

# GSK's consumer marketing boss on his mission to save the NHS £2bn

*Marketing director of GSK Consumer Healthcare, Craig Percival, wants his team to capitalise on the Covid-19 fuelled trend for “self-care” in a bid to empower consumers, drive brand growth and divert pressure away from the NHS.*

By Charlotte Rogers 15 Sep 2020



In a world where health has become our primary concern thanks to Covid-19, GlaxoSmithKline is on a mission to bring self-care into the mainstream in a bid to grow its consumer business and take the pressure off the NHS.

Last July, the company formed pharmaceutical super-group GSK Consumer Healthcare in a £10bn deal uniting GSK brands including Sensodyne, Voltaren and Panadol with Pfizer brands such as Centrum and Caltrate.

The company is now the global leader in over-the-counter pharmaceutical products, spanning pain relief, cold and flu symptoms, allergies, vitamins and minerals. The organisation has ambitious plans to reinvest 25% of the £500m savings generated through the joint venture into innovation and other “growth opportunities” over the next two years.

Craig Percival assumed the role of marketing director for GSK Consumer Healthcare UK and Ireland in January, having previously served as oral health marketing director as part of a 14-year career at the pharma giant. His task is to unite the two product portfolios and develop a marketing culture that maximises the opportunities presented by the new business.

Percival admits that a global pandemic and nationwide lockdown was not how he envisaged his first few months in the role panning out. However, this period of rapid change has afforded him

the opportunity to accelerate his understanding of the business in the short-term and cement the long-term strategy.

“Before the pandemic we were talking about self-care from a consumer point of view, so how do we drive more self-care in terms of research, finding solutions to minor ailments versus visits to the GP and A&E? Previously 18 million appointments were made with a GP for self-treatable conditions and it was costing the NHS over £2bn,” Percival explains.

“Now with the pandemic and the massive cost implications for the country we can see there’s going to be a cost focus for the NHS, so how do we step into that space and capitalise on the consumer attitudes to significantly shift that behaviour? How does self-care become the ‘new normal’ and people take that proactive interest in their own health? And how do we provide the right solutions?”

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In the medium-term, Percival believes for consumers to feel confident taking a more proactive approach to their health they will be on the look-out for trusted brands, which is where GSK Consumer Healthcare comes in. Producing “360-degree” content tailored to the category and condition will be crucial, as will tapping into the rise in ecommerce precipitated by the coronavirus crisis.

Percival explains that while digital commerce was a key focus, with a team already in place in the new organisation focused on growing ecommerce, the lockdown has accelerated everything.

“Ocado CEO Tim Steiner estimated the pandemic has condensed years of growth in online into a matter of months and we’ve certainly seen a massive acceleration [in our sector],” says Percival.

“We’ve grown our online share in the past 12 weeks by over 100%, so we really are accelerating in that space and making sure we’ve got the right content to support consumers. It’s about that complete ecosystem.”

Now he wants to “double down” on the search strategy and take a more holistic approach, linking retailer on-platform, organic search, paid search and off-platform to better understand the search ecosystem. The goal is to ensure GSK Consumer Healthcare has the relevant content for the result of every search, which will be a continuous focus for the team going forward.

## Exploring new channels

The push towards ecommerce has not been the only priority for GSK Consumer Healthcare since the onset of the pandemic. Percival wants his marketing team to be “pioneers”, who are not afraid to challenge the norm and experiment with new routes to market.

This year the organisation began working with media partner Jungle Creations across its oral health brands. The result was a partnership between Aquafresh Kids and Jungle Creations’ Craft Factory social channel, sharing content to help children brush their teeth. The video, which went live over the Easter weekend, was watched by 3.8 million people globally in four days, including 1.5 million from the UK and Ireland.

The team then joined forces with Joe Wicks – “the PE hero of the lockdown” – to create three interactive ads that sat within his daily online workout.

“We took some short-term, quick decisions to capitalise on the trends we saw coming through, but then we’ve also understood some of the changes to behaviour that have come out of the changes in peoples’ working habits,” says Percival.

He points to changing audio habits, with more people listening to radio, streaming services or podcasts while working from home. For the Corsodyl brand, the marketing team produced a successful podcast and Spotify campaign, a channel GSK is considering exploring further in 2021.

Percival is keen for the marketing team to learn together and share knowledge, in particular the results of these experiments during lockdown, to see if they could apply to other brands in the portfolio.

“Will these consumer behaviours stay forever? That’s a difficult question, but what we can do is continually monitor how the consumer is responding to the pandemic and making sure that we’re best placed to work with them in terms of providing the relevant content,” he says.

“At the same time it’s not to say that’s at the expense of our key proven foundation channels such as AV. It’s how do we evolve the AV plan to make sure we’ve got video-on-demand and all of those things to supplement it. It’s not a replacement strategy.”

## **Weaving together two cultures**

With all this work capitalising on ecommerce and changing consumer behaviours at the forefront, behind the scenes Percival is continuing to weave together the brands and marketing cultures within the new organisation.

He explains it’s not about “force fitting one into the other”, but about building a new business through the joint development of a new culture.

“The key component is making sure that I really listen and understand the brands coming into the organisation tonally, in terms of culture and then how we build a new organisation. That’s the mindset we’ve taken, so it’s not just a case of fitting one into the other, it’s about building the new,” says Percival.

“I see great opportunities within the new portfolio that both sides bring to the overall consumer healthcare business and then the culture of the team coming in and the learnings that can be shared to scale-up our offering. It’s about understanding where those strengths lie and building that new marketing team from a GB and Ireland perspective.”

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Marketers from the Pfizer business have been incorporated into the GSK Consumer Healthcare marketing team to ensure there is expertise from both sides. Sitting underneath Percival is a network of brand managers and senior brand managers, as well as directors looking after various

categories. There is also a head of experts who manages the relationships with healthcare professionals.

In addition, there is a marketing acceleration team which takes learnings from across the business, looking at emerging trends in terms of consumer media consumption and digital commerce in an effort to drive growth.

“We have a wider consumer healthcare strategy that’s set from a global perspective and that’s been defined as part of the overall strategy bringing together the Pfizer and GSK legacy businesses. Then it’s taking that and making sure we really focus on what’s right from a GB and Ireland perspective. It’s really around making sure we’re consumer and customer obsessed,” says Percival.

While at the start of lockdown there was a frantic short-term focus, he is keen for the marketers to appreciate the longer-term goals and in particular the self-care trend, which has only been accelerated by the crisis. Percival believes that, if Covid-19 has taught the company anything, it’s that success comes from having a curious and creative team.

“If I’ve got the right talent and right capability programme, and the team are empowered to make the decisions, then we’re well placed to operate as best we can whatever is thrown at us in the coming year or two,” he adds. “That’s why from a culture point of view it’s making sure we’re inclusive, everyone can be themselves and we’ve got that energy within the team.”