

# Interview: Gaetano Colabucci - General Manager

## Southern Europe, Beiersdorf, Italy

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*Global skin care leader Beiersdorf is investing in developing their pharmacy channel and Gaetano Colabucci, managing director of Beiersdorf Italy, explains the importance the Internet plays in patient education and product accessibility as well as highlighting the role regional insights can play in the development of global products.*

**When you were president of Assosalute in 2013 you highlighted the importance of OTC drugs in the health of individuals and the sustainability of the national health system. You encouraged an open dialogue with citizens who will contribute to the real development of the culture of health in Italy. What progress has been made in this regard?**

The advancement in the empowerment of OTC drugs and personal care solutions in Italy has been and will be a long journey, as many consumers are still inclined to visit the doctor in situations where they can be treated by OTC products.

We need to emphasize the important role that our citizens play in managing their own well-being, and the extent to which they can do so using health and wellness products, as well as OTC pharmaceuticals. In this regard, Assosalute launched a platform last year called “Semplicemente Salute”, with the objective for citizens to obtain informative and educative content about health

and wellness products and more importantly, being the point of reference on the Internet. This platform is progressively getting traction and moving forward, we cannot ignore the web as a tool to patient education.

**How can you foster the use of the Beiersdorf brands, leveraging your own channels to encourage this personal care mentality?**

There are two main areas that are critical to fostering this evolution in mentality: product accessibility and web support.

In terms of product accessibility, pharmacists tend to be over concerned with the exclusivity of their product portfolio, which will ultimately create a limitation in the future. I believe that encouraging product accessibility will not necessarily translate into loss of business for the pharmacists; on the contrary, it could encourage a broader awareness and consumer education. Pharmacists need to adopt a new mentality and embrace the benefits that could come from offering patients and consumers access to a wider selection of better known and better supported brands.

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**Within the Italian dermatology and skin care market, in which segments do you see the most potential for growth the next coming years?**

The anti-age product line is the most important segment within our skin care portfolio. Indeed, it is part of Italian culture in: we want to look great and accordingly, our personal budgets for skin care are higher than in other markets. This product line will always be our main growth driver and it is critical to our leadership within the skin care segment of the Italian market.

In addition, the men's care products are experiencing an interesting growth trajectory over the last few years and I believe that this is only the beginning. We expect a significant contribution from this business line to our revenues. The generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be much more inclined to use personal care products compared to previous generations. We certainly see a change in consumption patterns.

Natural remedies are another segment that is gaining importance in this scenario; it is a big market trend both in the pharmacy as well as the mass market. Our consumers want to be sure that their products are as safe and natural as possible.

One of the most important trends however is how the web is transforming the healthcare system, both in terms of available information and product access. The Internet will play a crucial role in the next ten years and it will completely reinvent the market.

**The in-depth knowledge of specific regional needs is a critical success factor for Beiersdorf. How is this strategy translated in the Italian market?**

Beiersdorf is strongly focused on local insights that can drive the development of global products. One example of this is the launch of the in-shower body lotion, which many consumers find fits into their daily routine more conveniently than taking the time to apply body lotion separately. This product originated from insights we gained from research in Italy. Beiersdorf is very committed to regional needs and it is great to see how this local insight has transformed into a global business success story.

**You became General Manager of Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece) at Beiersdorf in April 2015. How important is the Italian market for Beiersdorf and where do you see growth potential?**

Beiersdorf has always been excellent in terms of managing the mass-market channel. A new challenge for us is the pharmacy channel where we have identified opportunities for us to make it as successful as the mass-market.

Comparing Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, Spain shows the best prospects in the mid-term future mainly due to the fact that the country was hit hard by the crisis. The proactive attitude towards economic recovery and the fact that the Spain is recovering from a very low base point is what creates more growth potential for the country.

However, Italy remains the biggest market in Southern Europe and is the point of reference within this region. Indeed, we are driving decisions that have an impact beyond the Italian borders. I expect Italy to foster convergence, especially in terms of new business models and product development.

For OTC products, achieving portfolio convergence/harmonization across this region presents more of a challenge due to political and legislative boundaries of each country. I believe that the first company that will be able to manage this challenge successfully will gain a great competitive advantage.

**What have been your main strategic priorities since you assumed your position last year?**

I pursued three main strategic guidelines. The first one was to manage the expectations by our headquarters, aligning the organization's strategy with the market conditions on the ground, which are still largely influenced by the enduring effects of the economic crisis. The second objective was the management of the complex Italian trade, defining the optimal team to cover the territory and satisfy regional needs for personal care in the mass and pharmacy channels. The third and last strategic guideline pertains to optimizing the mix of our investments considering the relatively high cost of labor, media and new product introduction.

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### **What is Beiersdorf's strategy to become successfully established in the pharmacy channel?**

In order to gain traction within this channel we are working on creating a pharmacy culture within our organization. This is being done through the recruitment of talent with a background in the pharmacy sector, being closer to the pharmacy community and showing our commitment to this industry. It would be foolish to think that our brand identity in the mass market automatically translates into the pharmacy channel. To compete within this segment you need to engage and attract the community with a vision that goes beyond product quality. Indeed, the pharmacy channel requires a continuous commitment with a long-term vision. We are in it for the long-term and we are currently working on demonstrating this commitment to the industry stakeholders.

### **Beiersdorf has a number of different brands ranging from hygiene products to specialized dermo-cosmetics. How do Italian pharmacists and dermatologists perceive this more specialized range of dermo-cosmetic products such as Eucerin and La Prairie?**

I am proud to say that we are the undisputed leader in skin-care, that the quality of our products is excellent and that doctors and pharmacists recognize both of these qualities. We have made significant progress in building our image and brand perception in this channel, with many pharmacists responding very positively to our efforts, including my personal pharmacist. Nevertheless, we have not yet been as successful as would like to be.

Eucerin is certainly our most successful brand in the pharmacy channel. The range of products under this brand is very broad, from face care to body care to men's care. Due to the wide range of consumer needs this brand covers as well as the technology used within the products, we will focus on the development of Eucerin to gain increased terrain with the pharmacy channel.

Ultimately, our goal is for all of Beiersdorf's brands to be as well perceived in the pharmacy channel as it currently is in the mass market. We are leaders in terms of investment and innovation

in the mass market and we are able to drive market growth, especially in those categories that are not fully developed yet. This perception must also be translated into the pharmacy, and we are working towards this direction.

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