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Switching, Brexit and Digital – Three Priorities For The UK Self-Care Industry

by David Ridley

HBW Insight speaks exclusively to John Smith, chief executive officer of UK self-care industry association, PAGB, about the association's new "Strategy to 2025."

Switching, Brexit and digitalization are three major priorities for the UK self-care industry over the next few years, according to the Proprietary Association of Great Britain's chief executive officer, John Smith.

In an exclusive three-part interview with HBW Insight – to be published over the next two weeks – the PAGB's Smith discusses highlights from the association's new "Strategy to 2025."

"We wanted to make sure that we had a strategy that was fit for the future," Smith explained. "PAGB is now 100 years old and that is cause for celebration, but have we got a strategy that's going take us forward?"

To ensure the PAGB could provide another century of "world-class service" to its members, Smith said that the association had engaged in a far-reaching consultation, including representatives from the various sectors of the UK's self-care industry, and had produced the strategy document.

"For me, the strategy is more of an evolution rather than a revolution," Smith reflected. "I think we were doing a lot of things right."

However, alongside continuing priorities such as ensuring advertising best practice through industry self-regulation and the widening of access to medicines through prescription-to-OTC reclassification, major challenges – for example the UK's immanent exit from the European Union and digital disruption – meant that an update was needed.

While much of the advice given out by the MHRA with regards to Brexit has focused on the continued availability of prescription medicines, Smith explained that if consumers also struggled to get their hands on OTCs, they would turn once again to primary care channels, thus placing additional pressure on the UK's National Health Service.

“Just think if parents can't buy medicines for their sick child,” Smith warned. “They will end up going to the doctors or to the hospital. This would cause havoc, particularly in winter when the service is already under increased pressure.”

When it came to digitalization, the PAGB found it had to begin by looking at what industry actually meant by the term before self-regulation in the areas of e-commerce retail, mobile health apps and social media advertising could become effective, Smith noted.

“What we have put together is really in its infancy at the moment,” he revealed. “We've put together five working groups to investigate where we want to drive the digital arena going forward.”

Meanwhile, prescription-to-OTC reclassification was still “absolutely” one of the PAGB's key areas, Smith insisted.

“I think for me it's one of the things that we can do really well,” he said. “How do we make sure there is a proper pathway that enables our members to take products through the different classifications?”

The recent appointment of switch expert Michelle Riddalls – formerly Pfizer Inc.'s Regulatory Affairs director for Northern Europe – was a crucial part of delivering this aspect of the strategy, Smith said. (Also see "[Switching Can Help Normalize Self-Care – PAGB's Michelle Riddalls](#)" - HBW Insight, 13 Aug, 2019.)

There was “no one better” than Michelle when it came to reclassification, he maintained, an opinion formed not just by their experience of working together at PAGB over the last few months, but also while at Pfizer, where Smith also spent 20 years heading up the firm's UK and Ireland OTC operations.

“For me, it's always about who can I get as the best people to work at PAGB,” he boasted.

Riddalls' appointment and PAGB's new strategy would ensure that the association would continue to be the “expert voice of the UK consumer healthcare industry,” Smith concluded.

Watch out for HBW Insight's three-part interview with John Smith to be published over the next two weeks for more information on the PAGB's new strategy.

