

Interview: Bruno Costa Gabriel Managing Director, Janssen Brazil



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Bruno Costa Gabriel, managing director of Janssen Brazil, provides insights into the transformative market approach successfully implemented by this leading company in Brazil and his main priorities to further leverage the great potential of Janssen’s innovation and impact an ever-increasing number of Brazilian patients.

You display a truly international market perspective after having held senior positions at Janssen in various markets, including France, Portugal, Italy, Spain, and Puerto Rico among others. What key specificities of the Brazilian market would you highlight to our international readers?

I cannot deny that Brazil stands as a rather complex market, although it shares strong similarities with some of the markets I have operated in before, including both in Europe and in Latin America. As an innovative company, we focus on bringing a higher value to the patients, and this overarching objective has been guiding us through the complexities of the Brazilian market.

What was the strategic mission assigned to you when taking over the reins of the affiliate?

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Six years ago, Janssen decided to concentrate its efforts on five therapeutic areas with high unmet needs: oncology and hematology, neuroscience, infectious diseases and vaccines, immunology, and cardiovascular and metabolic diseases [a sixth therapeutic area – pulmonary hypertension – was added following the acquisition of Actelion in 2017 Ed.]. In this regard, my predecessor,

who headed our Brazilian operations from 2012 to 2015, held the mission to move our company's focus from primary care to a more specialty-oriented area in Brazil.

On my side, my main objective was to further consolidating this approach and strengthening some of our affiliate's critical infrastructures and processes, with regards to market access for example. For example, we aimed to bolster our capacity to efficiently build and communicate the value of the solutions that we are bringing to the Brazilian market. As a matter of fact, the size of our market access teams, which are both dedicated to the public and the private sector, tripled over the past two years.

Given the company's moving focus toward specialty care products, it is rather surprising to see that 50 percent of Janssen's revenues in Brazil still come from the public health system!

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You have to take into account the fact that biologics make up a significant share of our current portfolio, and federal health programs cover some of these products. For example, Remicade® (infliximab), our most important product in Brazil, has been included in a remarkable Productive Development Partnerships (PDP), whose success and efficiency have been praised by Brazil's federal government and the Ministry of Health. Overall, around 120 of our employees are committed to make a success of these strategic partnerships, which probably explain Janssen's eye-catching track record when it comes to with a greater access to life-changing medicines.

Furthermore, Janssen is particularly strong in the HIV fields, two strategic areas that have been strongly prioritized by the Brazilian Ministry of Health over the past decades. In that sense, I want to highlight that Brazil's HIV program in particular has showcased tremendous progresses over the past few years, and as a company holding some of the most advanced HIV products in the market we are playing a significant role in shifting the country's treatment paradigm in this critical area. Overall, Janssen also emerges as a strategic ally of Brazil's public health system in the immunology and virology areas and we will continue to tirelessly strengthen this close collaboration in the coming years.

In therapeutic areas that are not covered by federal health programs such as oncology and hematology, our products have been particularly well received by the country's private market, which covers around 50 million Brazilian lives. Given that a large share of Janssen's innovation has been primarily focused on these two therapeutic areas over the past years, we are particularly proud of the rapid uptake that these products have experienced in the Brazilian private market.

Two years after joining the affiliate, what would you describe as your main achievements?

Our main achievement definitely relates to our affiliate's great successes in getting approved and incorporating innovative solutions into the overall Brazilian healthcare ecosystem. Over the past six years, Janssen Brazil has launched eleven new, innovative products, which have had an extremely positive impact on both the results of the company and an incredible number of Brazilian patients. Looking at our most innovative therapeutic areas, more than 80.000 Brazilian patients have been able to access Janssen products between January and September 2017, which is a particularly impressive given that we are talking of highly sophisticated treatments.

In the Brazilian non-retail segment, we have managed to significantly improve our ranking and we actually stand as the second largest company in this field in September 2017, while we have been moving back and forth between the second and the third rank over the past year.

