

Glen Godresse – Chief Marketing Officer & Head of Commercial Excellence, Menarini Asia-Pacific



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Glen Godresse brings over 25 years of pharmaceutical industry experience to his role as Chief Marketing Officer & Head of Commercial Excellence for Menarini’s Asia-Pacific operations. In an exclusive conversation with PharmaBoardroom, he explains how Menarini Asia-Pacific is breaking the mould by focusing on niche therapeutic areas often disregarded by the industry, thereby turning “rocks into diamonds” and making a difference for patients. Godresse also expands on the challenges and opportunities of competing as a European family-owned company in the highly competitive APAC market as well as how Menarini APAC’s approach to omnichannel marketing and e-commerce is being adopted as best practice by its global HQ.

Can you begin by introducing your quarter-century of pharma industry experience, and how you draw on it in your current role?

My career in the pharmaceutical industry commenced by chance more than 25 years ago. I had studied commerce and marketing at university but had never set out to work in pharma. However, while at university I stumbled on an opportunity with ophthalmic company Alcon Laboratories and the rest was history.

It was an amazing introduction to healthcare; working in areas like glaucoma and cataract surgery that prevented blindness and, in many cases, helped people see again. I also witnessed firsthand, how the pharma industry could make a meaningful impact on people's lives; something which would later be reaffirmed when caring for my mother in the final months before her passing. In the last stages of her life, she was often in pain as a result of the cancer and also chemotherapy and radiation. The pain medication administered to her was primarily for short, sharp exacerbations of pain that "breaks through" traditional pain management therapy. I am therefore grateful that while many companies have divested from the opioid market due to well-documented challenges, Menarini has, for example in Korea and Australia, launched a range of medications, specifically for breakthrough cancer pain. These medications are able to offer patients very fast pain relief and some level of comfort and quality of life in their final months.

After Alcon, I relocated to Thailand and Taiwan with MSD, which was a big career milestone for me. Being in a completely different culture, where English was not widely spoken, was a big challenge for me at first. However, I learned that I could not expect a culture to adapt to me. Instead, I needed to adapt to the culture. I learned to be less of a perfectionist and more patient, open, and agile and to manage the "grey," accepting that not everything could be rationalized through my own understanding, and that living in a state of "chaos" was, at times, just part of daily life operating in some of these markets. Rather than finding it stressful, I began to love the fast-paced and dynamic nature of the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region and I thrived in the ambiguity and daily challenges.

Returning home, I joined Menarini Australia in 2013, initially as Sales and Marketing Director. Applying lessons from my experiences working overseas and in a listed MNC, I soon progressed to General Manager for Australia and New Zealand before becoming APAC Vice President, and now Chief Marketing Officer & Head of Commercial Excellence. My current role encompasses leading Menarini APAC's integrated commercial model, covering the regional franchises for ethical and consumer healthcare brands as well as commercial excellence including business intelligence, market access, marketing excellence, and digital excellence to advance Menarini's unique value proposition and meet evolving healthcare needs.

What is the significance of Menarini's APAC operations to the global group, and how would you characterize its strategy in the region?

Menarini APAC is a member of the Menarini Group, the world's largest Italian biopharmaceutical company with a heritage of 137 years, over 17,000 employees in more than 140 countries and annual revenues exceeding EUR4 Bn today. Menarini APAC's revenue contribution to the Menarini Group had grown steadily from seven percent ten years ago to 15 percent as of 2022 and we are steadfast in our focus to accelerate this beyond 20 percent in the foreseeable future.

We operate across the entire commercial value chain, from clinical development to regulatory approval, market access, and product launch, as well as lifecycle management. We have a diverse portfolio of proprietary and partnered brands in key therapeutic fields, including consumer healthcare, dermatology, allergy/respiratory, gastroenterology, cardio-metabolic and men's health.

Our broad, flexible, and agile business model enables us to pursue a vast array of opportunities that other companies may not have the footprint, capabilities, or commercial orientation to go after. This is unique and very often allows us to serve the needs of patients that are no longer met by other companies.

Menarini APAC is one of the fastest growing regions within the Menarini Group and has become a dynamic engine of growth. Our ambition – which is more than just a pipe dream – is to eventually become the number one region within the Menarini Group.

What are some of the challenges and opportunities of differentiating Menarini and competing as a European family-owned company in the highly competitive market landscape of APAC?

In many ways, Menarini is not a “typical” pharmaceutical company. Firstly, we are a business built almost exclusively on partnerships. Just about every product we have today can be traced back to a current or historical partnership. Secondly, we have a very flexible business model. Today, for example, while many companies are walking away from primary care and pharmacy, and focusing their efforts on a small number of speciality therapeutic areas, Menarini sees our broad customer and channel focus as an advantage, especially from a partnership perspective.

In an industry where it is easy to pay lip service only to patient care and centricity, we are open and proud of the fact that we are running a highly successful business but constantly remind ourselves that profit cannot be our only filter in decision-making. The way I look at it is that our flexible business model and strong position in primary care and consumer healthcare provide us with the financial strength to be able to invest in more niche therapy areas where there is a high unmet patient need and where other companies are not focussing. In many cases, these are truly life-changing or lifesaving treatments and are the products our employees are most proud of.

In Australia, a rare metabolic disease called hereditary Tyrosinemia Type 1 impacts around one to three babies born each year (one per 100,000 live births). These patients present at the emergency department at the age of three to six months with chronic liver failure. If left undiagnosed and untreated, less than one in three children would live until the age of five years old. Through our partnerships, we were able to bring a truly lifesaving treatment to these children, with 80 percent going on to live relatively normal lives. To give just one example of this product’s impact, a family in Australia with a baby that died of undiagnosed hereditary Tyrosinemia Type 1 conducted an autopsy, found this genetic abnormality, and then secured a diagnosis for their second child. This child was prescribed our product and is now a healthy and happy teenager. Beyond supplying the medication, our local subsidiary also invests in education around early diagnosis and screening, as well as working with our distribution partners to ensure rapid supply of medication to patients within hours of diagnosis.

