

# Interview: Javier Castro - General Manager, Boehringer Ingelheim Colombia

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*Javier Castro of Boehringer Ingelheim (BI) Colombia has been mandated to integrate Sanofi's animal healthcare business into BI's operation and prepare the Colombian affiliate for the coming changes in the market. He discusses the importance of embracing change, the animal healthcare business potential in Colombia and his desire to be perceived as a partner rather than a supplier by his clients.*

## **You have been in charge for the Colombian affiliate of Boehringer Ingelheim for the last 5 months, being previously responsible for Peru. What has been your assigned mission?**

As the Colombian market is experiencing fast change, my goal is to bring the Colombian operations forwards to face this transformative environment. The company's structure and mindset was historically oriented more in the trade market, however my objective is now to adapt our operations to the institutional market and prepare it for the coming changes. We've been working on the mindsets and processes of our commercial and marketing teams. Additionally, we've swapped our consumer care business with Sanofi's animal business and I've been mandated to integrate this new business division into our operations. We have let go of a portfolio that was of great importance for BI but the new portfolio is aligned with our aim of innovation and becoming the leader of the animal health market. Consequently, this requires a whole new set of skills, which we need to align with our company's value through innovation culture.

## **Can you give us an overview of Boehringer Ingelheim's operations in Colombia?**

BI is the only privately held company in the top 20 pharmaceutical companies. Our affiliate has been present in Colombia since 1962 with commercial offices and a production facility, which was sold in 2013 to Pharmétique. With 260 employees today, we are BI's second largest business unit in South America after Brazil and 9<sup>th</sup> multinational pharmaceutical company in Colombia. Our portfolio is a mix between older and recent brands. While our old brands provide us with satisfactory and stable revenue, I expect the new brands to drive the growth of BI. Additionally, I see many opportunities for BI in the institutional market moving forward.

## **What were your first impressions on the Colombian healthcare market?**

I left Colombia 7 years ago for Peru and returned in January 2017. The healthcare market has undergone massive changes. Logistical operators, intermediaries between pharmaceutical companies and EPSs, have all a lot more buying power, while market regulations have significantly increased.

This was however not a surprise for me, as the Peruvian government is inspiring itself from the Colombian policies. Moreover, the policies that the Colombian government and companies have started implementing 5 years ago were quite similar to what had already happened 10-15 years ago in Europe.

## **Following the integration of Sanofi's animal health business, how has the animal health business been progressing and how would you assess Colombia's market potential within this sector?**

Many of our products are leaders in the market, and we are the number two company in the Colombian Animal Health Market. Our main challenge is to keep growing during the integration. During the first semester of the year we have reached our targets both in numbers and in new people. Our systems and processes needed to be integrated and we've had to adjust our process to match the needs of this business units and integrate the new team within the BI culture. The values we shared, facilitated this integration and I believe we're benefiting from the new team's expertise that is adding a fresh energy to our activities.

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Our company sees a lot of potential in this specific market, which is divided in pet and farming sections. On the pet side, we have seen an evolution in the market as families are starting to consider their pets as integral part of the family, which directly impacts the amount of care the

animal receives and their life expectancy. Longer lives means higher lifetime value for us, and the apparition of new diseases, which brings a higher need for treatment. The production animals division is also one segment with a lot of potential. Colombian farmers need to increase the productivity of their farming businesses and our products can help them achieve this.

### **How has the integration of the animal business impacted the Colombian affiliate?**

The size of our teams and revenues has increased. Most importantly we're getting accustomed to the fast-paced practices of a company that used to be listed in the stock market. In addition, Colombia manages the animal healthcare segment in Peru, Ecuador and Venezuela. This brings significant development opportunities for our teams.

### **Could you give us an overview of your product portfolio represented in Colombia?**

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We want to help patients with solution that are different and have a positive impact on their quality of life. Currently in our Human Health area, the global focus is in 4 main areas: respiratory, cardiovascular, oncology and Diabetes. In the pipeline, we are looking at central nervous system related treatments. Lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular ailments are growing exponentially in emerging markets. Respiratory diseases and cancers are also areas where the number of patients is increasing because of the pollution, lifestyle habits such as smoking, and increased life expectancy.

### **What is the partnership strategy in Colombia?**

Until recently, our customers viewed us rather as suppliers than partners and we found it important to address this perception. While the global management remains in charge of monitoring research and development partnerships, the local affiliate has started to develop real commercial partnerships and educational initiatives. The main criterion in determining our partners is their commitment to improving patient's lives. Currently we're looking for a partner to help us build awareness on stroke. Indeed, the lifetime sequels of a stroke could be avoided if patients knew when to go to hospital as doctors would have more time to react and take action to treat the clinical symptoms of a stroke.

### **What are your strategic priorities moving forward?**

I want to make sure we have the right structure with the right people adjusted to the new characteristics of the market. Indeed, next year's performance depends on our sales force's

understanding of the market. Next, I want to change our client's perception of BI. Being viewed as a partner rather than a supplier is essential to good business collaboration. Last, I want to complete the process of the animal health integration, especially in the back office and support functions.

**On a more personal side, how can your international experiences help you drive growth in Colombia?**

Generally speaking, it helps me stay ahead of the next regulatory changes. Indeed, my 5 year European experience has exposed me to the regulation changes that are currently being implemented in Colombia. As a global marketer, I often had to work on market access in compliance with constant changes in regulations. My experience in Peru has helped my transition from Europe to Latin America, and the flexibility that rapidly changing environments like ours, require.

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