Thomas Wirth – CEO, Biomed

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02.10.2024

Tags: Switzerland, Biomed, Strategy, Distribution, Access

Thomas Wirth shares insights into Biomed's strategic focus on the Swiss pharmaceutical market, offering comprehensive services from regulatory support to market access for RX and OTC products. He discusses Biomed's commitment to long-term partnerships, technological advancements, and driving operational efficiency to stay competitive.

Can you start by introducing Biomed, and how the company has developed?

Biomed was established in 1951 by a family that still owns the company entirely today. Originally, the company was created to address restrictions on pharmaceutical imports from Germany into Switzerland following WWII. The founder, now nearing 100 years old, saw an opportunity to collaborate with a German partner to bring pharmaceutical products into the Swiss market, which laid the foundation for Biomed's beginnings.

Over the decades, Biomed has remained focused exclusively on the Swiss market, offering a complete range of services from regulatory affairs to commercial and marketing activities. We support B2B operations with two specialized field forces: one dedicated to prescription (RX) products, visiting physicians in internal medicine, gynaecology and paediatrics, and another for over-the-counter (OTC) products, visiting pharmacies and drugstores. B2C commercialization is performed with omnichannel activities targeting the relevant population. Our revenue is equally divided between RX and OTC, highlighting the balanced nature of our business. Switzerland

presents a distinct market, governed by specific regulatory authorities such as Swissmedic and the Federal Office of Public Health (BAG). Navigating these unique regulatory and commercial landscapes requires deep local expertise, which is why many international companies choose Biomed as their partner. We provide an end-to-end solution, from the regulatory registration of products to the development of strategic marketing and sales plans, ensuring that products are well-positioned for success in Switzerland’s diverse market.

Our regulatory and medical departments have expanded significantly, driven by the growing complexity of regulations and increasing quality standards. We continue to invest in ICT and regulatory capabilities to maintain our high level of service. In essence, Biomed serves as a vital bridge, connecting international manufacturers with the Swiss market while ensuring that healthcare professionals, such as physicians and pharmacists, receive the accurate and detailed product information they need.

Could you provide a deeper insight into Biomed’s portfolio and the key areas in which the company is currently active?

Our portfolio is balanced evenly between the OTC and RX markets, with both segments being equally important to us. One of our strongest areas is in mineral supplements such as Magnesia, where we hold a leading position. In the OTC space, we are currently ranked number one, although it’s a highly competitive market. In the RX market, we rank second, making Magnesia a core part of our portfolio. We also have a longstanding partnership with Bionorica, a company renowned for its products in respiratory and urinary infections. For years, we have worked closely with them, distributing their innovative products. This partnership is a great fit for Biomed, as their approach aligns well with our values and focus on providing high-quality, innovative solutions.

In addition to these and other partnerships, we also manage some of our own traditional Swiss brands, holding strong value in terms of brand recognition and image.

What are the main challenges and opportunities you see within the Swiss market, and how is Biomed navigating these?

One of the main challenges we encounter is how to introduce new products to the Swiss market. We don’t focus on breakthrough oncology treatments, which are the domain of larger players. Instead, our focus is on partnering with innovative companies that see Switzerland as a market

worth covering, but who need a reliable partner to do so professionally.

Our value lies in our deep knowledge of the Swiss market and our strong relationships with general practitioners (GPs). Over time, larger pharmaceutical companies have shifted their focus to specialists, leaving GPs less catered to. Covering the GP network effectively requires consistent effort and innovative strategies, and that’s where Biomed excels. We have equally strong relationships with Swiss pharmacies and drugstores – with individual stores but also with the groups and chains of those specialist retailers. As many of our products are detailed at physicians and specialist retailers, our partners profit from a broad coverage of the complete Swiss healthcare market. We work hard to build personal relationships with healthcare providers and offer the professional support they need. This personal approach is made easier by our low employee turnover compared to larger companies, helping us maintain long-standing partnerships.

The Swiss healthcare landscape has also evolved, with more physicians working in group practices, many of whom are women working part-time. This shift has required us to adapt our marketing strategies while still maintaining a strong in-person presence through our field force. Our products play an essential role in patient well-being, and we take pride in that contribution.

What specific regulatory challenges do you encounter in Switzerland, and how do you approach them to ensure compliance and market success?

Navigating the Swiss regulatory environment comes with its own set of challenges, some of which are hard to predict. When working with Swissmedic, we follow the standard procedure of submitting a Common Technical Document (CTD)-formatted dossier. But beyond that, we have various strategic options, such as leveraging Article 13 or Article 14 or submitting a full dossier, depending on the product and partnership.

A distinctive feature of the Swiss market is the classification system under Swissmedic, which categorizes drugs into Lists A, B, and D. For instance, List D includes OTC products, but there’s an opportunity to apply for reimbursement from the Federal Office of Public Health (BAG), even for List D drugs. Once reimbursed, public advertising is no longer permitted.

Another challenge is the unpredictability of BAG’s pricing decisions, which can impact a product’s viability. In some cases, even a promising product may become commercially unprofitable if the price point set by BAG doesn’t align with business expectations.

How do you identify and establish partnerships for Biomed, and what factors do you prioritize in these relationships?

