CCH – Barclays Global Consumer Conference 2026

Fireside chat transcript – 9 September 2026

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Laurence Whyatt: Well, thank you all very much for joining the Barclays Global Conference again today. I'm very pleased to have Zoran Bogdanovic, CEO of CCH, joining us. So we're going to have an interesting discussion about the evolution of Coke across a lot of European and African markets.

Zoran, why don't we kick off with the first half, because you had a very strong set of figures. Were you happy with how the first half went? What were the highlights? And where are the sort of key areas you're looking to improve things?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Thank you, Laurence. We are very happy with the first half. I mean it came as a result of very hard work, of really working close with customers, focusing on executing excellent initiatives that we had in the first half, of which, of course, the FIFA World Cup was a highlight, but that also overlapped with our preparation for the season, which was really done well.

So, all that resulted in this very strong 9.6% and 7.5% volume, which is acceleration of our underlying volume versus Q1. Very pleased with the profit improvement that that resulted with. And I'd like to highlight that we are very happy with the consistency that this is 13th quarter in a row consecutively of having volume growth. So for us, even in the times when there was a quite inflationary environment, where price mix was a big thing, we really maintain focus that in the overall RGM and volume and mix and price, all have to play their role. So I'm pleased. That's why I'm just elaborating more, like, why that there is consistency and quality and focus, and kudos to the teams for really doing that.

What we can do better is that, every day, we are looking at what doesn't work, and for that, we have our own internal listening. All employees are rating our own functions. We are constantly identifying and listen where maybe there are pain points, where we need to improve processes, where we have to be faster. So there are always opportunities to improve, and I love this mindset that it's never good enough. We recognise that it's good, but there is so much more that we do. And we put also our foot where our mouth is, investing more behind initiatives together with our partners, starting with The Coca-Cola Company, but also investing in our own capabilities - capacity, digital, AI, which can always and continuously make us better.

Laurence Whyatt: You mentioned profitability there, and I couldn't help but notice your profitability result for the first half was well in excess of where the guidance is for the full year. So, I guess that sort of assumes a bit of a slowdown in the second half. What really gives you cause to concern around the second half, and sort of what needs to happen in order to hit the high end of the range versus the low end of the range?

Zoran Bogdanovic: The first half gave us confidence to update and upgrade of the guidance. Having done that at the beginning of August, we recognise the fact that there are four days less in Q4, particularly in December, which is a big trading period for us. So we have to take that into account. We did say at the beginning of the year that our split between H1 and H2 will be more skewed towards H1.

Then, we simply have to recognise also that in any week, many things can happen. We know very well that we are managing through this situation in Ukraine, you never know what happens there. Equally, in the Middle East, we do see in many of our countries the impact on rising energy costs. How will this trickle down on consumer behaviour? Sometimes you see that consumers have this cliff behaviour. Everything is fine, until one day, when suddenly they start maybe pulling the brake.

So while we feel confident about the full year outlook for which we did upgrade. We have a very good programme ahead of us for the remainder of the year, but we simply have to be responsible in recognising many variables to which we don't have an answer. So that's how it all comes together.

Laurence Whyatt: I want to come back to some of the volatility you mentioned. But I suppose as part of that, we have seen a bit of a change in consumer sentiment in a number of markets, which you alluded to. Where are the key areas where you're seeing that pressure? Are there any markets you'd really call out, where the consumer is perhaps a little bit more under pressure from these increased costs?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Well, overall headline would be that there is nothing materially different versus last year. We went into this year preparing for consumers in general to have more sensitivity and more need for affordability. So in our overall revenue growth management umbrella, affordability plays an important role, yet affordability country by country is different, and it's very well embedded. In particular, there are a few markets where that sensitivity and elasticity is bigger.

Romania, which in a sequence of several years now, has been going through some regulatory changes including VAT, sugar tax and DRS. So it boils down on the consumer. Or we see more politically driven in Bulgaria, they are getting used to the fact that they are now in Europe. We know that sometimes it really creates bump in the prices overall and of course, Ukraine.

