

Interview: João Norte - CEO, HMR, Portugal



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Health Market Research (HMR) is a multinational healthcare knowledge generation company, with origins in Portugal that is making waves on the Iberian Peninsula. Since its founded in 2009 and now headed by experienced pharmaceutical executive João Norte, the company seeks to continue their geographical expansion, always with the mindset of using better data sources to provide the best information and insights to customers.

HMR offers a wide range of services including consultancy, market research, B2B sales, and other business solutions. How is your service offering adapted to Portugal?

All our offer is always centered in the healthcare sector, as we work exclusively for that industry. In Portugal, we have effectively changed the way that companies evaluate and assess the market, both regarding performance, competitiveness and in evaluation of commercial areas effectiveness. We provide market with information based on the strongest source of data that are pharmacies. We call this 'sell-out' data, whereas previously, the market only had access to more restrictive wholesaler based data. By having the pharmacy as source of data, we can have a stronger understanding of the interactions between the pharmacy and patients. We provide this data alongside a high-quality product offering. Our data source is closer to the consumer and the patient, and it has fewer limitations regarding stock movements or exports to other markets. From this data, we have begun to build different levels of services from consultancy-based analytics to segmentation, targeting, and profiling of healthcare providers.

What circumstances led to you taking on the role of CEO at HMR?

While leading the business unit for cardiovascular and diabetes at AstraZeneca, I was drawn to the opportunity to lead a Portuguese company possessing grand ambitions to internationalize. Naturally, following 15 years working for multinational companies, the chance to bring some of those experiences and incorporate them into fast growing and ambitious organization is an attractive prospect. The combination of my entrepreneurship mindset, with the knowledge of our business and how it is used by different customers and my expertise in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sector was a magnetic pull for this organization. My role brings together these experiences with a responsibility to develop foreign expansion. We soon approach ten years of operating in Portugal, having opened affiliates in four other countries to date.

How do you communicate the value of your services to customers here in Portugal?

On a commercial perspective, pharmaceutical industry operations are based on access to data. The industry needs and incorporates data - the assessment of market shares and performance - into their own strategy. There is already a need on the market, and when we build and develop new products, we communicate this with our customer base. The most common way to communicate and explain our services to customers is in face-to-face situations, that are under the responsibility of our commercial team. Furthermore, our commercial team have also a very important mission to improve always in the understanding of our customer needs.

Nowadays, our main customers are healthcare companies (Pharma, Generics and Consumer Healthcare) that develop their business mainly in the retail market. Currently, the only area where we do not provide extensive coverage is in the hospital segment. However, we are on the cusp of completing our hospital data offer in which we will have an influential panel of hospitals providing data, allowing companies to make better informed decisions.

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We provide reliable data from a national perspective that can be applied to smaller regions with high accuracy. For instance, if a customer we want to assess the performance of a salesperson, our data is extremely useful to do it, as it will allow to measure that person results on a well-defined territory.

Finally, we collaborate with wholesalers, pharmacy purchasing groups, and we have a healthy relationship with pharmacies in obtaining our data. Pharmacies also benefit from our collaboration from receiving back data regarding their own performance and the benchmark within the regions they operate in comparison to other markets. We do this with pharmacies using mass-market streams and hospitals across Portugal.

How did HMR perform in 2017?

We experienced the best commercial year to date in 2017, experiencing double-digit growth in Portugal. The main growth driver was the launch of new services, that had a substantial impact on the market, with high acceptance from the customers. Based on the data that we have around prescription dynamics and sellouts, we were able to offer a robust data offering, including the origin of prescription and travel of the medicine. From a geographic perspective, this is important information for companies to manage, particularly for their commercial teams.

For 2018, we continue to adapt our offer to better match healthcare market needs and to evolve our model in line with trends in the market. Plus, we focus on refreshing our services within our consultancy offer because of our vision of delivering strong consultancy to our customers based on data and knowledge models.

What do you observe as the emerging trends in Portuguese healthcare?

