

Consumer products

– ‘Full service’ innovation an interview with Dan Edwards

Dan leads our consumer products team, which focuses on delivering needs led technology innovation and breakthrough device development to the personal care, food & drink and household goods markets. He has a background in both technology and consumer marketing, and for a number of years led Sagentia’s innovation and technology management practice with a particular focus on medical devices.



You’ve recently been appointed Head of Consumer. What do you think will be the next big thing for consumer companies?

There are many market moves in play right now but let me focus on one area – personal care, health and beauty. Over the coming year there is a huge opportunity for personal care, health and beauty companies to take advantage of the convergence of the medical and consumer worlds. Consider the twin influences of baby boomer spending and the move to drive down the cost of wellbeing. This is an area that medical companies are already paying attention to and consumer

companies need to grab this white-space market or lose their home advantage. This could be a particularly important platform given the flattening of growth in many Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) categories that firms are facing in the western markets.

Having worked previously with Sagentia’s medical device customers on the drift of care from professional settings to the home, I can tell you that whilst medtech companies have a familiarity with the technology available they are at a significant disadvantage to companies with brands and channels that already reach consumers.

What other trends and challenges are your clients facing?

If I had to pick three main growth topics in CPG today, they would be flat growth in the developed markets and the move to capture emerging market growth; delivering new levels of efficacy within

existing brands; and juggling volume-seeking vs price-seeking investment within markets whose consumers are cautious in their spending today. On emerging markets, for example, consider that their middle classes will account for more than 30 per cent of global private consumer goods consumption by 2015.

The consumer market is fast moving and there are always a lot of trends to deal with, more so than in other markets. The skill is identifying the really important trends from the ‘noise’.

So, how could you help a consumer products company address flat growth in a specific category or geographic market?

We create programmes that deliver highly differentiated products and product-service bundles. Differentiation can be delivered by a step change in product efficacy, outstanding user-centric design (delivering high value experiences) or dramatic cost reduction.

We get involved in projects across the development lifecycle. At the front end, we pick up with our clients at the market research phase. Our strength at this stage is in translating consumer research into cues that are articulate and relevant to a technologist or a designer.

Then we are into a chain of events that perhaps takes us through technology

scouting, concept design and visualisation, technology invention, engineering, product prototyping and transfer to manufacture. It’s a very integrated act – we have manufacturing engineers sitting alongside PhD scientists and ethnographers – rare in a company of our size.

I think the magic ingredients for getting a breakthrough product to market are an inspired understanding of a market, the ability to use advanced science and technology to deliver on a consumer need and making sure that usability and design decisions lead rather than follow any technology decision. Good innovation programmes show a balance between creativity and pragmatism.

What are the three core strengths of the consumer team?

Deep and multidisciplinary science; award winning user-led design; and an expectation to deliver strong content over and above process.

And finally... what keeps you awake at night?

We’ve just bought a 350 year old cottage near Cambridge. It needs refurbishing and renovating. I worry about my DIY skills.

To discuss these trends further contact Dan: Dan.Edwards@sagentia.com