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Biopharma

It Takes A Village To Raise Novel Medicines

Rentschler Biopharma SE's Strategy For A Network Of Win-Win Collaborations

Strategic collaborations are a key component of Rentschler Biopharma's overall strategy, says CEO Dr. Frank Mathias. Joining forces with external partners allows the company to "always offer our clients the best available and best-fit solution possible."

Rentschler Biopharma uses external partnerships to expand its offerings and provide a "world-class service portfolio" across the biopharmaceutical value chain. Its external partnerships also drive innovation within the company itself.

"We seek strategic alliances with other organizations that have proven best-in-class capabilities," explained Rentschler Biopharma's CEO, Frank Mathias, in an interview with In Vivo. "Their offerings are integrated seamlessly into our business processes, ensuring all parts of the project are aligned."

As a result of working with top-level partners, Mathias said, "Our clients not only benefit from outstanding services, their time to clinic and to market also is reduced significantly."

Rentschler Biopharma has an ongoing alliance with Leukocare AG for formulation development. Leukocare's technology combines bioinformatics and an algorithm- and database-driven approach for drug product stabilization. "This tactic helps to explore a broader design space as compared to conventional approaches and strongly increases the probability of success while avoiding high-throughput-screening," Mathias explained.

Leukocare and Rentschler Biopharma have combined their resources to improve the stability and quality of biologics: potentially including high concentration formulations, viral vectors, vaccines, and dry formulation products. Leukocare also applies its technology and expertise to stabilize and protect proteins in biofunctionalized devices.

Recently, Rentschler Biopharma teamed up with another partner, Vetter, around aseptic fill and finish, and drug product manufacturing. The collaboration's goal is to create long-term value through aligning manufacturing approaches, enabling CDMO clients to bring products to patients more efficiently. "The alliance will leverage Rentschler Biopharma's extensive experience in drug substance manufacturing, including bioprocess development and API production, and Vetter's strong expertise in aseptic fill and finish and secondary packaging," said Mathias.

Rentschler Biopharma and Vetter have identified opportunities where "early and active exchange of know-how and best practice" will benefit CDMO clients and patients, Mathias noted. These opportunities are being further validated in pilot client projects with joint teams from both companies.



BUILDING THROUGH ALLIANCES NOT ACQUISITIONS

"Rentschler Biopharma has always run a different race. Companies offering complementary services are not seen as competition, but rather as an opportunity to evolve through collaboration," Mathias said when describing Rentschler Biopharma's recent partnerships. "Our collaborations leverage technological leadership and long-standing experience, for best-in-class project delivery for our clients. Our partners continue to conduct their own business interactions and further develop knowledge and offerings, which creates value for all stakeholders."

Mathias noted Vetter and Rentschler Biopharma make for a clever collaboration, with the companies being well-established on their own and well-matched together. The strategic collaboration aims to reduce complexity for clients, with the joint goal of bringing promising new therapies to patients with serious and rare diseases faster than before. The companies initiated their collaboration in July 2020 with an unconventional elbow bump, in substitute for a handshake due to COVID-19, between Mr. Vetter and Mr. Rentschler.

Vetter is a key provider of quality services in aseptic fill and

finish and secondary packaging. While Rentschler Biopharma is a leading CDMO in the production of complex biopharmaceuticals. “Very quickly we discovered synergies between our organizations and services,” Mathias said.

Rentschler Biopharma’s external partnerships are driven by the need of its clients to have “access to world-class solutions from one source,” said Mathias. The company continues to seek other collaborations to increase its offerings. “We are looking at the modification and bioconjugation of antibodies, as well as cell and gene therapy.”

With new alliances, Mathias said geography comes in second after the skills and qualities of the right partner. “The regions we are looking at are Europe, the US and Japan,” he said, noting that in Japan, Rentschler Biopharma is building strategic partnerships, supported by Summit Pharmaceuticals International Corp. “But, when it comes to potential partnerships, it is the partner that matters and geography doesn’t play a relevant role in this decision,” Mathias noted.