As we know, Portugal has outstanding basic research entities and organizations that could be better explored from a country perspective to attract more foreign investments. To this end, we must work more collaboratively internally to this end. Although we are a small country, working with different institutions in the three main cities in Portugal can create hurdles. This minor regionalism is a small geographical barrier, and Portugal is so centralized that at times, the excellent research located in one specific city might not try to connect with another city. From a cultural perspective, regions are important here which can cause of inefficiencies, regarding duplication or redundancy. Better coordination in the network in research could be beneficial.

As we are exposed to more and more countries in Europe, we become more aware that Portugal has an excellent base for the translation of ideas. We have a unique national healthcare system that is universal, free and crucially, heavily digitalized. hmR sees multiple opportunities, especially if we look to take a step further and integrate more systems and highlight the potential for interoperability. Pharmacies systems have turned heavily digital and if we can follow up using hospitals, private players, and Healthcare clinics, then the market research field would have a considerable amount of data available to us which would help concerning management and exploitation of research and development. As a country, we must make this decision and understand that data protection is vital, and improving the healthcare system via access to data is paramount.

There is a huge discussion in Portugal regarding value-based healthcare and value-based contracts and therefore, a need for real-world evidence and data that will monitor past decisions regarding

financing of pharmaceuticals and healthcare resources. Portugal is an excellent testing ground for these models because we benefit from a high level of digitalization in the country; we can be a hub for Europe to create real-world evidence, and given that our market is similar to the rest of Europe, the data generated here could be translated to other markets. As such, Portugal can be seen as a benchmark, not only in clinical trials but digitization. Very few European countries are as organized or as digital as the Portuguese pharmaceutical sector. If we compare with Spain, which is highly decentralized and there is no unique electronic prescription system set up, Portugal is streets ahead: 98 percent of prescriptions nowadays are full electronic.

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How do you react to changes in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)?

Changes in GDPR are an opportunity because it assists all stakeholders in understanding what needs to be done, with a clear ruling. Companies like ours will benefit from a more organized system and clear rules within the marketplace. Of course, this demand causes changes in knowledge from the different players, and sometimes when the knowledge is not there, barriers can rise. From our hospital offering, we have been able to develop a robust anonymized system for the Hospitals that is validated by the local data protection entity. All our data services will be highly anonymized and for sure respecting all GDPR rules.

How is HMR's international expansion shaping up?

New for 2017 was our entrance into Germany where we will start commercializing by the end of this year. We become quicker and more skilled at making international decisions given the way that we expanded into Spain and Ireland in 2014. We do not have one unique model for every market in which we operate because the model is tailor-made to each market, to allow for flexibility and adaptability. In Germany, we developed strong partnerships with key stakeholders in the market that creates a secure platform regarding the quality, accuracy, and representativeness of the data we put forward. As part of our growth ambition we want to have a strong presence in the European area, as so entrance in UK, France and Italy are under our radar, although there is not yet a public decision on the markets we target.

What differentiates you from the competition?

The most prominent differentiating factor in working with hmR is our data sources. The market research we conduct and the information and knowledge that we provide is from data originated mainly by pharmacies. We are part of a pharmacy association, and we firmly believe that

pharmacies are one of the best if not the best source of data for companies that operate in a pharmaceutical market. Not only does this data aid understanding and making decisions for businesses but it is also in extreme proximity to the consumer. Healthcare is part of hmR DNA and we are part of a large conglomerate with different business arms, from professional intervention to distribution to technology in healthcare. Apart from these, hmR believe that each market is different, requiring different commercial approaches, and clearly our flexibility is a differentiation from our main competitors.

Moreover, we are exceptionally quick at delivering data to market and we aim to have always the best data delivery time in the market, without compromising the quality of the information. We are still considered a start-up company that already has an international footprint, and we always adapt rapidly to market needs. We can adjust easily, and this is one of our critical differentiating factors. In the future, being a larger company, flexibility will be a challenge, although currently, it allows us to be closer to the market.

What are your strategic priorities looking forward?

In five years' time, HMR will be recognized by healthcare stakeholders as a significant player in the field of business intelligence on healthcare, both from a data perspective and on the knowledge, we generate. We will have an even stronger presence in Europe housing affiliates in two more European powerhouses.

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