

Daniel Bran - General Manager, Accord Romania



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Daniel Bran, GM of Accord Romania reveals that finding the right talent has been one of the most challenging and rewarding milestones in building the affiliate from the ground up. He shares his insights on what is driving Accord's growth and how launching nearly 20 new products a year has been conducive to its performance. Bran describes the evolution of the company and how they have managed to become the leading generic hospital for the onco-haematology field thanks to their ambitious growth strategy within five years.

What pushed you to build something from the ground up?

In 2015, Accord approached me and asked if I could join them as the country manager for Romania. Accord has a strong entrepreneurial spirit, and this was an exciting opportunity for me to join a dynamic and ambitious company. The company is a rather unusual business organisation, as it does not follow templates, but rather embraces the prior knowledge and experience that people bring along when they join in. Hence, they are ecstatic when a new approach or idea is put forward and they are happy to adopt it.

On October 1st, I woke up with just my cell phone and my determination to build a successful pharma company. We were able to meet the challenge developing and implementing a strong plan

to build the affiliate from scratch in a very short time-span with the support that Accord centrally has provided. From then on, Accord Romania has been steadily growing year on year.

What have been some of the challenges and milestones that you have achieved while building the affiliate up?

The biggest challenge was also the biggest success, which was and still is, bringing the right people into the right position while maintaining a perfectly balanced internal blend of skills and expertise. We started with a team of seven, and today Accord Romania has 30 employees. It has been an exuberant and rewarding journey.

The first invoice that Accord issued was in February 2016 and today it is a top-10 generic hospital company and the leading onco-generic hospital company in the country.

Accord is an exciting company locally as well as globally, as it is the fastest growing pharmaceutical company in Europe whose purpose is to deliver high quality and affordable medicines to patients. To be at the helm of the local affiliate of this ambitious company gives me a lot of pride and joy.

How different is the market today from five years ago?

Market access has become increasingly challenging because of the clawback tax. This policy is not sustainable on long term and is a heavy burden for the entire industry. Consequently, keeping products in the market and maintaining their accessibility for patients, makes Romania one of the most challenging business environments in Europe. The tax is at nearly 30 percent, which is paid on top of all the other taxes any company registered in Romania needs to pay.

Recently, the government issued an emergency ordinance for the financial and energy sector that imposed a 2 percent tax. However, it was withdrawn because the consequences were severe. Nevertheless, it illustrates how disproportionate the pharmaceutical industry is being penalized. Currently, it is the biggest cost for generics and when it is adjusted for products with prices less than RON 100 (USD 23.5) it represents 40 percent of the producer price.

As an industry, generics and innovators have come forward with a joint proposal to implement a differentiated and capped claw-back tax of 25 percent for innovative medicines and 20 percent for generics. Unfortunately, unless this is implemented, the access of Romanian patients to vital medicines will be restricted as we will see more generic products being withdrawn from the market in the future.

How do you balance the sustainability of the affiliate while operating in an unfavourable environment?

Accord has an entrepreneurial spirit which catalyses fast growth, yet this is deliberate and pre-meditated. We assess the capabilities of today, evaluate how far we can reach, and this translates into healthy growth.

Accord has the advantage of being vertically integrated as we're part of the Intas Pharmaceuticals group. This comes in addition to launching an important number of products yearly. Over the last five years, the affiliate has brought over 110 new SKUs to the market, which allows the

portfolio to be dynamic. On average, there are nearly 20 new meaningful products that are introduced by Accord in Romania. Since December 2019, patients in Romania have access to our pegfilgrastim biosimilar. Accord was actually the first company to launch a pegfilgrastim biosimilar in Europe. Notably, Accord is the first Indian origin company to launch a biosimilar in Europe, in 2015 and has rapidly become a leading supplier of this medicine on the European market, overtaking already available biosimilars. For Romania, the situation was quite similar. And this gives a very clear image of Accord's strength. The combination of successive launches and vertical integration enables the affiliate to grow sustainably.

What is the scope of the therapeutic areas covered by Accord in Romania?

Accord provides one-third of the oncological treatments in Europe which makes it the continent's leading supplier of oncology products. In Romania, oncology and haematology are the affiliate's flagship therapeutic areas. In the future, we have identified auto-immunology as the next direction to grow into, as we feel the affiliate can have a significant impact in that area. Here, we should note that Accord is launching the first oral solution of Methotrexate.

Stay tuned, as we are shortly planning to unveil other exciting new developments, which now are going through our internal procedures.

Where do you see the biggest need from patients in the market today?

Romanian patients have a lot of unmet needs, and the standard care of health needs to be elevated in many therapeutic areas. The biggest hurdle to overcome this is to increase the funding in the healthcare system, as Romania has the lowest healthcare expenditure in Europe with only 5 percent of GDP allocated to this sector. The minimum pricing methodology in addition to the clawback tax, lead to aggravated situations where generic companies are forced to withdraw more and more products from the market. The budget does not reflect real consumption and the healthcare needs in the country. Hence alternative sources of funding need to be found so that generics use can be optimized, and innovative medicines can be provided to the Romanian patients. Currently, one in four patients is covered by the healthcare industry, be it generic or innovative medicines.

How important is the Romanian affiliate for Accord's regional presence?

Accord Romania is the second most important market in the Central Eastern European cluster after Poland.

Are you planning to consolidate your position in the market with new launches next year?

What sets Accord apart from other competitors is the ability to launch an important number of meaningful launches each year. Hence the strategy that we have in place is very clear: continue bringing new products to consolidate Accord's leadership position in onco-haematology and replicate this procedure to gain market share in the auto-immune area. This is in line with the global strategy, to make Accord a leading pan-European generic and biosimilar company by 2021.

What special-sauce have you brought into the affiliate?

One of my secrets is that I have managed to bring in the company people who are more knowledgeable than myself in specific areas. We embrace high performing teams at Accord. Each one of the team members is an expert in his or her area of expertise, and I made sure to create the space for them to flourish. Furthermore, as each one of them is different, I have tailored my approach to fit each of their personalities, to ensure that their development and their skills are optimized.

What has been your proudest achievement since taking on the leadership of this affiliate?

The fact that I have managed to build the affiliate over the last five years, and that it is still growing has been the overarching achievement. There have been many significant moments, and one of the happiest moments was when we had our first company meeting and cut the first-anniversary cake. The environment is a tough one to operate in, and especially for a company that is one of the most ambitious in terms of growth. However, I thoroughly enjoy every day spent working with this wonderful team. The fact that throughout this journey Accord has a high employee engagement and a low turnover when it comes to people indicates to me that people are happy to be part of the adventure and this organisation.

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