

Lunesta alum Britts mans Merz NA

On September 2, Jack Britts was named president & CEO of Merz Pharmaceuticals, the North American subsidiary of privately held German firm Merz GmbH & Co. Britts started out as a sales rep at Zeneca and went on to become VP of GI products, overseeing AstraZeneca's PPI portfolio, including the lifecycle management of Prilosec and Nexium. He then served as both VP and SVP at Sepracor where he helped launch and commercialize sleep aid Lunesta. After leaving Sepracor and taking a year off, Merz piqued his interest.

"I thought it would be perfect if I could find [a company] that was poised for the type of growth we had at Sepracor," Britts says. "Merz was interesting, intriguing and challenging."

"It's grown great," he continues, "but not on a Big Pharma scale."

Well-known in Europe, Merz has a hundred-year heritage and a product line including prescription drugs and OTC treatments. Its North American operations are headquartered in Greensboro, NC. Britts says the US business "has been built on the back of med derm and podiatry." He'll work to increase Merz's US footprint, noting that the company offers "great opportunity" and is looking for talent. New neurology and aesthetics business units have already launched. Britts will build them out, and he says they're expected to generate more revenue than Merz's current base.

"We want very transparent, entrepreneurial organizations," he says. "Separate business units that have a bit of independence can allow an entrepreneurial spirit and culture to evolve [under] the umbrella of Merz."

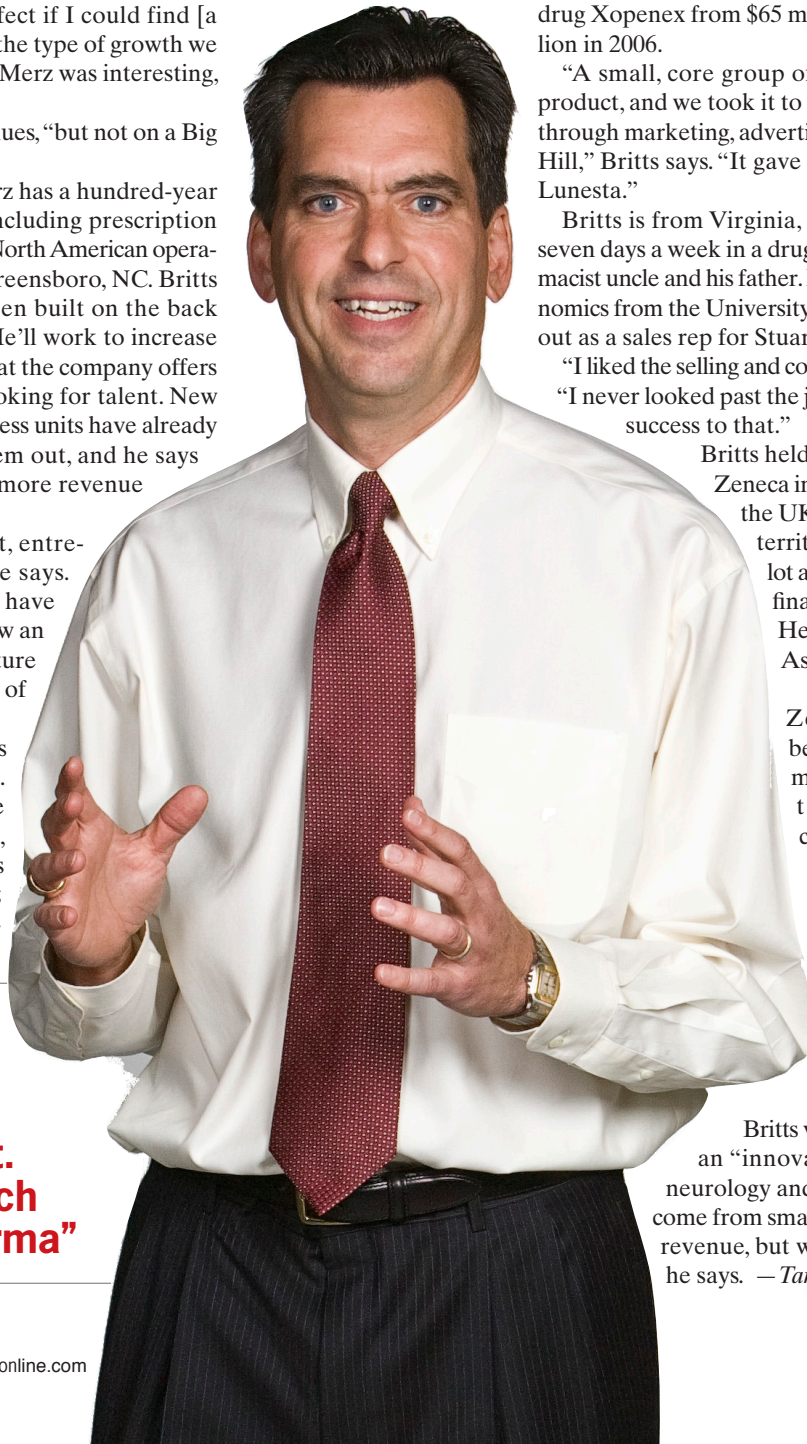
Merz has three aesthetics products (seven unique uses). It has a nice neurology base in royalties from Memantine, the billion dollar Alzheimer's treatment developed by Merz and marketed by Forest Labo-

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Jack Britts
President & CEO, Merz

2000-2007
VP to group VP, marketing and commercial planning, Sepracor

1986-2000
Medical and hospital sales rep to VP, GI therapeutic area leader, Zeneca and AstraZeneca



ratories. Britts says another compound that has CNS indications is in development, and Merz will partner on that drug as well.

"We don't want to get into the primary care game," he adds. "If we have a specialty franchise that fits, we'd like to be involved with product promotion, but not solely. At Sepracor, we got into primary care—it's not for the faint of heart. I like the approach of specialty pharma."

Britts is proud of the Lunesta launch but prouder of helping propel sales of the asthma and COPD drug Xopenex from \$65 million in 2000 to \$560 million in 2006.

"A small, core group of people believed in this product, and we took it to over \$500 million in sales through marketing, advertising and work on Capitol Hill," Britts says. "It gave us the revenue to launch Lunesta."

Britts is from Virginia, and he grew up working seven days a week in a drug store owned by his pharmacist uncle and his father. He got a bachelor's in economics from the University of Richmond and started out as a sales rep for Stuart Pharmaceuticals.

"I liked the selling and commercial side," Britts says. "I never looked past the job I was in. I attribute my success to that."

Britts held a number of positions at Zeneca in the US before moving to the UK to manage a portfolio of territories, which taught him a lot about the development and finance sides of the business. He returned to the US after Astra and Zeneca merged.

He eventually left AstraZeneca because it "was becoming a lot like government," and he "preferred to work at a mid-size company."

He says DTC advertising has gotten a bad rap. "Allergies were the greatest thing ever," Britts says. "Physicians didn't see it as an issue, and didn't want to treat it," but for sufferers, the drugs were a godsend.

Britts vows to help Merz become an "innovator and leader" in both neurology and aesthetics. "Growth will come from smaller products with smaller revenue, but we'll have more of them," he says. —Tanya Lewis

PHOTO: DAN CRAWFORD