Bringing innovative products onto the market is no easy task, regardless of the country in which you operate. Nevertheless, I am proud to work in a country that holds such a remarkable regulatory agency like ANVISA, which undoubtedly plays a great role in enhancing the Brazilian model of healthcare. The technical expertise and the transparency displayed by ANVISA are absolutely world-class and – above all – did not suffer from the political and economic turmoil that has significantly affected Brazil over the past years. The agency has accomplished huge progresses on the international stage too; as a matter of fact, ANVISA joined in November 2016 the International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH) alongside the US FDA, the EU EMA, and Japan PMDA, which stands as an additional evidence of the high level of expertise developed by Brazil’s regulator. Last but not least, I want to highlight the stability and predictability that ANVISA brings to the operations of pharmaceutical companies like Janssen. In Brazil as in any other countries around the world, innovators want to see their products being approved as fast as possible – in Brazil, ANVISA guarantees that this assessment process is secure, fair, and transparent, which is already a great advantage in our eyes.

As one of the largest pharmaceutical companies operating in the country, how would you define Janssen’s responsibility towards the Brazilian healthcare ecosystem?

Our vision for Brazil is to have a transformative impact that goes beyond our products, and – in the fulfillment of this endeavor – we can leverage our company’s outstanding footprint in the country. Taking Janssen and J&J together, we have more than fifteen manufacturing plants in Brazil and our operations gather together more than 6.000 employees. This huge footprint truly showcases the great and longstanding commitment of Janssen to Brazil, a country where we have been continuously operating for more than 84 years.

In Brazil, we have developed and implemented a large number of CSR programs that are particularly adapted to the specific needs of the country. For example, we are conducting a large-scale immunization program in partnership with the Ministry of Health and leading healthcare institutions in the country. Last year, we moreover developed an educational program targeting the Zika virus that was directly supported by Janssen’s headquarters.

As one of the world’s leading innovative companies, we have also broadened our R&D approach to Brazil by trying to more directly support local innovative projects, which we help scale up. For example, we have been supporting a R&D project conducted at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Prof. Leda Castilho): we have incubated their R&D teams on the Zika virus among our facility for six months to propel the advancement of this project. Clinical research also stands as another strategic pillar of investment for Janssen Brazil.

In 2017, we proudly stand as the third largest pharma in number of clinical trials in the country while we used to hold the sixth position in 2012. While we have already invested over BRL95 million [*around USD 30 million*] over the past three years, our objective is to become the country’s largest investor in clinical trials by 2020.

What are the objectives that you absolutely want to have achieved before the end of your tenure at the head of Janssen Brazil?

In all countries I work in, there are always three objectives which I am particularly adamant about achieving. First, I want to develop the great talent that we have internally, which is particularly true in Brazil. All professionals operating in the Brazilian affiliate are particularly skilled when it comes to navigating Brazil’s particularly complex ecosystem, and this expertise could reveal itself extremely valuable for our company at the global level.

My second fundamental objective is to continue successfully launching Janssen's innovative products and look at new ways to provide Brazilian patients with an ever increasing access to these treatments.

Finally, we want to tirelessly support Brazil, which includes first our CSR initiatives and second our enduring commitment to bolster the fundamental structure of Brazil's healthcare system, be it with regards to clinical research investments or to industrial enhancement through PDPs.

Brazil can be considered as a launchpad in the careers of brilliant, international pharmaceutical executives. Which skills in particular have you been strengthening since you took over the head of the affiliate?

Without any doubt: resilience and the capacity to cope with instability. In such a complex and somehow unpredictable environment, being resilient and holding firm to your long-term plan is absolutely paramount.

You have been working at Janssen for most of your career. How do you explain your loyalty to the company?

I indeed have been working at Janssen for more than 17 years, which includes seven different countries and various positions. The main reason behind this loyalty is our company's values - Our Credo. One might be skeptical about the real importance given to our values, but I can guarantee that after only a few days working at Janssen their importance become absolutely obvious. I have moved across the company and around the globe over the past seventeen years, markets and affiliates might be different from each other but Janssen values remain the same everywhere.

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