, you have extensive experience with different pharma companies. What is unique about Pfizer?

My first company was Janssen-Cilag, a subsidiary of the American group J&J, then for the UK-based group Zeneca, then the French Sanofi, and I am today with Pfizer, back to an American work culture.

What I like about Pfizer is how the company is always open for creative ideas, and how they execute good ideas in a timely manner. For instance, at the moment, the Pfizer team is on the right path to become a strong partner in healthcare with the multi channel approach.

What is your personal vision for the future of the Austrian pharmaceutical industry and the specific role Pfizer will play within it?

According our slogan Working Together for a Healthier World, we make medicines and vaccines that help people when they are sick, and prevent them from getting sick in the first place. Our focus lies on personalized medicine. We are convinced we will still play a leading role in the

pharmaceutical industry 5 years from now, supported by our portfolio and our employees.

What objectives have you set for Pfizer Austria to grow in the next five years?

It is our aim to be aligned with the international strategy, which is to focus on our resources in disease areas where we have the best chance of scientific and commercial success: neuroscience, cardiovascular diseases, vaccines, oncology and inflammation/immunology.

To increase our life expectancy further we have to define goals to work on in the future, in order to reach those targets. This appeal is targeted to all players in the health care system. The pharmaceutical industry, as well as Pfizer, will for sure contribute to this goal.

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