

24 Feb 2021 | Interviews

J&J's Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack – Getting Inside One Of 2020's Biggest UK Launches

by [David Ridley](#)

HBW Insight speaks to Johnson & Johnson's Bill Twomey and Sven Sjovalld about how one of the biggest OTC launches of 2020 – Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack – uses behavioral science techniques to help motivate consumers to quit smoking and overcame COVID-related supply chain difficulties to launch a much-needed digital smoking cessation aid in the middle of a pandemic.

Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health's Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack digitally enabled smoking cessation aid was one of the biggest launches of 2020.

Describing the product as “the world's first connected OTC medicine,” J&J's QuickMist SmartTrack combines the company's latest nicotine spray delivery system with trackable digital health app technology, leveraging the power of personalization to help “provide motivation and encouragement to quit smoking for good.” (Also see "[J&J Leverages Power Of Digital Personalization With Nicorette UK Extension](#)" - HBW Insight, 26 Nov, 2020.)

“This was really a big step in terms of innovation,” commented Bill Twomey, senior director for J&J's Global Smoking Cessation franchise, in the second part of an exclusive interview with HBW Insight. (Also see "[It's A Win-Win Situation' – Nicorette At The Vanguard Of J&J's Global Sustainability Efforts](#)" - HBW Insight, 23 Feb, 2021.)

“Where we saw a major opportunity is offering better support,” added Sven Sjovalld, senior director and R&D site lead for Nicorette in Helsingborg, Sweden.

“If you've talked to or know anybody that has tried to quit smoking, or you have smoked yourself,

you'll know it's very difficult," Sjovald continued. "It's a disease, it's goes well beyond addiction."

"Staying on track, staying compliant with the therapy and seeing progress is very difficult," he explained.

Comparing smoking cessation with weight loss, Sjovald pointed out that in the case of the latter, you have scales and calorie counts to track progress and provide much needed reinforcement, reward and motivation.

Outside pharmacy programs, OTC smoking cessation products, by contrast, haven't offered the same comprehensive support, he said, "because there wasn't the mechanism for that historically."

Nudging Techniques

QuickMist SmartTrack's behavioral support app – which uses digital technology to create a personalized quit plan of "achievable milestones" providing a way of monitoring and visualizing progression – "fills that void," Twomey insisted.

"It helps you get that support in the sense that you can set micro goals such as, 'I want to get through 12 hours or a week without smoking'," Twomey continued. "Also, it helps you track the amount of money that you've saved by not smoking cigarettes, which we know is a huge motivator in addition to the health benefits."

Alongside these app-embedded "behavioral change techniques" – the science behind which J&J's senior medical affairs director Mark Watt will be presenting in poster form with colleagues at the 2021 Society For Research On Nicotine and Tobacco Annual Meeting – the other key innovation in the new Nicorette product is its near field communication (NFC) technology.

"We had a couple of different options, NFC chips or Bluetooth" Sjovald explained. "What we realized is that Bluetooth would be really difficult to get to market quickly."

"So, we asked smokers whether they would be willing to use NFC technology, explaining that it would be like contactless payment systems, and the answer was a resounding 'yes'," he said. "It actually feels good to physically tap on your mobile device instead of picking up a cigarette and seeing the progress you are making. That's quite innovative and interesting."

Keeping On Schedule

In fact, this consumer-driven decision to use NFC helped J&J keep on track, despite the challenges of launching in the middle of a pandemic. "It actually ended up not being an inhibitor to our launch and actually became a way for us to us to get to market very quickly," Sjovald pointed out.

The launch of an NRT product that leverages digital technology to fill the gap left by face-to-face smoking cessation support was also timely, given the lockdowns imposed by governments across the world to stop the spread of COVID infection.

“The UK has some of the best in-person smoking cessation support services in the world and people were cut off from them,” Twomey noted. “A product that can deliver in a virtual manner some of that support was critical to bring to market during the pandemic.”

While J&J had no idea what was coming when they planned the UK launch of QuickMist SmartTrack, Twomey said that the obvious need pushed the Nicorette team to get the product to market “as quickly as possible.”

Supply chain disruptions experienced by all OTC manufacturers during the height of the pandemic made it “tremendously challenging” to meet the planned release date, he added.

“We had some upstream supply chain issues where we had to quickly pull together and secure the raw materials we needed for the product,” Sjovall revealed. “But we were able to do so.”

“We were also in close connection with UK retailers about how to best launch into their reality,” he said. “We were very pleased to work through a rocky period.”

Future Plans

As for how QuickMist SmartTrack has performed since its launch last November, Twomey admitted that it had been a “slow start.”

“As you would expect, the pandemic is creating a little bit of the challenge,” he said. “We’re doing our best there. It’s early days, we’re happy with where things are but we’re hoping to gain even further momentum once the lockdown is lifted and we get back to a little of a more normal trial environment for lack of a better term.”

Asked whether J&J plans to roll out QuickMist SmartTrack in other European markets in 2021, Twomey said “it’s a very fluid situation.”

“While the UK is a critical market for us, we don’t aspire to launch in a single country,” he pointed out. “We will be launching in additional markets, but we have to balance what is also best for our employees and our other stakeholders.”

“It’s all taken into account and, given the circumstances, it’s a country by country decision making process,” he concluded.