

Juergen Nelis - CEO, BGG World Holding



Caring about our health prevents us from many diseases and supports a long and happy life.

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Juergen Nelis, CEO of BGG World Holding, discusses the company's strategic growth and evolving approach to sustainability, market expansion, and product innovation. He highlights key initiatives such as expanding production capabilities outside of China and refining BGG's global leadership structure, while also addressing the challenges posed by geopolitical factors and tariffs. Nelis emphasizes the importance of conscious health management through supplements and shares his vision for the company's future in a rapidly changing market.

Can you briefly introduce yourself and what led you to join BGG?

I am Dutch by origin but moved to Germany soon after earning my degree in mechanical engineering. I spent the first 20 years of my career at Roche in various roles including operations, supply chain, and global procurement, ultimately serving as Vice President of Global Procurement Technical Operations for the Pharma Division.

Seeking a new challenge, I then joined Givaudan, a former Roche spin-off and world's largest Flavours and Fragrances company, as Chief Procurement Officer. My position taught me to source natural specialty ingredients from around the world, Madagascar, Sulawesi, and beyond, and to build sustainable supplier ecosystems. After that, I assumed the Vice President Global Procurement and Supply Chain at SGS, the world's largest testing, inspection, and certification company, gaining broader leadership experience in the service industry.

When I considered slowing down, I reconnected with my long-time friend Mr. Li, founder of BGG. Over 25 years ago, BGG was Roche's sole supplier of shikimic acid, the starting material for Tamiflu, during the bird-flu pandemic. My task then was to scale Roche's pandemic supply chain, and BGG played a pivotal role.

In May 2023, I joined BGG as CEO with a clear mandate: double the company's size within five years and transform it from a family owned China-based international supplier into a truly global corporation. This involves creating new legal entities to consolidate our group structure, a complex task given China's regulatory and financial constraints. Nevertheless, our momentum is strong. In the last quarter, we doubled our European sales year-over-year and achieved at least 20 percent growth in the US. We will leverage this positive dynamic to build BGG's global footprint.

Can you provide an overview of BGG World Holdings and its core business?

BGG is founded on the principle of harnessing nature's wealth to create high-quality ingredients for supplements, OTC, functional food, and cosmetics. Our core business is built on three technology platforms: botanical extraction, microalgae and bio-conversion.

In 1995, the company's success began with botanical ingredients produced through waterethanol, and chromatography extraction. We extract polyphenols from apples, tocotrienols from rice, palm and annatto, antocyanins from berries and produce enoxelon from licorice roots or stevia from stevia leaves.

Today 60 percent of our business comes from the microalgae platform. On our 150-hectare site in the pristine landscape of Yunnan province, we cultivate selected microalgae strains in tubular photobioreactors under tightly controlled conditions of light, temperature, and nutrients. By stressing these cultures we trigger the production of powerful natural compounds. We are the world's largest producer of natural astaxanthin, a carotenoid with antioxidant activity 6000 times stronger than vitamin C with several clinically proven health benefits. On this high tech platform BGG will be launching other actives such as fucoxanthin, omega 3 fatty acids and proteins in the coming two to three years.

All our products are natural and clinically proven for their effects on vision, cognitive function, performance, immune stimulation, women health or overall wellness. We design and conduct clinical and observational studies by ourselves to substantiate health-support claims, a complex but essential process, since unlike pharmaceuticals, supplements cannot "cure" disease but instead bolster long-term health and wellbeing.

This three-pillar model of botanical extraction, microalgae, and bio-conversion allows BGG to serve diverse markets with scientifically validated, nature-derived solutions.

Could you walk through BGG's global footprint and how the company's geographic presence supports its long-term growth strategy?

BGG's core operations are based in China, where we have five factories and a dedicated R&D center.

The company sales activities actually began in Japan, where our founder first developed liquorice and bilberry based anti-inflammatory and eye health products to leading Japanese supplement brands. From the very beginning, BGG has followed Japanese quality standards, which is something that sets us apart. Japan remains a very important market for us, not only because it is difficult to enter, but also because we work directly with the brand owners, which is quite unique in this industry.

We also conduct many of our clinical studies in Japan. This is partly due to the strong relationships we have built, but also because clinical studies are required for successful product launches in Japan. We use the data from these studies globally

Today, about 25 percent of our sales come from Japan, and another 25 percent from the United States, where we are based in Irvine, California. BGG has sales organization in Lugano, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. From there, we are expanding further, into South America, Middle East, Asia and Africa.

Why was Switzerland chosen as the Western headquarters for BGG?

We chose Switzerland as the base for BGG Europe because we needed to establish an international hub, and after evaluating several countries, Switzerland stood out for a number of reasons.

