Andrea Lodetti – CEO, Bormioli Pharma

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Bormioli Pharma's Andrea Lodetti outlines the company's evolution towards becoming an international leader in the pharma and primary packaging business, COVID-related business impacts, the shift towards localised manufacturing, and the importance of earlier and deeper collaboration between pharma companies and packaging providers.

Can you tell us a little about your career path?

I started my career in the aerospace industry after receiving a degree in aeronautical engineering from the Polytechnic University of Milan. However, after seven years I began to feel that the development project timelines in that industry were too long and thus returned to university to study for an MBA.

After graduation, I joined Bain & Company as a consultant, primarily working with the aerospace industry. I enjoyed participating in restructuring projects for struggling companies that required a redesigned industrial footprint, particularly in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis.

Following these years of consulting restructures, I wished to manage a restructuring process myself. This opportunity appeared in the kitchen industry with Snaidero Cucine, where I became COO. Subsequently, I was offered the CEO role at the German subsidiary Rational Einbaukuchen Solutions GmbH to use the skills I had developed through both my professional and educational background. I was then headhunted for the CEO position in the tile industry at Gruppo Ceramiche

Richetti, a listed company that also required a financial and industrial restructuring.

Finally, I received the opportunity to become CEO at Bormioli Pharma. The role was to turn it from a division of Bormioli Rocco group into an independent company and to position it as an international leader in the pharma and primary packaging business.

What progress has been made in your time as CEO to carve out Bormioli Pharma and restructure the business?

While the last four years have had some external disrupting factors; the company has become independent and been successfully rebranded as Bormioli Pharma. The business has been changed from a pure commodity producer into a partner and solution provider for the pharmaceutical industry. Previously, customers' inquiries needed to match the capabilities of the business. Today, Bormioli Pharma works on both core development cooperation and joint innovation activity with the customers to collaboratively design solutions.

Bormioli Pharma concentrates on delivery solutions such as the container and dosing of a drug, something that is generally overlooked by pharmaceutical companies. Moreover, Bormioli Pharma researches the experience different individuals such as nurses, mothers, or people with disabilities have with the drug and conveys them to the customer in order to design packaging which provides an optimal experience.

Furthermore, Bormioli Pharma conducted a series of mergers and acquisitions abroad to increase its international presence. The company now has facilities in Germany and France as well as commercial offices in the US and China. Additionally, we have improved our catalogue through acquisitions so that we are today able to offer an integrated and complete range of solutions in liquid applications.

Bormioli Pharma aims to address three segments. The first is the therapy segment for high-end medicine that requires administration by a medical professional. The second is the health segment for over-the-counter drugs, where we focus on patients' ability to apply the medicine themselves. The third segment is the life segment for applications in the space between food and pharmaceuticals such as food supplements, vitamins, and nutraceuticals. This requires a different approach to the customer and packaging with more attention to marketing and sustainability.

What has the impact of COVID been on your business?

The impact was enormous and significantly different between 2020 and 2021. In 2020, Bormioli Pharma implemented defensive measures to continue operating while protecting its people. The company's customers wanted to build up a safety stock to prevent disruption and Bormioli Pharma was also involved in producing containers for sanitising products outside of its usual product range. Therefore, the business activity was 30 to 40 percent higher than in the past at a time when it was difficult to bring employees into work. Bormioli Pharma managed to persevere during this challenging period and the company's employees felt the social responsibility of continuing the work needed to fight the pandemic.

In 2021, following a year of social distancing, staying at home, paying more attention to washing hands, and not using public transport, more common diseases had significantly reduced. There was approximately an 80 percent reduction in the demand for oral liquid applications for coughs and colds and other unexpected consequences, such as, for instance, a drop in ear infections due to people no longer going to the swimming pool.

Another side effect of COVID was the delay of surgery activity as individuals did not want wish to enter hospitals. This caused a delay in screening activities for breast cancer and – as a recent Swiss study has shown – a rise in its incidence. Moreover, a report from Istat, the Italian public institute for statistics, has shown additional deaths in 2020 and 2021 not related to COVID. This indicates that COVID has caused other diseases to be left untreated that has led to additional casualties.

Therefore, a key learning from the past two years is that a pandemic is not only dangerous due to the disease itself, but from the impact it has on the healthcare system and on populations that delay treatment.

Bormioli Pharma understood that it could play a role in the COVID vaccination campaign and increased its production of tubular vials, the container used for the vaccine, and purchased new machines to increase this production. This shifted the company's production from oral liquids to the parenteral segment which improved Bormioli Pharma's offerings.

What is Bormioli Pharma's position on localised manufacturing?

European manufacturing is returning to the centre of the discussion as people realise that localised manufacturing is needed as a backup solution for shocks to the supply chain. Similarly, US customers are seeking manufacturing activities within the country which is limiting Bormioli

Pharma’s development in the US. However, the company has created a logistic base to store safety stock for glass containers and will improve these to provide a buffer that is appreciated by customers.

From the manufacturing standpoint, shareholders have supported improvements in technology to all of Bormioli Pharma’s manufacturing sites. For example, over EUR 60 million has been invested in the glass manufacturing to build a new furnace, to refurbish and improve all production lines, and to put more digital technology into the quality and process control.

What goals in the short to medium term would you like to achieve?

Bormioli Pharma would like to increase its sustainability efforts and make them more widely known. This is a major factor for the pharmaceutical industry as the vast quantity of parts produced are likely to end up in landfill and need to find its way back to the producer to be sustainable.

Fifteen years ago, Bormioli Pharma started research and development (R&D) activity into the use of sustainable, recycled plastics. Despite presenting no difference in a study of its leachables and extractables, customers were, on the whole, not interested in these recycled plastics.

Today, the paradigm has shifted and last year Bormioli Pharma was awarded by Chiesi Group as the best supplier for sustainability. The company systematically offers its customers more sustainable solutions for their production practices.

The challenge is to use recyclable material and integrate the pharmaceutical business into the recycling loop. Furthermore, customers are consulted regarded organisation for recollection from the hospital of these plastics and reused. However, the industry requires more support in general to allow for a functioning recycling loop.

What are your hopes around future collaboration and innovation in the pharmaceutical packaging space?

I hope that the cooperation between packaging producers and pharmaceutical companies continues, especially in terms of co-development activity. Work is needed to improve access to these products for people with disabilities and consider the patient more during the design process. This is particularly important with medicines as those suffering from illness do not have additional difficulties associated with managing the drug.

Generally, the pharmaceutical industry is prudent in changes due to the importance of safety and high levels of regulation. One example of this conservative approach can be seen in old black and white movies. Since that time, the technology around clothes, phones, and cars has improved hugely, but injectable drug packaging – standard glass vials – has remained the same.

An increasingly innovative approach and an openness to new ideas from the pharma industry around packaging would be hugely helpful.

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