

Marketing & Sales

Piloting a biotech leader to greater growth

Growth in a dynamic biotechnology industry requires empowering teams, making real-time adjustments, and shifting the mind-set to accelerate toward the end goal.



A combination of thoughtful acquisitions and deliberate leadership has fueled significant and sustained growth for biotech leader Sanofi Genzyme, the specialty-care unit of Sanofi. Bill Sibold, executive vice president and head of Sanofi Genzyme, discusses with McKinsey's Barr Seitz how he has navigated the dynamic biotech marketplace to create that growth.

How do you get the best out of your teams?

Empowerment is critical. If your teams have to run every move up to senior management in a dynamic launch, you've severely hindered yourself. So the goal is to always tell the teams, "You're the experts. You're closest to the data. We want you to act on it." Part of that, though, is senior management's involvement to reinforce that message and also for them to be aware of what's going on in a more fundamental way than just looking at a dashboard report. I attend meetings where we are reading out the launch metrics with the team, so if they have any challenges that they need help with, I can take action on their behalf very quickly or reinforce what they need to do. But my time is limited, so they have to be doing it on their own. But we try to touch base frequently enough so that there is an advocate there to help them get done what they need to get done.

How do you plan a new product launch to support growth?

In any product launch, if you think you know what's going to happen in advance and stick to that plan, I think you're destined for failure. The market's just too dynamic right now. You can't know everything beforehand, and we've taken a lot of pride in making real-time adjustments to our planning based upon the metrics. Now, that is not to say that you just chase the flavor of the day. You need to have the discipline to stick with the core components of the plan while maintaining the flexibility to adjust. For instance,

we've had launches where we saw that some of our conversion rates from prescription to patient fulfillment were slower than we had anticipated. So you begin to dissect and do the diagnostic to understand where the patient is falling through the cracks. You can put very specific, targeted plans in place to try to change that component and affect the ultimate metric.

How do you grow in a dynamic market?

Even if you're first-in-class, the time between one launch and the next launch has shrunk so much over time that it just really forces you to move much faster. I think we've seen that in each of our therapeutic areas. You can't afford to have a monthly meeting when you're talking about a dynamic market; you have to meet on a weekly and sometimes daily basis, listening to what you're learning from the market and making adjustments quickly. If you're launching, you have to focus on that. If you have a competitor launching into your space, you need to understand what they're doing and how you might pivot and change your reaction to the competitive pressure. We put extremely high surveillance on each of those areas. When we have a launch, we conduct a daily cross-functional meeting that [considers] all the learnings from the field, from internal, from across our whole service offering, to be able to react to things that we're learning. When a new company is launching in our space, it's the same type of idea: What do we hear they're doing that we can rapidly try in order to get ahead? You just don't have the luxury of spacing things out anymore, and it becomes very much a real-time proposition.

How do you shift thinking about what is possible?

I try to talk in terms of what the big goal is, years down the road when we end a product, in order to get people thinking about accelerating toward that end goal rather than making incremental changes. So if we're launching a product we believe could be

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something truly extraordinary, the challenge to the team is, "This is where we are going to end up, and it feels like many years away. You have to think about how to really, really, really condense that time. I don't

care about your forecast for the quarter or for the year; it's irrelevant. Your eye should be on how to get to that final destination and that condensing of time."

Bill Sibold is executive vice president and head of Sanofi Genzyme. This interview was conducted by **Barr Seitz** of McKinsey Digital and McKinsey's Marketing & Sales Practice.

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