On the other hand, you see countries that continue to perform strongly this year. Hungary, Czech, Ireland and Switzerland had a very good first half. I'm also pleased with Italy’s performance in the first half. Austria had a very good bounce back, because last year, they were dealing with their own DRS introduction. So on balance, we do see that consumers, while being mindful, they are the ones with which we delivered these results and we feel responsible that we constantly pulse and read how they are, and that we dynamically react with adjusting initiatives whenever needed.

Laurence Whyatt: And of course, this is going to affect your own cost line as well. You're going to be exposed to some of the raw materials that have been inflating as a result of these various changes. What levers can you still pull in order to mitigate those increased costs? And would you expect pricing to have to materially step up as we go into next year?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Look, I like this football analogy. The best way to defend yourself is to attack. And we've been always front-footed and focused on driving top-line growth. I think that's the best way to drive cost leverage. To drive top-line growth is infinite, with costs there is a floor. So that's why our investments behind the 24/7 portfolio that we are developing with a number of categories, where each one of them play their role in a given market, where with our partners we are actually stepping up investments in marketing exactly for that reason, that we can support broader portfolio range and brands that we do with excellent initiatives, with supporting more events, where we give consumers and customers really the chance to activate our products and drive transactions.

One of the key areas we are investing in, through digital and with the support of meaningful AI, is micro-segmentation. That really helps us to deploy our assets and investments in a much more targeted, relevant way. In the past, it was like one size fits all. Now we know that for certain brands, even for certain packages, these are the types of outlets we really need to go versus the other ones. So that increases our effectiveness of resources that we deploy and the time of our people. So all that plays a role.

Then, we have every year productivity initiatives, where we are constantly finding ways of increasing productivity, enhancing efficiencies, reducing costs wherever necessary. That also plays a role. I'm also very happy with the very robust governance that we have with the overall hedging approach to our purchases of materials. So when you blend that all together, I feel there is a lot that is in our control, even in these circumstances. And that's one of the key learnings that we have from last six, seven years, from COVID onwards, that irrespective of what's going on, there is a lot in our hands that we can react, and we do have tools and resources to do that.

Laurence Whyatt: And just staying on the topic of volatility, of course, you're very acutely exposed to the Russia-Ukraine situation. You mentioned the Middle East earlier. We've had this FX volatility across Africa, and for which you're going to have increased exposure to with the closure of the CCBA deal. How is your framework of managing these sort of geopolitical currency type risks evolved? And what do you consider resilience really looks like once you consider the consolidation of CCBA?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Covid changed so many things in how we run scenario simulations, risk management, which again, is based on estimating various scenarios. But our academy before that was Nigeria. This is where we went through all kinds of things, and we went through political, macro, fiscal, supplier issues, all kinds of things tested us there, from which we were capturing learnings, which really came in useful in a number of scenarios in other territories.

When each country presents their business plan, of course, they must have one core scenario. But then there are risks and opportunities and there are scenarios that can look more on the upside and scenarios if things go wrong. So our people are empowered to bring their own locally relevant knowledge and insights and their own understanding - and I think that's the strength of our model.

We rely on the expertise of our general managers and the local country teams to identify what are the possible things that can potentially be worse, and immediately, they are asked to tell us, if that happens, what do you do? So there is a constant iterative way of what, what if, with quantification. We don't leave things to see if something happens, as that is too late. We want to have already thought about it.

Also, as a management team, we are constantly looking for more opportunities where we can unfold something that we haven't been doing so far. It's always more on the commercial front, where are the additional customers, how we can work better and closer with them. So I correlate that also with the way we constantly increase intimacy and loyalty with our customers, which is reflected in the constant growth of our NPS score with them. Also listening is where we get lots of ideas, this is a time where curiosity must be at its best. You never know what tomorrow brings, but solutions are there. It's a matter of allowing ourselves to listen, everyone has a view. When we talk and walk with our market developers, it's so useful to listen to them and what they think. You get great ideas when you talk to a line operator, these people have great ideas. So it's our responsibility to listen, and as much as this might sound trivial, this overall plays a role.

