



CASE STUDY



INNOVATIVE DIGITALISATION STRATEGY FROM W. L. GORE & ASSOCIATES SIMPLIFIES COLLABORATION WITH HOSPITALS

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PATRICK GÖBLER

EMEA Provider Sales Leader at W. L. Gore & Associates

Healthcare providers do face quite some challenges. On the one hand, they must ensure optimal patient care and therefore depend on the innovative power of research and reliability of pharmaceutical industry and medical device manufacturers. On the other hand, they are under pressure to manage the day-to-day costs of providing patient care. To relieve them of the process costs for ordering, delivery and payment, Gore is focusing on digitalisation. In line with the theme 'Easy to do business with,' the company aims to make it even easier for customers to work with Gore. Global Healthcare Exchange (GHX) provides the digital platform for this.

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So, what exactly is behind the digitalisation strategy? What were and are the hurdles that have had to be taken into account during implementation? How do hospitals and patients benefit from a fully digital and at least partially automated supply chain of order-to-cash? What opportunities does digitalisation offer the industry?

Patrick Gößler, EMEA Provider Sales Leader at Gore, and Martin Wabara, Head of MNS Supplier Sales Europe at GHX provide the answers, in this informative look at the digitalisation project.

HIGH QUALITY PRODUCTS FOR PATIENTS

“Saving human lives and improving the quality of life of patients are the focus of our company. To do this, Gore develops innovative and high-quality medical products,” says Patrick Gößler, explaining the company's strategy. For more than 40 years, Gore has been providing doctors and patients with a wide range of innovative treatment options for complex medical problems. The company's medical products range from synthetic vascular prostheses, endovascular and interventional therapies, surgical meshes for repairing hernia, to sutures for use in vascular, cardiac and general surgery. More than 45 million Gore medical devices have been implanted. “However, innovation exclusively in the area of products is not enough to provide optimal support for the healthcare system,” Gößler continues.

ESTABLISH A SIMPLE ONLINE ORDERING SYSTEM FOR HOSPITALS

“At the same time, we must make it easy for hospitals to order and use our products,” Gößler continues. “We must not burden them with time-consuming administrative ordering processes, and we must ensure that staff receive optimal training and support and can use their time for their core

medical tasks. For us, innovation therefore means taking a holistic view of the entire system. This includes the ordering processes, catalogues and the supply chain. Here too, we want to be innovative and even more customer-friendly.

To achieve these goals, Gore is digitalising the ordering process in Germany and making the electronic product and price catalogues available to German hospitals, using the GHX technology platform implemented in Germany in December 2019. Gore has been using this platform successfully in the UK since 2014 and in the USA for even longer. The platform connects manufacturers with healthcare service providers, optimises electronic transactions, validates the data, generates corresponding return documents, provides transparency for electronic transactions and helps ensure consistent, electronic order-to-cash processes for suppliers and optimal purchase-to-pay processes for hospitals.

“The GHX platform is designed to help Gore process orders faster, more accurately and efficiently in the future, and to reduce the number of queries or corrections,” says Patrick Gößler. “A paperless process also helps to protect the environment.” The decision to rely on GHX in Germany was obvious: “Around 50 percent of hospitals in Germany already work with GHX,” estimates the sales expert.

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DATA INTEGRITY IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH DIGITALISATION IN HEALTHCARE

“One of the biggest hurdles in the digitalisation of processes in healthcare is data integrity,” explains Martin Wabara, Head of MNS Supplier Sales Europe at GHX. “If the manufacturers’ data does not match the hospitals’ data or if data is misinterpreted by the systems, electronic processes do not work. Even if the systems are technically capable of handling processes consistently and automatically, this will only work smoothly if the data is correct and recognised by the systems.” Patrick Gößler adds: “Ideally, the healthcare industry should have one data structure that applies to all, in order to reduce the high costs and complexity associated with different approaches and systems. But the industry is still a long way from achieving this.”

Data integrity also played a key role in connecting Gore in Germany to the GHX platform. The first step was to standardise the master data between Gore and GHX. “This was the basic requirement so that every hospital could order from Gore via GHX and the order could then be processed correctly,” explains Wabara. “For example, it could happen that Gore and GHX had different address data structures in the system for the same hospital. We had to standardise these so that the data was consistent. Achieving this was a major milestone throughout the project.”

FOCUS ON THE USER

Even the best system is useless if it is not used correctly or not used at all. For this reason, Gore places great importance on users and their training. “The introduction of new technologies takes some getting used to, and companies must invest time and resources in professional user training. What at first seems like a burden turns out to be time and cost savings in the long run,” says Patrick Gößler. Professional training also takes away the fear of new technology and its incorrect use. “The goal should be to create a common user experience that motivates people to use and further develop the solution,” Gößler continues.

A PROJECT THAT PAYS OFF

The success of Gore's digitalisation initiative will be measured at several levels. Success means that collaboration with customers has improved and both manufacturers and customers benefit from simplified, efficient ordering processes. For example, Gore measures the percentage of automated orders, electronic versus manual orders, and the percentage of customers who order through GHX. Customer satisfaction is measured using the Net Promoter Score, a key figure that indicates the extent to which a customer is willing

to recommend a company to other companies. "The greater the proportion of electronic and automatically processed orders, the greater the savings potential that is realised," explains Gößler. "By connecting to GHX in Germany, we have already been able to process a relevant proportion of orders electronically and will continue to increase this figure together with GHX," the sales manager is pleased to report. "The initial feedback from our customers is also very positive and strengthens our decision."

ONE SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE

For the digital future of healthcare, Gößler would like to see only one valid data structure for everyone and one system that everyone understands, both healthcare providers and suppliers. And this system would automate a large part of the processes. Basically, it would start from the patient and put him or her at the centre. "For example, repeat orders would be triggered automatically as soon as a patient received a product or implant. At the same time, the system would automatically link the implant to the patient's data for maximum traceability," Gößler describes the ideal situation, adding: "Intelligent systems that are flexible and learn would also be an advantage. They would then also be suitable for special billing models or they would recognise and indicate error patterns so that errors can be avoided in future."

With the connection to GHX, Gore has taken an important step towards automated e-commerce processes. Gößler is convinced that secure, efficient and transparent ordering processes contribute to improved patient care overall: *"Because they are the foundation for fast and reliable delivery of vital medical products."*