TRUST IS EVERYTHING

Rentschler Biopharma also considers its relationships with CDMO clients as partnerships. “Within client partnerships, a defining factor is trust. Our clients trust us to find the best-fit solutions from bioprocess development through commercial manufacturing, and to deliver on our promise,” Mathias said. “We have earned this trust because of our commitment, experience and expertise.”

Focusing on the client company’s point of view, Rentschler Biopharma creates a framework to best leverage its technologies to solve complex development and manufacturing issues. “This holds true for every client, every project, and every molecule,” Mathias stressed.

An example of this is Rentschler Biopharma’s partnership with BioNTech. They will use an innovative business model that is well suited for novel, urgently needed technologies and allows maximum flexibility to address BioNTech’s development and manufacturing requirements. This includes responsibility for key aspects of cGMP (current good manufacturing practice) drug substance manufacturing of BNT162b2, BioNTech’s mRNA-based vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 being developed with Pfizer. This vaccine candidate is being tested in a global Phase III clinical trial and has been submitted to the European Medicines Agency for a rolling review.

Rentschler Biopharma determined that the best way to address BioNTech’s COVID-19 vaccine drug substance manufacturing need was to establish a dedicated mRNA production suite for the company at its Laupheim facility. This approach ensures capacity, staff and equipment are ready when needed without interruption of other ongoing projects. It is also an approach that is quickly and easily scalable to meet future demands.

Reflecting Rentschler Biopharma’s strategy of maximizing its partnerships for greater efficiency, in addition to large-scale production services for the COVID-19 vaccine, the agreement also provides for small-batch manufacturing of BioNTech’s other RNA programs for use in clinical trials.

WHAT DOES 2021 HOLD?

Mathias noted the company had “exciting” developments in

store. “We are expanding into new modalities as we speak and will extend our expertise and specialize in mRNA technologies as well as enter cGMP production of cell and gene therapies.” Furthermore, Rentschler Biopharma will continue to modernize and digitalize its sites.

Mathias highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of a digital landscape, which allows people to stay connected. It is “essential to have updated information to make good decisions,” he said. The novel coronavirus pandemic spurred Rentschler Biopharma to “strengthen our digital setup with dedicated training on how to quickly shift to digital meetings and move to paperless documentation.”

Rentschler Biopharma’s Digital Agenda and its initiatives will complement and enhance its existing services with digital capabilities, “which become increasingly important in our fast-paced and interconnected partner networks,” Mathias noted. “We know the success of this vision depends 20% on technology and 80% on the people driving it – our focus has and will always be on investing in our people, as our employees are central to our success.”

Predicting what 2021 will look like is tricky, as the world continues to grapple with COVID-19. As a cGMP service provider manufacturing highly complex biopharmaceuticals, Rentschler Biopharma is an important partner for the reliable supply of therapeutic drugs. Mathias emphasized that this is “especially important” in 2020. “We are meeting our responsibilities by supporting COVID-19 therapeutic developers, both for vaccines and symptomatic treatment,” he noted. “We are doing everything in our power to support our clients in this extraordinary situation. Collaboration at all levels is key to overcoming the pandemic.”

THE THREE RS

COVID-19 has led Rentschler Biopharma to evaluate its business through three lenses: resilience, reformation and reimagination.

Resilience: The CDMO has set up an initiative to strengthen resilience to disruptions in global supply chains and to focus on establishing alternative sources for raw materials as well as to balance global and local vendors.

Reformation: Rentschler Biopharma has analyzed its core business processes to make them more efficient and sustainable. It has reflected on its way of working and identified the potential for talent acquisition and retention. “Having the right people at the right place within the organization is very important,” Mathias said.

Reimagination: The company is reimagining the way it works internally as well as with clients. “With this, I allude to ‘Rentschler New Work,’ which is part of our strategy 2025 and central to our agile and learning organization. To drive this vision, we have established interactive leadership trainings, offered via our global Rentschler Academy, to address topics as diverse as the new economy, digital skills, business model generation, modern sales and employer branding.”

Mathias concluded: “We strive to consistently assess and reinvent ourselves – more so in the time of crises, for the benefit of our clients and their patients.”