Laurence Whyatt: It sounds very similar to our job as well. The best ideas come from the team. So I want to talk a little bit about some of your markets. Just let's start off with the emerging side of things because, of course, I think you're getting a lot of questions on that space, and it's a lot of change happening there. Many of us came out to Egypt with you a few months ago now. And I suppose when I saw the aspirations of getting double-digit growth every year, it sort of appears relatively lofty until you see it on the ground. So, for those who weren't able to travel to Egypt, why are you so confident you're able to deliver growth at that sort of level?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Well, it was great to have you and others on July 7, for this day in Cairo and I can encourage anyone who would like to listen to that. It's available on our website to listen to what we shared very openly that day.

We believe that from the moment we decided to go after this acquisition, in agreement with The Coca-Cola Company, we were then and are now even more excited about the immense opportunity that this country offers. Firstly, the size of the 110+ million population that is going in the right direction and the infrastructural development as well as other areas where the country is progressing.

Within that context, we know that this market is far from its developed level. So investing further, prioritising commercial capabilities to be able to deliver on the great portfolio that we have there, making meaningful additions right from the start, where apart from the focus on sparkling and water, which were two key categories there, then we started also with energy, which was proven as the right thing, and that has provided more additional growth and relevance to our customers.

We immediately invested in raising the commercial capabilities, which starts from the basics. Every single salesperson has gone through our sales academy. This is how we educate all our people and train them to be able to more effectively and better connect with customers. And seeing the market in June, when we had all general managers meeting in the north of Egypt, and then later on, when we were there together, it's mind-blowing to see how much has been achieved in 18 months.

We also use Egypt for our broader capability development. In July, we opened our new digital hub in Cairo, where currently we have 250 people and by Q3 next year, we will have 450. And that's part of the intentional in-sourcing of specific roles and capabilities that we want to have in-house for various solutions, platforms that we are developing, as they are forming the competitive advantage that we then deploy in all countries.

I would say the joint belief and commitment with our partners - The Coca-Cola Company and Monster Energy, knowing what needs to be done, the right locally relevant investments and then deploying them with great, disciplined focus. We are ambitious and that's why we say this is a market that has to see double-digit growth.

Now, it might not grow by double digits every year, as things can happen, but we have to be ambitious. This is pushing us to constantly think what we do more of, how we do better and Egypt is a market for something like that.

Laurence Whyatt: And of course, it was an acquisition a few years ago, and you're expected to close the CCBA deal later on this year. How transferable are the learnings that you've taken from integrating Egypt to the CCBA business? What's similar? What's more different?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Many things are transferable. For us, four years ago, the integration of Egypt was a great learning ground, and we have reflected on the things that really went well. We also incorporated some of the learnings. So now, myself and my team, every one of us has personal ownership for all the chapters of the integration plan that we are developing, that we started from January, from the moment CCBA closed its books of 2025. From the end of January, we started a disciplined, systematic approach in preparing, in parallel with the regulatory process work that is happening.

It's due to close in Q4 and I'm confident about how ready we will be for day one, as well as phasing thoughts, ideas and initiatives over the first six months, six to 12 months and beyond. We cannot do everything at the same time, it needs to be phased.

While many things are transferable, we also have to be respectful that every single market within CCBA has its own dynamics and insights. We need to learn that, and that will happen through on-site visits, meeting our teams, customers, to really understand what the specificities of every market are.

At the end of July, we went for the first visit to South Africa, Tanzania and Ethiopia. It was fantastic to really learn on the ground, and I can tell you, Laurence, when we finished the trip, we really were boosted. We can really see tremendous opportunity.

Laurence Whyatt: I look forward to many Bitesize events in the years to come. When you talk about these markets, which are the ones that you see as the biggest opportunities? And maybe some of the markets that we haven't spent a huge amount of time on, where do you see the most opportunities.

Zoran Bogdanovic: Unsurprisingly, the largest market, South Africa, is the biggest opportunity. It's really the backbone of CCBA. It's a phenomenal market, with so many opportunities. It's already a great business, but we really see that we can provide more tailwind to do more things.

Beyond the obvious of South Africa, there is Kenya and I'm impressed with Ethiopia. They have a population size of 140 million people and the country is slowly but surely going in the right direction. We were impressed with the quantity of development that we observed in Addis Ababa. Next year they are having COP 32, a big thing which puts Ethiopia on a global stage and the entrance of international players slowly getting there. We've seen a team that is very ambitious, very knowledgeable and competent. So, it's for us to see how we support them, give them more tools, more resources, because they clearly know what they want to do, and they are, for sure, not lacking ambition.

