Interview: Bernard Jambon – Chairman, Mapi Group, France



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While assessing patient perspectives in comprehensive drug and treatment analyses may sound like a contemporary issue, the Mapi Group has been a pioneer in the practice for over forty years. Mapi Chairman Bernard Jambon explains the importance of patient incorporation in drug and therapy evaluation and his ambitions to expand the company's market research methods to new markets

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Despite the contemporary nature of Mapi, we see that you created the company over 40 years ago. What is it that prompted you to found the Group?

I began my career as a market research reporter in 1974. Soon after, I decided to launch my own market research company. We based the foundation of the company on gathering the opinions of clients for market research, which lends itself to the positioning of the company to this day. From global market research, I refined my focus to medical market research, and specifically to drug evaluation. In the beginning, drug safety and drug efficiency were the main points of assessment. At the time there was a new trend in academic circles for documenting patients' self-reported measures of physical and mental health, a concept called Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL).

Up until that point, this new concept was not a component of drug evaluation, which we immediately acknowledged as a critical missing component of our research. It is impossible to evaluate drugs and therapies comprehensively without also collecting patients' insight. Patients are the final consumers of drugs and if a patient is ultimately not satisfied with a drug or therapy experience, then the efficiency of the drug or therapy will suffer. To evaluate a drug, assessing efficacy and safety under existing parameters is the primary step, but patients' advice is the next necessary data.

When we initiated our expanded approach to market research by inquiring with patients, we were met with skepticism and our practices were dismissed as a marketing gimmick. We had to stand firm in our beliefs that a drug cannot be marketed appropriately without first actively addressing patient perspectives, especially for treatments of chronic diseases. For over 25 years now, my company has been a pioneer looking beyond simply safety and efficacy evaluations, but also developing technical expertise in gathering and assessing patient perspectives.

Over the years, Mapi has expanded through a series of acquisitions, including select Optum Life Sciences services in 2014 and Registrat in 2009. Under what criteria do you select your partners and how easy is it to build synergies between the different businesses?

When a company decides to make an acquisition, they must integrate them into their overall strategy. Simply undertaking an acquisition to manage the bottom line or to balance profits and losses is a mistake. An acquisition must be strategic, especially for an SME like the Mapi group. Considering the acquisition scenario from our perspective, we were contending with a situation where 90 percent of our market was in the US, along with the headquarters of our clients and leading decision makers, yet we were still perceived as a small, distant, French company.

Our first acquisition was a competitor of ours in the US, Registrat, finalized in 2009, opening new avenues into research on late-phase, post-marketing studies. As a US-based company, they faced similar struggles of striving to conduct global-level research, while being confined to the US, making the acquisition a win-win.

A few years later, even with our expanded presence in Europe and the US, we were finding that our ambitions for large-scale research were failing to compete against the capabilities of larger contract research organizations. This led to the acquisition of Optum Life Sciences services in 2014, which along with a focus on patient perspectives, also provided specialization in economics, late-phase research, as well increasingly important regulatory business. Their global coverage, primarily

in Asia, is extremely valuable to us, in addition to new outlets in Canada, Sweden, Italy, and Spain, reinforcing our mission to internationalize further.

Mapi claims to be the leading patient-centered research company. In France, however, there is what seems to be a rather tense relationship between the government, payers, and pharma companies. In such an environment, how can stakeholders in this industry evolve to focus more on the patient?

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We were successful in establishing collaboration with government authorities following the creation of a non-profit organization nearly twelve years ago, the Mapi Research Trust, an information and documentation center on Patient Related Outcomes (PRO). This trust has become a leading institution and reliable source for information assessing patient care and quality of life. At the time, we collaborated with representatives from the FDA, the former EMEA, academics, trade unions, and drug company representatives, forging a new association establishing new rules to assess patient quality of life. Following several round-table discussions, we compiled a guidance document that the FDA later edited, and is now a universal reference document for the entire field. With the FDA demanding very strict rules to assess patient outcomes, and pharmaceutical companies requesting a much more laissez faire approach, we naturally encountered challenges and roadblocks. Bringing all of these actors together initiated a collaborative working environment that was extremely fruitful.

While regulators and drug providers collaborate with each other more, patient organizations are becoming increasingly important yet are frequently excluded. Navigating the skepticism of drug companies while being lobbied by patient organizations poses new challenges in reaching consensus among these disparate market players. There is a contradictory philosophy when patients express their frustrations that the pharmaceutical industry is capitalizing on their illnesses for profits, while at the same time they also demand remedies for such illnesses. Appeasing these generally bad-natured relationships and improving the overall image of pharmaceutical companies is still a very relevant industry challenge, in France, but also globally. This alone puts precedence on including patient organizations in industry discussions regarding patient care and quality of life.

In January 2013 you recruited James Karis as the new CEO. How has this benefited the Group in terms of performance?

We maintain a positive perspective for the future, thanks in part to our positioning in the market, our expertise, and our reputation. Our strengths aside, we have suffered from a lack of solid

management. As the company grew, reaching nearing 400 employees, the leadership demands were beginning to extend beyond my own capacity. With James Karis integrated into our team, with his many skills as a high caliber CEO, he immediately addressed our strengths, as well as our weaknesses, and has excelled in managing the company. This has helped us to expand our service offerings, by taking our professionalism and business capabilities to the next level.

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Does the fact that you set up a headquarters in the US, tell us something about the state of the industry in France, and if you had to make the same decision today, would the outcome be the same?

It is a challenge for a consulting company to be based in France. This is simply a reality that we must acknowledge. To be a globalized company with American clients, it is critical to have a US headquarters. If presented with a choice of one place to maintain headquarters, it most likely would not be in France. This is not a criticism of French regulations or the French authorities, but the reality of the image of a French company in international business.

The company celebrated its 40th anniversary last year, highlighting the accomplishment that for four decades, healthcare researchers, pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and medical device companies around the world have depended on Mapi innovations. What will the next 40 years bring?

Developing technology is of the utmost importance for the near and long-term future. With the increasing interconnectivity of computers, mobile devices, and phones, we need to develop the appropriate technologies to keep up with the rapid digitalization of information. This is one of our main priorities as a company, to maintain our status as an industry leader by consistently upholding innovation. The market is changing rapidly, and we are constantly seeking innovative mediums through which to address the digitalization of the information market.

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