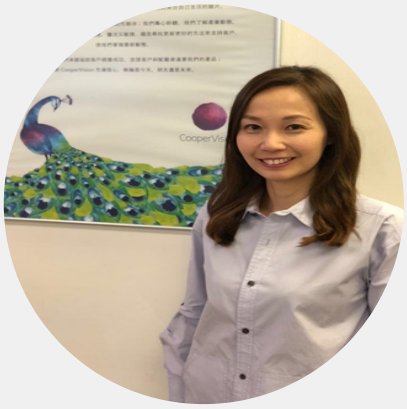
Yvette Chu – General Manager, CooperVision Hong Kong



17.10.2018

Tags: Hong Kong, Ophthalmology, CooperVision, Eyecare

Yvette Chu, general manager of CooperVision Hong Kong, shares the affiliate's double-digit growth over the past three years, the importance of their relationships with the optometrists in Hong Kong, the value of their innovative and comprehensive portfolio of contact lenses, and her vision for the affiliate in the next few years.

Yvette, overall, CooperVision has performed very well in Asia-Pacific with double-digit growth over the past few years. How has the Hong Kong affiliate specifically performed?

To begin with, I am very happy to share that 2018 marks the tenth anniversary of CooperVision Hong Kong, so it is a milestone year for us. In addition, what is even more impressive is that CooperVision has seen double-digit growth over the past three years, especially impressive given that in the past year, the overall contact lenses market in Hong Kong has been flat. We are happy to have outperformed the Hong Kong market.

Our success is driven by three 'P's: products, partnerships, and people. CooperVision focuses on launching new products based on consumer needs. For instance, in 2014 and 2015, we launched our first series of daily silicone hydrogel (SiHy) contact lenses under the clariti® 1 day family, with three major products (spherical, toric and multifocal) covering most of the contact lenses users' needs in Hong Kong. Another example is the Biofinity Energys™ product, designed to relieve digital

eye fatigue. We launched this two years ago in the US when we realized that people are always using devices that are close to their eyes. The product helps consumers see better, as well as relax their eyes and accommodate their eyes to digital eye activity. We are expecting to launch this product in HK.

Secondly, CooperVision Hong Kong treasures partnership with our optometrists, so we listen to them and work with them very closely to understand their needs, both through key professional associations like the Hong Kong Association of Private Practice Optometrists (APPO) as well as the optical chains and independent stores. Our unique strategy here is to help them build their own customer brand in order to help them maintain their professionalism and develop customer loyalty within their own base.

Finally, in terms of people, my team is the important assets to our organization. This is why I encourage the team to work together towards the same vision. Teamwork is a critical factor to drive business growth and help our contact lenses further penetrate the market in the coming years. In my personal philosophy of people management, I always highlight three points crucial to building a strong team: respect, communication and partnership. We have around 25 employees at the moment and we are planning to grow the team further in the future.

What are the specific trends and characteristics of the Hong Kong contact lenses market?

What interesting is that around 60 percent of Hong Kong contact lenses wearers use daily disposable contact lenses. This is a consumer behavior we have noticed. Part of the reason is the long working hours here, so Hongkongers value the freedom and convenience of using daily disposable lenses, where you do not have to follow a cleaning regimen every night.

In terms of supply as well, there is a large range of contact lenses options in Hong Kong, including daily disposable, biweekly and monthly disposables, so consumers really have many options.

This means that it is very important for us to launch products that fit the market. For this reason, we pay close attention to the market and we will periodically work with focus groups and undertake some market research. For instance, this year, we have started working with the City University of Hong Kong’s Marketing Department, enlisting some students’ help to conduct market research. This also helps them obtain real life experience in doing market research and developing a marketing plan. We also conduct market visits to our optometrists and I personally do such

meetings twice a month. This ensures that we keep our ears close to the ground.

With your products being a key pillar of your success, could you share some of the main growth drivers within your current portfolio in Hong Kong?

Our focus is really on our silicon hydrogel products, which are new innovations that are best for our consumers' eyes. Here, we have three 'hero' brands, as we like to call them.

The first is, as mentioned, the clariti® 1 day family, with spherical, toric and multifocal options. The multifocal product deserves mention, because it is for presbyopia (old-sightedness), which is a symptom of aging that cannot be avoided. For many people used to wearing contact lenses, it could be a shock and a great inconvenience when they realize that they can no longer use contact lenses at a certain age. This is why the clariti® 1 day multifocal option is so great because it offers aging people with presbyopia the option to continue wearing contact lenses.