Tanzania was another market that we really loved seeing. Many of these markets are on a level of development that has abundance of per capita consumption opportunity, development of the categories, introduction of some of the categories or packages that they at the moment don't have. That's why from the moment we take over, we will see in the first years that we will need to support them with some more investments, because for the car to go faster, we'll need to pour some fuel, so that it can really then prepare it for sustainable, profitable growth.

Laurence Whyatt: You mentioned the Q4 completion. Do you have any updates on approvals or anything that's been approved recently?

Zoran Bogdanovic: Yes. The last two approvals of South Africa and Tanzania that are pending, but all of that is progressing well, and we feel very confident that in Q4, this is going to be completed.

Laurence Whyatt: Okay. And just staying on Africa, you've seen quite a big volume acceleration in Nigeria. What was the key reason behind that? Was there a bit of lower pricing? And is there a bit of a risk that we see increased competition now that we've seen a bit lower FX pressure?

Zoran Bogdanovic: I think consistency of performance in Nigeria is a result of many things coming together. First of all, capability of the management team - their determination and focus and discipline - and the overall capability of the organisation. When we see and walk the streets with market developers, to see how they guide us and when they explain what they do and how they are leveraging all the tools that we introduced to Nigeria, even as a testing ground.

When we started with RGM, Nigeria was in the first wave. When we started with data insights analytics from 2020, Nigeria was the first one there. The first global pilot of the use case of micro-segmentation with The Coca-Cola Company was in Nigeria. So we are constantly enhancing the capability of the country. It is able to deliver on very strong brand marketing initiatives, together with The Coca-Cola Company and Monster, and even with other brand partners that we have in that country.

It can sound simple - knowing what the relevant initiatives that we have to do marketing-wise, which are connected with passion points that consumers in Nigeria have. They make it easy for us because the way they love music, the way they love football, and the way they socialise and they gather around meals, makes it very simple to focus consistently behind these three points. Now the challenge is on our own creativity, how do we do that? And we've seen how Coke Studio there transformed into one of the best ones globally, the way football is activated. And I think that we will only see the new way of doing that when now we activate English Premier League on an insight that you have more EPL fans in Nigeria than in the UK. People are crazy about football. So now, thankfully, we have that great asset of EPL that we can activate in Nigeria, and we will do that.

Next week we are in Nigeria, where we will celebrate 75 years of the company that started in 1951. So we have a big event for our stakeholders in Abuja. And then we have our Board meeting in Lagos, and of course, before the meeting, we are going to the market to really see what is being done.

Lastly, even in the times when there were challenges with hard currency accessibility and devaluation, we were not in a half-pregnant state. We knew that we believe in Nigeria, we know the tremendous potential it has, and we kept investing.

You know very well that many companies have left Nigeria in past years. That never crossed our mind. And now we see that some of them are looking how to come back, because this is a country of tremendous growth potential, and the result you see this year is a result of continuous focused investments and work. I don't correlate it with any lower pricing, it’s RGM work, where it's perfectly fine that now is the time when volume has to drive more of the revenue generation. There is always some level of pricing there that's healthy and that's needed and it's there.

Laurence Whyatt: And speaking of a very volatile market in Ukraine, it's completely understandable that it's very challenging, given where the conflict is. There was some news of recent damage to one of the Coke production facilities in Kyiv. So I was wondering if you could give us an update on that. But also, how do your teams continue to deliver some pretty strong results in the face of such daily challenges?

Zoran Bogdanovic: First of all, I need to recognise our team in Ukraine for the heroic work that they are doing in the most unbelievable circumstances. They really serve as an inspiration to all of us. Our biggest and utmost priority is we always make sure that everyone is safe, that we do everything in our power to support them and families in staying protected, which so far, I think we've been doing really well.

It's not the first time that our manufacturing facility was impacted. There has been limited impact on our factory. Most importantly, we were alerted, we knew the attack was coming. Everyone was evacuated. No one was harmed. So most importantly, on human element, everyone remains safe.