Establishing partnerships is fundamentally a relationship-driven process. Much like a sales representative relies on personal connections to succeed, as CEO, I focus on building strong, chemistry-based relationships with partners. It’s important that we not only like working together but also share a similar vision of how to run our businesses and why we do it. At Biomed, we prioritize delivering value to patients and operating ethically, rather than focusing solely on maximizing profits.

We’re open to exploring new opportunities globally, but our focus remains largely on Europe. Business development is a long-term process—it’s not about quick wins. We attend key industry congresses, conduct thorough research, and nurture relationships over time. Sometimes an initial discussion may not lead to immediate results, but several years later, that same relationship can turn into a successful partnership.

Our approach is to always aim for long-term partnerships, particularly in the prescription (RX) sector where returns on investment take time. While the law limits contracts to a maximum of five years, we build business cases with the expectation that partnerships will extend well beyond that. Trust, shared goals, and mutual understanding are key to ensuring this longevity.

Switzerland’s small market requires a realistic approach. It’s not comparable to larger markets like Germany or the UK, so it’s crucial to make sure the partnership makes sense for both parties from the outset. We monitor performance closely, and if both sides stay aligned with their goals, it’s easier and more likely to continue the collaboration beyond the contractual period. It is always our priority to invest in the innovations of our current partners. Maybe this is one of the reasons for having so many partnerships over the decades. Tracking progress and ensuring we’re on course according to our plans is fundamental for a sustainable, long-term relationship.

What are your strategic priorities and how do you envision Biomed moving forward?

Our top priority remains the development of our core business—continuing to support our current partners and growing our existing product portfolio. This is the foundation of everything we do. Alongside this, we are always focused on bringing new products to market, which requires significant attention and effort each year. A key area of focus moving forward is improving efficiency by harnessing technological advancements. The pharmaceutical industry has historically

lagged in adopting cutting-edge technology, but as a smaller company, we recognize the importance of catching up and staying ahead. We are investing in better systems and interfaces to enhance how we collaborate with our customers and partners. Looking ahead, we see exciting projects on the horizon, and we are committed to continuous growth, process improvement, and further engagement with both our team and our partners.

Biomed needs to continue driving operational excellence while leveraging the agility that comes with being a smaller company. Our ability to make quick decisions and focus on what we do best is a significant strength, but we must also evolve our processes to remain competitive in a rapidly changing environment. With advancements in artificial intelligence and ICT, we're heavily investing in our digital infrastructure as well as in our digital approach to ensure we can better connect with partners and customers on virtual platforms.

Additionally, we anticipate significant changes in the regulatory landscape, particularly around OTC products. Currently, online sales of OTC products are heavily restricted in Switzerland, but this will certainly change in the future. We need to be prepared for this shift and ensure we maintain our competitive advantage, especially with our strong connections to pharmacies and drugstores. As major players like Galenica or even Amazon enter the space, we must have a strategic plan that keeps Biomed and its brands well-positioned in this evolving market.

As a leader, how do you foster agility within Biomed while still ensuring necessary processes are in place to maintain competitiveness?

Fostering agility at Biomed is about distributing accountability and responsibility among teams and allowing them to make independent decisions. We set up brand teams that are empowered to handle projects on their own, without relying on a rigid hierarchical structure. This flexibility enables teams to move seamlessly from one topic to another, which is crucial for maintaining agility.

As a leader, I believe it's important to disagree at times, but without interfering in the decisions made by the teams, as over-involvement can undermine engagement and autonomy. Instead, I aim to guide and share my perspective when needed, encouraging the team to consult with others who have expertise on particular subjects. Effective communication between teams is essential for this setup to work.

One of the unique advantages of working at Biomed, with its 60 employees, is the direct impact each individual can have. Here, everyone’s opinion matters, and we can create a culture where people feel empowered and engaged in driving the company forward.

In a competitive pharmaceutical market like Switzerland, how does Biomed attract and retain the right talent?

Attracting and retaining talent in a market as competitive as Switzerland is certainly challenging, especially when competing with larger, more established companies. However, Biomed has built an image that appeals to individuals who are eager to learn and take on broader responsibilities. Unlike larger corporations, where roles may be more specialized, we offer employees the chance to engage in a wider range of activities. This exposure helps them develop a broader skill set, which can be a significant draw for those seeking to grow their careers.

Additionally, our work culture is highly professional but free from the bureaucracy and corporate politics that often come with large, multinational companies. We don’t have a distant headquarters dictating our actions—decisions are made locally, and employees have real autonomy. For example, when a small group within Biomed proposed launching a LinkedIn presence to showcase our activities and culture, I initially questioned whether the approach would be effective. They wanted to keep the posts light and informal, and I felt it might lack depth. However, I trusted their judgment, and in the end, they proved me wrong, creating an important asset for our employer branding. The visibility and transparency of our operations have helped to reinforce our reputation as a company where people can take ownership of their work while still operating at a highly professional level. This environment is appealing to those who value responsibility, impact, and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully.

Do you have a final message?

If you’re seeking a dedicated partner in Switzerland who will genuinely care for your product with passion and commitment, then I encourage you to reach out directly. At Biomed, we take pride in managing products with the highest level of care and professionalism. We aren’t just a service provider—we take ownership, ensuring that each product is handled with heart and integrity. This personal investment is what defines our approach and sets us apart from others.

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