First, Switzerland is globally recognized and respected as a business-friendly country. It has a strong network of free trade agreements and is politically neutral, which makes it easier to do business across many different regions.

Second, the talent pool in Switzerland is very strong. We have access to highly skilled professionals, and the overall business environment is pragmatic and efficient. Whether it is tax matters or legal questions, it is easy to find the right expertise, and both professionals and authorities are solution-oriented. That level of flexibility and cooperation is quite unique.

We look to simplify and consolidate our corporate structure and bring in external investors to support our growth ambitions. Switzerland is an ideal location in today's difficult geopolitical landscape. This is essential to naturally hedge our risks and reduce our dependency on China. Last but not least Switzerland is at the heart of Europe where we find many global brands to partner with. By being close to them geographically as well as culturally we can best understand them and develop integrated solutions together.

Could you give an overview of your current portfolio and highlight which segments you are investing in most heavily or see as having the greatest growth potential?

We organize our portfolio around major health and wellness megatrends, with a strong focus on performance, longevity and eye health. Longevity is about helping people stay healthy for longer, while eye health is becoming more important due to increased screen time in both work and leisure activities. These areas align with our three key technology platforms.

For example, we are about to launch a new product that supports healthy weight management. We are not competing with GLP-1 therapies for obesity but instead targeting active individuals who want to improve their body composition and burn additional calories. This product helps increase brown-fat thermogenesis, burning about 300 extra calories per day.

By focusing on high-growth areas and using scientifically validated, nature-derived ingredients, we position BGG to capture significant opportunities in supplements, cosmetics, and niche pharma applications together with our clients and business partners.

While longevity, eye health, and performance support are our primary focus, we also maintain a broad portfolio. For instance, our apple-polyphenol extract offers skin-whitening benefits in cosmetic formulations. We also produce licorice-root ingredients used across multiple markets: in pharmaceuticals for cough syrups, in cosmetics for anti-inflammatory and whitening effects, and in food for confectionery products. Although our range is wide, we concentrate investment and resources on the highest-growth health trends.

How would you say the split of your business is approximately across different areas like dietary supplement, pharma, and food.

Supplements account for roughly 75 percent of our business, cosmetics about 15 percent, and pharmaceuticals and food approximately five percent. In food, we sell natural stevia-based sweetener that supports healthy lifestyles and weight management. Unlike earlier stevia products with a lingering aftertaste, the latest formulations taste much better. While we will remain a niche player in stevia, given the scale of major sweetener companies, this segment offers attractive growth opportunities for our specialised solutions reducing sugar intake while natural and tasty.

How does BGG measure the impact of its clinical studies, and what approach do you take in evaluating these studies?

In our clinical studies, we select endpoints that act as reliable proxies for the health benefit we target. For cardiovascular research, we measure biomarkers, typically LDL cholesterol or triglyceride levels, before and after supplementation. A demonstrable reduction in these markers serves as an indirect indicator of improved cardiovascular health, since designing a trial to show actual reductions in heart-attack rates for a supplement is not practical.

For eye-health products, we use standardized vision assessments, visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, or other ophthalmic tests, at baseline and after a defined treatment period. We also incorporate validated patient-reported outcome questionnaires to capture how participants perceive changes in their vision or eye-related quality of life. By combining objective measurements with carefully designed surveys, we build a robust, fact-based picture of our ingredients' impact, even when direct clinical endpoints are not feasible.

What is your go-to-market model in different regions?

We are currently implementing a go-to-market strategy in Europe where we clearly define which markets we want to enter directly, which ones we approach through partners, and where a hybrid model makes more sense.

In countries like the UK and Germany, for example, we are going direct. We identify key accounts and have established a key account management structure to work closely with those clients. This allows us to build strong, strategic relationships with companies that align with our values and long-term goals.

In other countries, like Poland, we work with distributors who help us bring our products to market. But we take a step-by-step approach. Our products are not commodities. They require a deep understanding of the science behind them and the specific benefits they offer to customers. We need people who can communicate that effectively and build a compelling value proposition.

We are not aiming to compete in the commodity space. That is not our business model. We are a smaller, science-driven company, and if we try to dilute our focus by entering commodity markets, it would not serve us well. Our strength lies in innovation and specialization, and that is where we need to stay focused.

You mentioned building a new commercial organization. Could you elaborate on the structure you are implementing and the success model you are aiming for?

One of the key factors that has helped us is bringing in experienced professionals who understand the industry and know how to implement standard processes. These are people with strong client networks and a track record in building sales organizations. For example, one of BGG's leaders has extensive experience, having worked at DSM and Roche, where he led the European food business. He understands how to structure commercial teams, work closely with clients, and build effective marketing and communication strategies.