In addition, we have positioned this brand as a great, value-for-money SiHy option. Our mission is to help people see better, so we do not want our consumers to make trade-offs between price and long-term eye health.

The second is our MyDay® daily disposable family, which has the lowest modulus in the world at 0.4MPa. This means that it is the softest SiHy option out there, which is great for users looking to improve long-term eye health, wearing comfort and ease of handling. This year, we expanded this family by launching the MyDay® toric lenses.

The third is Biofinity® family brand, which is a series of monthly disposable silicone hydrogel contact lenses that have an even wider range. We have a product series, called Biofinity XR, where 'XR' stands for 'extra range'. The main feature is that it offers an extended range for consumers with more extreme prescription. Most spherical contact lenses only go up to -12.00, whereas the Biofinity® XR goes up to -20.00. This is a great news to consumers that previously thought they would not be able to wear contact lenses and offers one more option to them.

Looking forward, Cooper Vision is very focused on the SiHy portfolio and this is also definitely a future growth driver in Hong Kong. SiHy lenses are an important innovation for the promotion of long-term eye health because it allows for more oxygen transmission to the cornea. A lack of oxygen may not present any noticeable side effects to the consumer, but it is not optimal. Hong Kong is fortunate that it is affluent enough to afford products and solutions that promote long-term eye health, but the problem now is a lack of awareness, so we also hope that we can work with

optometrists to spread awareness about this.

In Hong Kong, another important business segment is our myopia management segment, with our MiSight product, as the first daily disposable contact lenses to correct existing myopia and slow its progression in children. This is very important because over 70 percent of Hong Kong teenagers suffer from myopia, which means that the overall myopia rate in Hong Kong may increase significantly in the future. This is why we also hope to invest and grow the myopia management category.

Cooper Vision strategy is very clear: use innovative products to win the market and to drive partnerships. Our brand purpose: to help people see the world better.

On your point about partnership, could you share firstly the characteristics of the retail market and CooperVision Hong Kong's strategy to maintain productive partnerships with optometrists in Hong Kong?

The split is more or less 20 percent optical chains (i.e. with merchandising offices) and 80 percent independent optical stores, so the landscape is quite fragmented. Some of the independent stores are also looking to grow into larger chains to leverage on economies of scales and so on.

In terms of channel management and sales and marketing, I have a strong team that understands the needs of optometrists and the work that they do. This is what enables us to work closely with optometrists as partners through our private label strategy, which is unique to CooperVision and critical to our success. The idea is to help optometrists maintain their professional image, build consumer loyalty and develop their own individual customer brand. We focus on selling our services and solutions to them, not just our contact lenses as commodities, and we help them capitalize on opportunities available to them. The sale of our contact lenses to them is only the start of the conversation, not the end of a transaction.

This is even more important because a challenge that this sector is facing now is the rise of online shopping which is a trend across all categories. Contact lenses are classified as a medical device in Hong Kong but some consumers see it more as a consumer good and will buy it online instead of visiting their optometrists. This could be harmful to consumers' long-term eye health and also breaks the communication between the consumer and the optometrist, which is vital for long-term eye health. It means that consumers reduce the number of visits to the optometrists, they may not know about proper eye care procedures or new products in the market that may benefit them. On

this issue, we need to work closely with the government and optometrists to communicate the importance of proper eye checking habits.

Recently, we have also launched a masterbrand campaign in Hong Kong to help consumers understand CooperVision better and to promote our brand. Here, we are also promoting the importance of long-term eye health with the eye-catching message: “if you would like to get a pair of contact lenseses, please consult your optometrist!” in the print materials.

On a more personal side, your professional background is in more consumer goods like skincare and cosmetics. What inspired you to move into the medical device space?

I had previously worked across the health supplements and dermatology segments. Every time I have looked for a new opportunity, I want to join a company that helps people. I want to work with products that truly improve the lives of people. This is why I decided to move into the medical device space.

With such strong foundations for CooperVision in Hong Kong, what is your five-year vision for CooperVision Hong Kong?

In five years, I would like to see CooperVision with the second-largest market share in Hong Kong. My team is well-equipped to meet this challenge and ready to work wholeheartedly towards this target. We will also continue to launch different innovative products to meet the needs of the Hong Kong market. Finally, I would also like to improve brand recognition of CooperVision on the contact lens users side to around 50 percent through our professional partners and branding campaigns.

See more interviews