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'Faster, Better, More Efficient' – Why Bayer Is Investing In 'Precision Health'

by [David Ridley](#)

Like other big global OTC players, Bayer Consumer Health is stepping up its investment in digital self-care. In the first part of an exclusive interview, HBW Insight catches up with the company's head of R&D and chief scientific officer David Evendon-Challis to dig deeper into the rationale for setting up a new 'precision health' business unit, including why a holistic and personalized approach to digital self-care increases trust in long-loved and science-backed brands.

According to [Bayer AG](#), more than 80% of consumers globally want more personalized health care and want tools to help them predict and prevent illness along with better tools to manage their health.

To address this demand, the company has set up a Precision Health business, which will sit within the Consumer Health division and identify “digital and digital-supported consumer healthcare opportunities,” it says. (Also see "[Bayer Focuses On Medical Technology For Consumers With Precision Health Unit](#)" - HBW Insight, 9 Jun, 2023.)



BAYER
CONSUMER HEALTH'S HEAD OF R&D AND CHIEF SCIENTIFIC
OFFICER DAVID EVENDON-CHALLIS

In the first part of an exclusive interview, Bayer Consumer Health's head of R&D and chief scientific officer David Evendon-Challis expands on the company's rationale for setting up the new business unit, while also explaining exactly what “precision

health” means.

Working with start-up companies and other digital health providers while also improving Bayer’s existing digital capabilities, precision health is about offering a holistic and personalized approach to self-care that increases trust in the company’s consumer health brands, Evendon-Challis explains.

Q Why did you decide to set up a separate business unit?

A We know that over the last many years, people have been looking to take more control over their personal health – a trend only accelerated by the COVID pandemic. There’s lots more information out there and people are looking for ways to find out what’s actually going on with their health and what they can do to improve it. Combine that demand with superfast innovation in digital technologies that are providing all of us with new insights and understanding about how to self-care responsibly, and we have a way of generating new products, services and solutions. Of course, this convergence of demand and new technologies is something that applies to lots of different areas of our business. Digital is relevant for every area our lives. But given that the technologies that sit behind these kinds of developments can serve multiple consumer healthcare brands and categories, we thought it would make sense to put all this together as one to approach it from a strategic level. You know, there's always a few bumps in the road when you do something new, so we also thought a business unit to serve the whole consumer health division would make learning easier and faster, as opposed to having a thousand flowers that no one really notices when they bloom or when they die. It’s really important that we learn together. And the other reason, of course, is that we think this is a big market opportunity. There are predictions that precision health will be up to 20% of the consumer health market. We need to make sure that we are equipping ourselves as a business to be able to respond to that.

Q What is precision health?

A There's lots of these words floating around that mean different things to different people. I go back to go basics here. We're all different. All our bodies are different.

We're all have different attitudes, needs and things that are going on within our bodies. So, it's about helping people develop a better awareness of what's going on inside their bodies, making the invisible visible, if you like. It's about identifying the things that are influencing our health and educating people about the different options available to manage these influences. In terms of outputs, this could mean creating a bespoke physical product, or it could be just directing someone to something that already exists, but for each person, it should offer a precise solution based on their needs. With digital technology, we can also think about layering things on top, like diagnostics, digital therapeutics, and apps to keep you motivated and help you track your progress. For Bayer, precision health is thinking about all of these different aspects of health and asking: What is the right intervention for this person at this point?

Q It sounds like Bayer is thinking about this holistically, trying to offer consumers a range of tools to help them look after themselves better.

A Exactly. This isn't about one size fits all. Personalization is about saying 'Okay, for someone like you, this is the route that you need to go down. This is the information that you need.' In terms of the consumer health market, it's going also going to be very, very different for different categories. A good example of this is Canesten. Vaginal health is a difficult subject to talk about and in many cases still a taboo topic. In the UK we recently added to the brand website a symptom assessment tool, a chatbot for education, and some fun, taboo busting activities. It's now the second most popular website for women's intimate health after the National Health Service. It has also provided a healthy uptick in sales. So even in the UK, there's clearly a need for this kind of thing. But like I say it will be very different in a category that isn't taboo, for example allergy.

Q So, this will be attached to recognized brands that people already use?

A Yes. I don't think a brand agnostic platform would actually get to the right people. You know, we've got brands that are super well trusted, and that's the right way to do it. Now, if we're smart about it, we can use platform technologies to make consumer

health faster, better, more efficient. But yeah, this absolutely has to be through our core brands, as this is the best way to reach people. And what I find interesting as well is when you start to add these things in the brands that are already trusted, the trust levels go up as well by providing additional services, support and information. A good example is Bayer's Aspirin-branded Heart Risk Assessment tool, developed in collaboration with Huma Therapeutics Limited. (Also see "[Bayer Aspirin Tackles Cardiovascular Risks In 'Official Sponsor Of Fans' Hearts' Campaign](#)" - HBW Insight, 6 Feb, 2023.) Launched earlier this year in the US, the web-based tool quickly assesses an individual's risk factors for developing cardiovascular disease (CVD) over the next 10 years, which can be shared with a healthcare professional as part of ongoing health management. It offers people a different way of managing this condition, it's a really cool proposition. And lots of people are using this. We found that for the vast majority of people, using the tool increased trust for the Aspirin brand. So, these things can reinforce each other, which I think is really important.

Q Speaking about the Aspirin CVD tool, Bayer Consumer Health US general manager and vice president of pain and cardio, Kelly Fanning, emphasized the importance of partnerships. Is the new precision health business an attempt to create your own experts within Bayer, or will partnerships remain an important part of the company's digital strategy going forward?

A Partnerships are a really big part of how we innovate, not just within digital. We don't have access to all the emerging science, technology and innovation that is coming from startups and universities. When it comes to digital, partnering with these kinds of players is even more important. There are usually multiple component pieces with these digital projects, so it's a little bit more complex than the discovery of a new molecule, new delivery mechanism, or a new packaging technology. We want to be experts in all of those areas, but if we did it all ourselves, it would take forever and we don't have those skills. We've got great brands, a really good understanding of the consumer, the journey that they go through, we've got a lot of experience with things like educating consumers and healthcare professionals, and excellent relationships with retailers. These are our strengths. When you bring them together with the strengths of partners, you can innovate much faster. It just makes sense to put these

things together, especially given the pace and complexity of digital transformation we're experiencing now. ([\(Also see "Bayer Wants Aspirin CVD Screening Tool To Reach 100m In US As It Plans International Roll-Out" - HBW Insight, 7 Mar, 2023.\)](#))