We are still in the process of building this structure, but we have made important progress. We have invested in training our teams and have also replaced people who were not equipped to meet our new standards. In the US, for instance, we appointed a new Managing Director with industry-specific experience. She has brought a much more professional and forward-thinking mindset to the team.

It is not just about people, it is also about processes and systems. Building transparency and using data to make decisions is crucial. We now look at facts and figures related to clients, products, and competitors, which gives us a clearer understanding of where we stand and where we need to go.

Historically, the company was very much driven by the founder, who built strong personal relationships with key clients. As a result, we have excellent partnerships with major players. However, our visibility in the broader industry remains limited. We are trusted by those who know us, but we need to become more proactive and better known across the sector.

That is why a big focus now is on branding and increasing our presence in the market. These efforts are already starting to show results.

Who are the key stakeholders you engage with as part of BGG's operations and growth strategy?

Our key stakeholders are the brands who use our ingredients in their finished products and ultimately, the end consumers they serve. Unlike in pharma, where you work closely with health associations and physicians, our focus is on understanding consumer trends. We develop solutions based on those insights and propose them to our clients. By staying consumer-oriented and bringing genuine passion to each project, we build strong, collaborative relationships with the brand owners who rely on us.

Could you describe the transformation you have led since joining BGG two years ago?

When I joined BGG two years ago, my primary objective was to double sales from approximately USD 90 million to between USD 180 million and USD 200 million by the end of 2028. The company has been heavily centered around its founder and organized through a fragmented legal structure in China, Europe, and the US. To scale effectively, we needed to replicate our owners deep knowledge, his entrepreneurial spirit and incredible people driven leadership and align the organization around our values and objectives.

Our first milestone was unifying the US and European operations under a single target-operating model and go-to-market strategy, staffed by a mix of seasoned and young professionals. We completed those changes last year and established one cohesive sales approach. Now, we are building a global leadership team to take strategic decisions, driven by market insights and global trends.

A critical part of this transformation has been separating our management structure from the legal entities. Rather than operating through multiple regional boards, we are moving toward one global board and one management team. This five-

year journey will position BGG to achieve its growth goals and become a truly global organization.

Beyond experience, what qualities do you look for in new recruits to ensure they align with BGG's values and culture?

I come from a sports background, I was part of the Dutch Olympic rowing team, so teamwork is deeply ingrained in me. I believe strongly in working together, building trust, and creating a sense of mutual reliance. That spirit defines the kind of culture I want to establish at BGG.

For me, it is about ambition, collaboration, and bringing together the right skills. Of course, candidates must bring expertise, but it is equally important that they share our team-oriented mindset. I am quite direct during the hiring process. I often say, "I am too old to work with people I do not like." That does not mean everyone needs to be the same, we want a diverse team, but we also need strong cohesion. Without that, the team cannot function effectively.

What is BGG's approach to sustainability?

Sustainability is a very important topic and one of the major trends we are focusing on. However, I have to admit that the company has not historically taken a structured or conscious approach to it. We are now pushing to integrate sustainability more intentionally into our operations.

That said, we already have many of the right building blocks in place. For example, we work with plant extractions and produce microalgae. Microalgae actually require CO₂ to grow, which means parts of our production process are CO₂ negative, a strong sustainability story in itself.

We are moving in the right direction, but I would not yet call us highly professional in this area. We are aware, we are certified, such as with ECOCERT, and we are certainly not doing badly. But there is room for improvement. I come from Givaudan, where we built a clear sustainability agenda, and I see the opportunity to bring that same level of structure and commitment to BGG.

One of our first priorities is to measure our CO₂ footprint across our supply chain. We will assess where we currently stand and identify areas where we can improve.

What are BGG's key milestones and priorities for the next few years?

A key milestone is re-establishing our global leadership team, which will include a stronger focus on integrating China. Alongside this, we plan to increase our investments outside of China in order to hedge our risks, tap into global innovation networks, and being close to our clients.

Our next steps are growing presence in our markets and with global clients, expand our technologies, innovative product portfolio and global manufacturing footprint in order to achieve our double in five objectives.

How are you addressing the impact of tariffs on products coming from China?

Strategically, it is challenging to make long-term decisions right now. We need to wait for the situation to stabilize before taking further action. However, over the past six months, we have taken some proactive measures. For example, we have increased our stock of key products in the US, with an eight to nine-month supply, which gives us some breathing room to find a solution.

This stockpiling buys us time, and we hope the situation will settle down, but it is uncertain. In the meantime, we are exploring options to build capabilities outside of China. We are also looking into partnerships with local producers in Europe to manufacture some products and reduce our reliance on Chinese-origin goods.

While we have some time to make adjustments, we are not planning to waste it. We must stay ahead and find long-term solutions to navigate these challenges.

Final message for our international readers.

Caring about our health prevents us from many diseases and supports a long and happy life.

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