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Flexibility, Time to market and Strategic collaboration- Key trends of pharma manufacturing in 2023

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Summing up 2022 and closely looking ahead to what 2023 will bring to the pharma and biotech community, BioSpectrum Asia asked Carsten Press, Senior Vice President Key Account Management, Supply Chain Management and Marketing at Vetter to answer a few crucial questions. He shared his experiences of an unprecedented year and what he thinks will be on the horizon in the biopharma industry. As a leading global contract development and manufacturing organisation (CDMO), Germany headquartered Vetter offers comprehensive fill-and-finish services from clinical development to the product's market launch and beyond.



In one word, how would you describe 2022?

I would describe it as volatile, which means it was very difficult to make accurate predictions. COVID-19 is still around us and we are also experiencing the unwarranted Russian invasion of Ukraine, the result of which is strong insecurity in the supply chain. This is a situation that we have to deal with right now.

How has Vetter changed since the pandemic?

A lot of things have changed. Nevertheless, we kept our mission to supply customers and their patients worldwide with critical drug products. We also see an increasingly positive reputation among pharmaceutical and biotech companies. Having said that, I would also say employee health has become more important. And what also came to the table was the ability to work in hybrid forms .

What were some of Vetter’s key achievements in 2022?

The start of our new facility in Austria has been very important for us. We acquired and prepared an additional dedicated clinical manufacturing site to help meet the strong demand we see in clinical trials. The site is now up and running with all of the necessary infrastructures. Another important step for us was the alliance with Rentschler Biopharma, which we further intensified over the last year. We call it Xpert Alliance.

One additional great achievement to mention is our recently published sustainability report. We take our responsibility seriously and have therefore developed a holistic sustainability strategy to achieve a high level of sustainability.

Vetter has invested in various energy-efficient and environmentally friendly technologies.

Looking back at 2022 industry challenges, what stood out for you?

We find ourselves in a more or less unexpectedly difficult and challenging environment. I think this is valid for many sectors of the industry with regard to energy supply and the rising costs linked to it. The labour market became even more challenging along with the supply of materials.

When we have a look at the global pharma and biotech pipelines, we still see strong growth by 2026, with parenteral product growth exceeding $1 trillion. As such, we have to be prepared for this growth. Complex oncology products will be one of the major drivers followed by a double-digit growth rate in rare diseases.

Have you seen the role of the CDMO change over the last few years?

There is a strong ongoing change, but even stronger now than in previous years. Due to the previously mentioned trends, CDMOs are expected to answer the strong demand for technically high, sophisticated manufacturing support for complex molecules. As a reliable partner, we have to find answers and prepare for further upcoming trends like cell and gene therapies and DNA-based molecules. They have made the leap from scientific innovation throughout to groundbreaking medications. This will be part of our future business. Another big impact is what is happening in digital transformation. We have already implemented many digital projects internally but there is still a lot in front of us, especially when it comes to artificial intelligence and machine learning. Things like this will be part of our setup for tomorrow's automation and robotics.

Are there any areas where you think the industry could improve?

Yes, of course. Continuous improvement is decisive, in order to keep pace with the market and its requirements. I would like to mention again the topic of sustainability. Our industry has a massive carbon footprint, even bigger than the automotive industry. In my opinion, there are several reasons why the pharmaceutical industry has such a large carbon footprint. One is the fact that single-use drug components have become more common. And there is also an even greater concentration on supply security.

What are your predictions for the Life Science/Pharma sector in 2023?

What we are seeing is a further move away from a single blockbuster type of business towards a mixture of both blockbusters and small batch sizes. We are prepared to handle either one, however, we must also deal with the complexity of doing both at the same time. That is why we make the investments and focus on preparation. Doing so will only help us manage our business better in the future. In post-COVID times, we still have to manage the existing challenges: security of supply by managing labor elements, energy, and costs.

What developments and trends do you expect to see in the area of pharma manufacturing?

First, we need to prepare for even more flexibility. That means a broader range of formats, not only with packaging and

devices but also a broader variety of agreements from our partners that allow us to remain flexible. There are, of course, many definitions of ‘flexibility’. We equate the expression as a long-term outlook for an increasing number of clients and how they collaborate with us in defining how the partnership should work. This includes not only the type of capacity needed but also how much capacity should be held in reserve and contractually agreed to.

Another important topic is time to market. From our end, this becomes ever more relevant. How quickly can our customers bring products to the market and commercialisation with our contribution? This plays an important role in our company.

I also would like to emphasise the trend toward strategic collaborations. In our case, it is the alliance with Rentschler Biopharma. We focus on aseptic filling and packaging. But when it comes to complementary services in the value chain, for example, drug substance production, this is a business field of other market players. As such, from the perspective of the customer, it is beneficial that respective expert companies work closely together.

What can we expect from Vetter in 2023?

First, we will strongly continue our efforts in sustainable growth and work towards the best-possible quality and security of supply for patients worldwide. As a team we are dedicated to achieving this common goal.

Further, we will continue with our strong investments. We have a very straight investment plan already ongoing for several years now, in order to expand our capacities and meet the increased customer demands. We did and will further invest in the areas of development service, aseptic filling, visual inspection, and packaging. These expansions will also go hand-in-hand with keeping the existing infrastructure across all sites up-to-date and state-of-the-art in order to achieve the highest possible level of quality that we are known for.

Finally, what last thoughts would you like to leave readers with for 2022?

It’s very difficult to predict. Despite the unfortunate events affecting our world including the Ukraine-Russia situation, as a team we remain confident that we can continue our efforts to maintain the security of the supply of lifesaving medications for patients worldwide. This is the most important goal we have, and what drives us every day.