In certain cases, where we lack the internal capabilities to bring potentially lifesaving medications to large groups of patients ourselves, we have recently shown willingness to find external partnership models to ensure access. We recently entered into an exclusive licensing agreement with SciClone Pharmaceuticals in China to introduce an important new treatment option to address the public health threat of serious carbapenem-resistant enterobacteriales (CRE) infections, which the World Health Organisation has identified as the top three critical pathogens in need of new anti-microbial treatment options. This approach is well aligned with the efforts we are making with other industry partners to address antimicrobial resistance through our partnership with the AMR Action Fund. Again, antibiotics are not a hugely attractive commercial opportunity and have been deprioritized by many larger firms, but there is a huge unmet patient need in our region.

In what ways has Menarini adapted its approach to developing and executing marketing and commercial strategies to the diversity of markets in APAC?

When Menarini first acquired Invida group over ten years ago, it found itself suddenly operating in a new, unfamiliar, and complex region. However, our global management quickly recognized that a “one size fits all” approach would not work for an extremely diverse region like APAC. We are a global company with a very local mindset and tailor our approach locally for the 13 main markets in which we operate. We consider language and culture as well as incorporating all the critical aspects of running a successful healthcare operation, from legal and regulatory to funding mechanisms, distribution networks, channel dynamics, compliance, and risk.

Today, our portfolio of products is quite different depending on the market, and we have developed a broad multi-channel capability across primary care, speciality care, retail, e-commerce and consumer marketing. We believe this is the right business model for our region and one that has enabled us to continuously grow our business exponentially year on year.

How does Menarini define “commercial excellence” and why is this concept so important in APAC?

Menarini APAC has strong in-market commercial teams, expertise in regulatory and market access, plus an established distribution network, and manufacturing capabilities in place. These capabilities ensure faster and easier access to medicine for patients in APAC, helping to manage underserved health conditions.

We pride ourselves on creating productive and profitable alliances and offering our partners a single point of entry into all major APAC markets. Every single opportunity that comes across our desk, no matter how small, goes through a rigorous assessment process involving all relevant departments (medical, regulatory, commercial, market access, and so on) to ensure we do not prematurely discard them just because it may not be an immediately obvious fit. We are extremely proud of our ability to “turn rocks into diamonds”, which in essence is commercial excellence in action.

Sales Force Effectiveness (SFE) is taken very seriously at every level of management. This is not just about managing activity metrics, but also ensuring our sales managers are equipped to provide the right coaching and that we are engaging in more meaningful and relevant interactions with our customers. Beyond SFE, we have been working hard to evolve our digital capabilities. This year alone we have engaged over 30,000 unique physicians in our email marketing campaigns, using new tools to help us be more relevant to our customers, and providing the right information, to the right customers, via the right channel, at the right time. We have invested a lot of time and energy in profiling all our customers, not just to capture information, but to ensure how we are engaging them is aligned with their preferences. If a customer does not want to receive emails, we know about it, and we respect it. If a customer is not interested in medical education events, we do not continue to send them invitations. To me, this is the essence of commercial excellence – making efficient use of resources and being more relevant to each individual customer.

China, to take one example from your region, is a global frontrunner in terms of online shopping and delivery services, which extends into consumer healthcare products. What do you see as the key digital marketing trends in your region today and to what extent are Menarini’s APAC experiences being fed back up the chain into global strategy?

We are very proud of the tremendous progress we have made in the last year or so in the area of omni-channel marketing. Today, we have built a comprehensive regional digital innovation hub and have recruited some of the industry’s leading talent in the areas of digital marketing, data and

analytics, and e-commerce. It is not just sales and marketing, other functions such as our medical department, are increasingly adopting new ways of engaging scientific leaders and collecting real word evidence via digital channels. In all markets across our region, we champion omni-channel marketing and support all the local brand teams with planning and executing meaningful and impactful digital campaigns.

Today, around 40 percent of our total revenue in China is via major e-commerce platforms, especially larger internet hospitals and increasingly online-to-offline (O2O) platforms. Our men's health portfolio in the areas of erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation in particular, is largely driven by patients seeking an end-to-end solution – consulting doctors online, receiving an e-prescription, and shipment of their medication, all without leaving their homes. We have dedicated people and infrastructure in China to ensure we partner closely with these platforms, not just in terms of product supply, but in supporting medical and patient education. We are now working to take the learnings from China and apply these to other markets, with a major focus on our consumer healthcare and dermatology brands.

Within the Menarini Group, we are seen as ‘Racers’ when it comes to omnichannel marketing, with many of our approaches and best practices being shared at a global level.

After over a decade with Menarini, what keeps you engaged and motivated in his job, and what are the key opportunities you are looking forward to grasping in the years ahead?

What keeps me energized is the fact that our business is rapidly evolving; the most exciting thing is that, due to our dynamic partnership model, we often do not really know what is around the corner.

I am passionate that we are placing more emphasis as a company beyond our traditional roots of primary care and consumer healthcare, with a growing emphasis and near term launches in speciality areas including oncology and anti-infectives. This is especially important in APAC, given the region's aging population and the projected impact of antimicrobial resistance in the coming years. These dynamics, coupled with the progress we are making in evolving our customer engagement model beyond traditional approaches, are what will help us sustain our strong growth momentum and keep me energized well into the future.

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