Interview: Johann Egger – General Manager Switzerland & Austria, bioMérieux



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The General Manager of bioMérieux Switzerland and Austria highlights the significance of Switzerland for the company's regional cluster and furthermore explains how Switzerland contributes to the global development of the company.

Could you please introduce yourself and bioMérieux's organization in Switzerland and Austria?

I joined bioMérieux in 2001, in which I have been active in different positions ever since. This was an exciting step in my career as the *in vitro* diagnostics business is unique in terms of its scientific approach and the highly dynamic product life cycle. For almost ten years now, I have been the general manager of our Austrian affiliate and two years ago, I was also given responsibility for the Swiss affiliate.

From an organizational point of view, we cluster different countries together within the EMEA region. Switzerland is for example part of the Central Europe Cluster with Austria, Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, where bioMérieux is present through subsidiaries. This implies that we are working as part of a cross border matrix organization which leverages our strengths and expertise to be experts in our market and different business segments.

bioMérieux is a company with a rich history and tradition. Already in 1897, Marcel Mérieux, who worked with Louis Pasteur, set up the Mérieux Institute which was focused on developing and manufacturing human and animal vaccines. In 1963, his grand-son Alain Mérieux chose to focus on *in vitro* diagnostics and founded bioMérieux. Today his son, Alexandre Mérieux, is the company's CEO and Jean-Luc Bélingard is the Chairman. This year, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the subsidiary in Switzerland, symbolizing our longstanding commitment to the Swiss market.

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You have been the General Manager for bioMérieux Switzerland for two years now. What were your key priorities when taking over?

The key priority was—and still is—to further develop and grow the business. For us, the Swiss market is one of the countries where we can play a role as pioneer. Switzerland is indeed a highly dynamic market and is first in Europe and the world in many aspects, including implementing new solutions and product launches for instance. Given the dynamics of this market, another priority over the past two years has been to ensure we are organizationally aligned to these dynamics. Translated into actions, that meant to bring even more expertise to the market and customers, strengthening our team in terms of financial and human resources and consolidating our local organization in Switzerland overall.

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A lot of work has been delivered in the so-called "supporting processes" across our different departments and furthermore reinforcing the strength of our quality management system.

Fortunately, we can conclude that the year 2016 was highly successful for us.

So just how significant is Switzerland to the regional cluster you mentioned earlier?

Within Switzerland, we are divided into two main business units: the clinical business unit and the industrial business unit. 25 percent of the Swiss affiliate's revenues are generated by our business in industrial microbiology control and the rest comes from clinical diagnostics. In terms of innovation, bioMérieux relies on a highly innovative pipeline of solutions, these in turn are dependent of targeted investments and long term vision.

How would you assess the attitude of Swiss healthcare professionals to diagnostics in general?

60 to 70 percent of medical decisions depend on diagnostic tests results which make up only two to three percent of healthcare spending.[1] In Switzerland, the total spending on the healthcare system is the same as in almost all other European countries (10 to 11 percent of their GDP).

The demographic factor of an increasingly aging population with rising medical needs is considered as a pan-European financing challenge. The recognition of the medical and economical value of diagnostics by healthcare professionals is *in fine*, not only a Swiss, but a global concern. For sure, healthcare professionals are very much interested in the medical value of diagnostics for better patient care but we also carry out studies to demonstrate the medical and the economic value of diagnostics as powerful tools to support the sustainability of healthcare systems. *In vitro* diagnostics enable to improve patient care and reduce healthcare costs because the sooner the patient is diagnosed correctly, the sooner the right treatment can be applied. This allows to improve or even save the patient's life and reduce the length of stay in hospital and costs all along the entire care pathway.

Switzerland is renowned for being a huge manufacturing hub for pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. Given the significance of Switzerland in this arena, what is your strategy to succeed?

In Switzerland, we are particularly focused on providing highly innovative solutions for industrial microbiological control in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sector. Currently, we witness a rising demand in improving the safety of drug manufacturing process as regulations are becoming more and more stringent. Therefore, pharmaceutical companies and manufacturers need to increase integrity of their drugs to comply with current regulations. We have grown to become the reliable partner for a significant number of pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, assisting them in the highly-regulated arena of pharmaceutical compliance.

How do you define the role of Switzerland in the first two pillars of your strategy 'innovation' and 'mergers, acquisitions and partnerships'?

bioMérieux is a pioneering *in vitro* diagnostic player and Switzerland is an integral part of its historical and geographical expansion. Switzerland is a focus market as we recognize it as a fantastic platform to bring new developments to the market. As aforementioned, we have many successful examples of solutions we have first launched in Switzerland.

For example, FilmArray® (an FDA, CE-IVD, and TGA certified multiplex PCR system that integrates sample preparation, amplification, detection and analysis) is one of our preferred solutions in Switzerland, which is a huge success for patients, for clinicians and for the healthcare system. Switzerland is a pioneering market, which is very much sensitive to innovation. We have a very good rate of market penetration and business development in Switzerland, which is also due to a clear market segmentation. Switzerland is a highly competitive market as everyone wants to be here. Therefore, our vision is to reinforce our position to maintain our position in the country. To do so, however, I believe that we need to even more gain proximity to the customer. We want to have high skilled local teams dealing with the customers and providing the solutions they need.

Another point I would like to add is that as market leaders, we recognize the trend of international companies seeking solutions; they are not discussing ‘product A versus product B’ anymore, they are seeking comprehensive solutions. Recognizing this trend, we are, for example, currently building solutions for the diagnostic of sepsis at each step of the patient’s condition, thus becoming a one stop shop and genuine partner for our customers. Moreover, we aim to clearly position ourselves as global partners with a global key account management approach, which allows us to be at the forefront of upcoming trends and needs.

Evisight™ Compact: intelligent incubator system for real time culture media reading



Evisight™ Compact: intelligent incubator system for real time culture media reading

bioMérieux recently launched EviSight™ Compact. How does this product compare to existing microbiological testing solutions used in pharmaceutical industries?

The launch in 2016 of EviSight™ Compact (a smart incubator that provides real-time culture media readings) is another perfect example of bioMérieux's pioneering solutions. In the pharmaceutical industry, microbiological testing is a crucial aspect of quality control. Evisight™ Compact is the most effective testing method for microbial detection in pharmaceutical products. This innovation further strengthens our portfolio of solutions for the pharmaceutical sector and illustrates our

commitment to protecting consumers' health.

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Pharmaceutical companies are increasingly confronted with rising regulations surrounding data monitoring. The increasing strictness of these results in more and more audits of the pharmaceutical companies that will need to show that testing has been done in a proper way. As a matter of fact, there is currently a real need from pharmaceutical companies for innovative methods ensuring integrity; and this is exactly where EviSight™ Compact connects. We are already in the launching phase which is expected to be completed within 2017 in Switzerland.

What are some of the developments we can expect to come out of bioMérieux in the next five years?

bioMérieux has a genuine track record of groundbreaking innovations and we will always maintain this path of growth. Syndromic testing with the FilmArray® technology is one of bioMérieux's focus. Our overall target is to fight infectious diseases and our innovation capabilities will always be directed at this goal. R&D is never a one case subject, but always a multiverse of different possibilities that need to be reviewed and anticipated to find the best solutions.

We also expect to strengthen our position in infectious diseases backing on microbiology, molecular biology and immunoassays. In all of them, combined to our long-term vision, we will bring innovative solutions to the market. The need for diagnostics is increasing, which means there is a growing market regarding the aforementioned demographic factors.

[1] The Lewin Group, Inc. The Value of Diagnostics Innovation, Adoption and Diffusion into Healthcare (July 2005)

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