Interview: Giampiero Roncoroni – Swiss Market Manager, Zambon, Switzerland



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12.12.2016

Tags: Switzerland, Zambon, Production, Pharma, Pharmaceuticals, Healthcare

With over 50 years of history in Switzerland, Zambon operates in Canton Ticino one of Zambon's two major global production centers. Swiss Market Manager Giampiero Roncoroni discusses the unique features of the Swiss market, and how a particular focus on the OTC/OTX market has been a key factor of success for the Swiss affiliate.

Being active with primary care products prescribed largely by general practitioners, what would you say is the unique challenge of marketing pharmaceutical products in Switzerland?

In Switzerland you are required to schedule an appointment to meet with a physician, and thus can only plan a maximum of five maybe six visits per day. In fact, an increasing number of GPs will no longer meet with sales reps as they argue they can inform themselves adequately via other channels – attitudes are a bit different around the initial launch of innovative products. On the other hand for those GPs whom you can meet with, the contact is deep and professional, . Yet, this circumstance is very different from markets where you can just drop by around the lunch hour.

Given this circumstance, the key is targeting the right physicians and recruiting and training excellent reps, who are able to convey smart arguments and leave a lasting impression with physicians. As we are currently in mid-November 2016, this is a critical moment for scheduling appointments for all of 2017, as physicians usually open their agenda for the next year sometime

in September,. Once the year begins, it’s much more difficult to make many appointments as you have to struggle to line up your agenda with a particular doctor.

What role does Zambon Switzerland play for the global Zambon group?

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Zambon Switzerland was founded in 1965, here in Cadempino. In the 1980s the current site was established, and a significant manufacturing facility was built. Today, this site is one of the two big production hubs for Zambon’s global operations, alongside the site in Vicenza, Italy. The Cadempino facility is specialized in the production of granulates, effervescent tablets and injectable antibiotics; in some cases the plant of Cadempino is the only production site for worldwide supply.

Today we have a staff of over 250 employees working for Zambon Switzerland, with about 32 covering the local market and the rest working in production and administrative functions. Across these lines, we produce 76 million units per year,. 60 percent of our production is for the Zambon group affiliates worldwide. About 25 percent of our output is for toll manufacturing clients, and the remaining 15 percent destined for the local Swiss market – we of course also import products from Vincenza for the Swiss market, being liquid syrups, drops and tablets.

Considering the local commercial operations, how does Zambon’s Swiss business compare to other affiliates?

I would say Switzerland is a bit like Belgium in the Zambon world, very strong in OTC/OTX relative to other affiliates who are more focused on RX. Similar dynamics also exist as both countries have distinct language groups and cultural dynamics within.

In this sense, it is important to understand that although Zambon is united around three key products, each affiliate has taken a slightly different course of development. These three key products, Fluimucil (acetylcysteine), Monuril (fosfomycin trometamol), and Spedifen (ibuprofen arginine), were developed by Zambon and still account for 50 percent of Zambon’s global revenues, and are thus a key part of our operations and corporate identify. Moreover, they are quite diverse in their applications with both RX and OTC applications – Fluimucil for instance has indications to treat a common cough on one hand and chronic bronchitis or antidote for paracetamol intoxication on the other.

Starting in late 90s the Swiss affiliate identified significant growth opportunities in the OTC market, primarily because we found some products under the Fluimucil and Spedifen brands which could be

switched as OTC products under Swiss regulations. Thus, the company created an OTC marketing team and assembled an attractive OTC portfolio by licensing in some products to complement our own brands. This strategy has turned out to be highly successful as about half of our revenues are generated on the OTC side, with the other half being RX sales – and this is a much higher OTC share than Zambon has in most other markets.

As such, when you look at our rankings in the Swiss market we rank 43th by value, but if you consider only OTC products we are in the Top 10 in volume.

How has Zambon's strategic pivot to CNS affected Zambon Switzerland?

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In 2012 Zambon made a substantial equity investment in Newron, a company developing a Parkinson's treatment based on the compound safinamide, and this has kicked off Zambon's efforts to enter the CNS fields. Safinamide has since been approved, and was launched this January under the brand name Xadago. A year later Zambon took another step in this direction with the acquisition of Profile Pharma in 2013, Profile Pharma having developed an innovative concept for the inhaled treatment of cystic fibrosis.

We received the dossier for Xadago in 2015 and were successful in getting the product registered and reimbursed before the year ended. While the launch started in January 2016, we actually started our prelaunch efforts back in June 2015 by creating a new CNS Business Unit appointing internal staff. As a manager, it was very important to me to let my team have the opportunity to run with this project rather than bringing in someone from outside to lead the effort, which would have been very demotivating.

Once January arrived we had done solid pre-launch work, knew which CNS specialists at which centers were more focused on treating Parkinson's versus other conditions. Overall, we have been very happy with the launch which is hitting the right targets and seeing the same levels of uptake as we've seen with other affiliates. This really is an interesting product and it's the first new development in Parkinson since some years, so many specialists were eagerly awaiting its launch.

What's next for Zambon Switzerland? What will be your priorities for driving growth over the next few years?

Certainly driving the Xadago launch will continue to be a key priority for some time, since we will have other CNS products reaching the market to continue to build our presence in this niche. Of course we must remember our core brands, Flumicil, Monuril, Spedifen, Perenterol and the OTC line

as they still account for such a significant portion of our revenue and will continue to do so for some time; we must ensure they remain relevant and present in the minds of prescribers, pharmacists and patients.

The cystic fibrosis therapy we have in the pipe following the acquisition of Profile pharma is an interesting challenge that we are working on tackling. We have an innovative inhaler selected, and we are working hard to put together the business model needed to support a quality of service which can really surpass the level of service already being offered on the market,

Finally, I would say the new Zambon concept or theme is being an “open company.” This means we must build good relationships outside the company, work with others, and not close ourselves off from the rest of the life sciences ecosystem. Individuals must take on responsibilities themselves and demonstrate and entrepreneurial spirit in each affiliate. I’m sure with this attitude the future will bring success for all of my colleagues at Zambon Switzerland, and the rest of the Zambon global organization.

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