
Meet Robert Burton

Scientific & Regulatory Director, Plxsur



How did your previous experience lead you to joining Plxsur?

With past roles in the pharmaceutical and RRP sectors, I have always been very interested in looking at, from a public health perspective, the argument around tobacco harm reduction and reduced risk alternatives. Throughout my career I have been able to conduct a lot of qualitative research to understand the dynamics of smoking behaviour, device development and why people would or wouldn't switch to e-cigarettes; so joining Plxsur felt like the next step in that journey.

It is an interesting dynamic of the RRP sector that David, Charlie, Nigel, Martin and I had all been working in it, in various respects, for 12 years, often overlapping. It was almost like a natural gravitational pull that brought us all into that group which formed Plxsur.

How have you seen the seen the vaping market evolve during the last decade?

If you look at where vaping has come from, the first devices that came out of China didn't really work very well and the quality wasn't there. But what they did do was pique the interest of the broader sector. It has always been and still is a very disruptive and fragmented market.

Almost all of the development in this space, since inception, has been through independent companies and entrepreneurs seeing an opportunity and really trying to take it forward. This is still the case with our partner companies leading the next stage of the RRP category in their markets. With the combined resources and sharing of knowledge that we have as a group, we are in the perfect position to bring the sector forward together.



Regulation has to work hand in hand with innovation to allow continued development of reduced-risk products with the latest technology and consumer insight rather than hindering it.

What is the ideal regulatory framework that you would like to see in place, and how is Plxsur planning to develop its Standards further to continue raising the bar for its partners?

An ideal regulatory format should still allow communication and education to smokers on how to use these products as they are intended, safely. This comes back to the fundamental ambition of Plxsur, which is that we want to offer smokers reduced risk alternatives and portfolio products with different reduced-risk characteristics without attracting underage users.

Regulation should bring in standards and enforcement that stops underage access to vaping. Attention is now on enforcement particularly, as the regulation has been in place for a considerable time with regards to minimum age restrictions, but the category has progressed faster than the ability to enforce it and this is where issues arise.

At Plxsur, we advocate for a set of core principles including age verification systems for both online and in store purchase. We set best practice standards for our companies and this includes identifying and utilising leading technology, such as age estimation devices that use facial recognition software to ensure that our products are only going to an adult smoker.

We want to see regulation develop a framework that moves the technology forward rather than hindering innovation. Regulation has to work hand in hand with innovation to allow continued development of reduced-risk products with the latest technology and consumer insight rather than hindering it.

How is Plxsur utilising R&D to ensure that it is ahead of wider sector trends?

Recycling is a huge focus area for us and it is something that we are continually evolving as we invest in R&D. As technology improves to make more parts of our devices recyclable, we are setting a greater environmental focus with regards to our products within our group companies with all of them having recycling initiatives in place to safely dispose of devices.

We are exploring ways in which various elements of a device can actually be reused rather than just put in a recycling bin or end up in landfill. These kind of principles allow us to have a much more environmentally conscious approach to products and future product development.

We are also developing systems to ensure that young children can't accidentally pick up a device and use it. These include locking systems which will limit the extent to which children can mimic adult behaviour and access a product by accident.



We have a duty of care to smokers to provide them reduced risk alternatives that are high quality and offer a range of flavours and products that help them to make the transition.

What do you see as the biggest opportunities and challenges facing the category?

The biggest challenge will be that regulation doesn't allow vaping to have the public health benefit that it could have, but this also creates a huge opportunity. The fact is that more people are using vaping as a cessation tool. It has the ability to be part of a multi-product framework to assist smokers who are looking for ways to quit traditional cigarette use. If communicated and introduced effectively, this can have a significant positive impact on long term public health.

Compared to smoking, vaping is considerably less harmful and, even though they are not always seen in a positive light, tobacco companies have helped the science evolve in these areas in terms of developing techniques around things like biomarkers and what potential indicators look like for certain disease models. We have a duty of care to smokers to provide them reduced risk alternatives that are high quality and offer a range of flavours and products that help them to make the transition. The potential for a more collaborative scientific approach is something that could be a huge opportunity moving forward as the need for scientific education around reduced risk products increases further.

What does 'shape the future of vaping' mean to you? Where is it that you think Plxsur is acting differently and making the most significant impact?

For us, shaping the future of vaping is the ability to take the best practices and learnings from our different companies and roll them out across our multiple global markets almost instantaneously.

Our partner companies are very well established in their respective markets; they've got great experience, ideas, consumer insights and products. They each have their own strengths and areas for further development, but, as a unified group, we can align these strengths, set global standards and bring about meaningful change in the sector.



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