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'It's A Win-Win Situation' – Nicorette At The Vanguard Of J&J's Global Sustainability Efforts

by [David Ridley](#)

Johnson & Johnson's market leading nicotine replacement brand, Nicorette, is at the forefront of the company's global sustainability strategy, which includes eradicating smoking entirely from the world and greening its Consumer Health business soon as possible.

Over the past few years, companies have begun to “embrace the idea that their obligations to shareholders should not come at the expense of other stakeholders – that is, employees, customers, the community, suppliers, and society,” according to management consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

Like many other pre-existing trends, this shift towards what McKinsey calls “stakeholder capitalism” has been accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Over half of CEOs are now taking a “broader, purpose-driven approach focused on multiple stakeholders,” a recent KPMG survey discovered, with one in five company bosses now saying that their “primary objective is to improve society.”

Johnson & Johnson is taking this trend very seriously. In September last year, the company announced that its Consumer Health division will be investing \$800m over the next decade to “improve the health of people and the planet.”

All J&J Consumer Health brands will offer full transparency on ingredients to help consumers make the most informed choices and will use 100% recyclable, reusable or compostable plastic packaging and certified/post-consumer recycled paper- and pulp-based packaging by 2025, the company said.

Addressing complex preventable health issues is also part of the plan, with market leading nicotine replacement brand Nicorette providing the vehicle for J&J's efforts to eradicate smoking entirely from the world as soon as possible.

"It's the right thing to do," insisted Sven Sjoval, senior director and R&D site lead for J&J's global Smoking Cessation franchise. "Smoking is a global pandemic," added Bill Twomey, also senior director for the company's global NRT business.

"What I don't think a lot of people know is that seven million people died of smoking-related diseases last year," Twomey continued. "That means roughly three times as many people died from smoking than from the coronavirus in 2020."

The problem is, of course, that smokers are more vulnerable than non-smokers to developing a severe case and dying from COVID-19, so smokers are, in essence, faced with a double pandemic.

In Jordan – where four out of five men smoke tobacco or use e-cigarettes and 80% of the population are exposed to second-hand smoke from tobacco products – J&J is donating almost a million dollars' worth of free nicotine patches, personal counselling and digital support to help thousands of the country's frontline workers, patients with non-communicable diseases and refugees quit smoking.

The initiative is part of a wider collaboration with the World Health Organization and the UN Interagency Task Force on NCD Prevention and Control under the Access Initiative for Quitting Tobacco (AIQT) banner.

"The WHO has endorsed NRT as one of the best means to quit smoking," Twomey pointed out. "Their view is that during the pandemic, we need to act urgently to expand access to NRT to help people quit particularly in developing countries."

"J&J is actively distributing Nicorette in over 65 countries but the last time I checked, there's over 190 countries in the world so there's clearly more people that need our help," he added.

Going Green

Alongside expanding access to NRT, Nicorette is also at the vanguard of J&J's sustainability plans, having achieved carbon-neutrality at the brand's manufacturing home in Helsingborg, Sweden, four years ago.

"It's an amazing achievement to have true carbon neutrality at Helsingborg, and I think it's a shining example to us as an industry of what can be done," Twomey reflected.

Going green can seem like "climbing Mount Everest," he continued. But what J&J achieved at its

Nicorette site was done through a whole host of small steps. “You’re not going to flip a switch one day, literally and figuratively and get to carbon neutrality,” he said.

“From when this was decided as a target until it was achieved it took six years,” added Sjoval, who led the decarbonizing project alongside manufacturing manager Jody Lodge. “You have to declare the goal and then you have to be steadfast on achieving it over a certain period of time.”

A good example of how J&J’s step-by-step approach worked in practice is how the Helsingborg site shifted its heating source from traditional supply to heat generated by other manufacturing sites in the local region, essentially reusing energy waste for new production.

“So rather than buying natural gas or oil to heat our plant, we’re now feeding our heat and our energy off this district heating grid,” Twomey explained. “The small remaining amount of natural gas that we continue to use is now completely shifted to biogas – environmentally-friendly, renewable energy source produced from organic matter, such as food or animal waste.”

And going green has not stopped with achieving the goal of becoming carbon neutral either. The Helsingborg team has now started to repackage unused food from the site and sell it to employees at a very low cost, Sjoval pointed out.

“This helps the environment by reducing food waste and it helps our employees get a great meal for themselves and their families at a low cost,” he noted.

“We’ve also replaced all the transport between the buildings with electric transport,” he added. “The team just continues to drive further and further see what they can do, just to get to get better for the environment.”

Packaging Puzzle

While making the manufacturing process sustainable is a large piece of the puzzle, packaging – how it is sourced, how it is disposed of and how green alternatives can ensure the safety and stability of medicines – is another large and arguably more challenging one.

“We sell gum in cartons,” Sjoval noted. “We want to make sure that our cardboard is Forestry Stewardship Council certified and ideally made out of recycled and recyclable material as well.”

“Sometimes, it’s going to cost us more to make packaging materials sustainable, but hopefully we can achieve on a cost neutral basis and that’s really where we’re striving to get to,” Twomey continued.

“It’s is a mindset shift,” he insisted. “If you get the right partners in the room, from the supply chain to R&D, you can find these opportunities.”

However, J&J's first commitment, both Twomey and Sjovald maintained, was for the highest possible levels of safety, quality and efficacy for the company's medicinal products throughout their shelf life.

Finding recyclable materials that can meet these standards is a "technology challenge," they suggested, which J&J is working actively towards meeting.

"Sustainability has been looked at as a cost for a lot of companies," Twomey reflected. "But actually, there are many opportunities if you look hard enough. We have to start looking at sustainability as a win-win situation."