Interview: Alvin So – Country Division Head, Bayer Consumer Health, Philippines



"We have 100 million people living in this country, all potential consumers for our brands, particularly in consumer care and OTC which serve a much broader range of the population."

28.11.2016

Tags: Philippines, Bayer, Pharma, Pharmaceuticals, Strategy, Consumer Health, Patient Access

Alvin So, Bayer Consumer Health Country Division Head, discusses Bayer's commitment in Consumer Health in the Philippines. He also discusses his vision for the future, including expanding the product portfolio in the country and continuing to be the partner of choice for the Filipino population.

When you assumed the position of country division head, what were a few of the key objectives that you had? What were some of the initiatives that you had to make this impressive turnaround a reality?

My main objective was to focus on growing our Consumer Health business in the Philippines. The first step we took was a change in culture and mind set in our organization, something I believe we have achieved. We all talk about how culture in an organization can drive the business, so I came in with the belief that we needed to see a change in culture to realize growth. From there, a more long-term sustainable mind set in managing the business was set in place in our organization. Secondly, we worked to engage our customers better and more effectively. One of the things we did well was in the engagement of our key customers, such as retailers and sellers. Through those engagements, we were able to develop a strong relationship with them and achieved alignments on areas to support our businesses mutually.

Considering the extent of your regional expertise, how have you been able to leverage that to the benefit of the Consumer Health division of the Philippines?

One of the great benefits of having been exposed to different countries is that you can see different best practices rather than simply the ones applied here in the Philippines. Another factor contributing to our success is that we were able to take projects or strategies that worked well in other markets for Bayer and successfully reapplied them here, whether it be in marketing, sales or engaging our customer. This is one of the big advantages of a global company where a lot of good things happen around the world. The key is to ensure that these successes are communicated and re-applied across as many markets as possible.

Looking more broadly at Bayer's regional portfolio, how important of a role does the Philippines play regionally?

The Philippines is a key market for Bayer Consumer Health in Asia Pacific (APAC), not only in terms of the current size of our business, but also in terms of potential. We have 100 million people living in this country, all potential consumers for our brands, particularly in consumer care and OTC which serve a much broader range of the population. With the economy doing extremely well over the last few years, we will see a corresponding increase in the incomes and consumption of the population, boosting demand for pharmaceutical products, both prescription and OTC.

[Featured_in]

More specifically looking at the Filipino market, how important is the Consumer Health segment for Bayer in the country?

OTC products play an important role in helping patients and consumers manage their health. Our strong brands and portfolio, especially nutritional offerings, allow our consumers to prevent and treat common diseases.

The other vision we have for our consumer health brands is not only to help Filipino consumers live a healthier life, but also better life. For example, we also have products for pain relief, for allergy sufferers, and for improving skin health, to help consumers manage their undesirable symptoms to improve their well-being and quality of life. This also captures what we are all about at Bayer Consumer Health, and how we complement our other divisions at Bayer in our overall company mission of Science for a Better Life.

You mention that the consumer health division works to complement the pharmaceutical segment. What are some examples you have seen of synergies between

these different units?

We share the same partners, including distribution, manufacturing suppliers or customers that we engage with. Our products are sold to the same distributors and retail partners. Together, we have better scale and we are able to add more value for our customers, from a business point of view.

From an organizational point of view, there are a lot of opportunities to move from one division to another. One thing that is good in Bayer is that we are a diverse company and our employees have the opportunity to move throughout our different divisions, giving them the opportunity to grow within and with the company. It might be a different division, or business, but there are many similarities in our entire life science approach.

Currently, which of Bayer's segments is driving the most growth in the Philippines?

All our products are growing. We are performing particularly well in our vitamins and skin health segments with brands such as Berocca, Rogin E, Canesten, and Elica. We have a great portfolio of leading brands, from Claritin, the world's number one allergy product, to Canesten, which is the number one anti-fungal medication in the Philippines. We have a number of brands that are in leading positions in the categories that we compete in, which is why we are in the top 10 among the OTC companies in the Philippines.

How will you work to maintain the impressive growth of Bayer in Philippines?

My job is to make sure this growth continues well into the future. One of the elements that I was talking about is the need to take a long term view of the business. It is not enough to simply grow one year. We have to demonstrate and prove that we can sustainably grow this business over many years, and this is what we are currently working on. We have many initiatives underway to ensure we continue to grow in the market. For example, we are looking for opportunities to bring new brands and continue to identify growth opportunities in the market.

[related_story]

Access to quality medical care and consumer products is an issue we have heard many discuss. What do you see as being the main roadblocks as you work to expand access to your products throughout the country?

There is still room for improvement in terms of distribution and availability of Bayer consumer health products. We have very remote areas in the Philippines where medicines are not available. That is a big opportunity for expanding our reach across the country.

We are also looking at making our products available in smaller pack sizes, at the same price per tablet. This will allow more people to use our products without having to make too large an expense upfront.

Looking back over your time as country division head at Bayer Consumer Health, what has been the accomplishment that you are proudest of?

I am extremely proud of our market ranking and the robust growth we are seeing today! I hope that in the years to come we are able to sustain this impressive level of growth, which is why I am working to set the stage for a strong year and continuous growth.

Moving forward, what are your main goals and aspirations for the next 3 to 5 years?

Broadly speaking my goal is to achieve our mission of helping Filipinos live better and healthier lives. I hope we will be making significant progress on that front, and making sure that our existing brands today are more accessible to the population while also adding more brands from our global portfolio. Today we have about 17 brands in Bayer Consumer Health Philippines, however, globally we have more than 100, representing a lot of opportunities to bring in more brands and address more issues, especially in the areas of pain management and cough and cold. I believe that we can make a difference in the Consumer Health industry

In general, I would say that the story of the Philippines is a growth story. The Philippines is a very attractive market, where the healthcare sector is seeing attractive growth opportunity and will be very exciting to watch in the coming years!

See more interviews