As I said, it already happened a few times before. So far we have repaired and brought everything up and running, and this is what we will do also this time. Our team and all of us are committed to do that, but this is always done in a fully safe way.

If we are temporarily not able to produce in Ukraine, which is a big factory of ours, then other countries are there to support with contingency supply, like we had last year also in one situation. So options are there, and it's inspiring to see how our people stay committed to serving our customers in the most difficult situation, finding creative solutions and how they all care for each other - it's inspiring to see.

I was talking earlier about finding new solutions and they are an inspiration to see with some of the most innovative ideas. Some of their processes are much faster, simpler than anyone else because they are forced to think like that, and we learn from them.

Laurence Whyatt: I want to talk about the energy category because, of course, that's been delivering, I think it's 10 years of double-digit growth, and you've had further acceleration. What's really driving this sustained acceleration? Is it category recruitment, distribution, innovation, premiumisation? And where do you expect that sort of growth level to normalise?

Zoran Bogdanovic: The category is continuously growing year-by-year and expanding. It's a category where it's increasing the average age of consumers - now 35/36 years old - 15 years ago this was different. Now you see energy products on menu boards of quick service restaurants, which we didn't see 15 years ago. Simply, there are more drinking moments during the day.

Also, the category has benefitted from the fact that consumers say they need more energy to endure through the day. Lives are more hectic, busy, intense, and simply, people need more energy, and they divert to energy drinks as a no-brainer solution. There is more work to be done to also remind people that there are also other sources of energy like Coca-Cola Original Taste and coffee.

The category is expanding with 26% of energy consumers entering the category in the last 12 months. That's a clear statistic that we get as an insight from the Monster team.

Monster also does a phenomenal job with the portfolio development and reformulations. Ultra is a zero-sugar variant, which is performing phenomenally and now there is a green zero-sugar version, and various other versions like Valentino Rossi. Every year, there is something. We can clearly attribute this innovation to driving approximately a third of the growth.

In terms of tapping into the right passion points of consumers, Energy has been a key proposition in the gaming occasion and Monster has been focused on that. Then you see football, what they do with Predator and Chelsea now. MotoGP, music, rappers - the overall experiential approach to marketing really does play a role.

And then you add to that, continuous investments behind coolers, providing more equipment, so that product is chilled and available. You put all that together, and over the last 10 years, the average growth rate on volumes is 29%. This year will be another 20+ percent growth year, and I remain confident that the category will continue to grow.

Laurence Whyatt: Zoran, we've jumped around a number of different topics in your business. But what's the area of CCH that investors just don't ask you about and we really should spend a little more time looking at?

Zoran Bogdanovic: First of all, I really like when sometimes people ask about our culture and people. I think that's an important one to sometimes understand more how we do things. What values are driving us? How do we nurture this high performance? If the people and culture element is not in the right place, I don't think we would be where we are today.

Then second thing is appreciation of how wide our portfolio is. People very often are surprised when we tell them that we have two coffee propositions and that in many markets we are an exclusive distributor of premium spirits to reputable companies. Even with The Coca-Cola Company portfolio, sometimes people don't appreciate that we own FuzeTea. Our 24/7 portfolio is one thing where I don't think there is another player that has that broad portfolio, which really offers us the opportunity to get to one customer, almost all beverage propositions. And that's the reason why people are surprised when we share that we get to be 80%, sometimes 85%, of the overall customers' revenue generation comes from our product.

Finally, I would say people maybe don't appreciate how much we are investing behind digital and AI, overall technology. We are very committed in the last seven, eight years, since we started accelerating investments, what we are producing in-house, how much we have already digitalised our business, how committed we are. And that's attracting talent that worked in technology companies, where they find it more attractive to work for us because they do see that we are serious. They are in an environment like this digital hub in Cairo, where they really see that we almost act as a technology company, but they are able to see faster results of the things that they work on because they need to translate tomorrow to that sales or whatever initiative is. So there is a faster connectivity between the work they do and the results that we achieve. That's probably the most underrated thing is the understanding of how much we invest and how much we are transforming company in that sense.

Laurence Whyatt: Well, thank you, Zoran, for joining us. I can see we're out of time, but I really appreciate you coming here today and spending your time with us. Thank you.

Zoran Bogdanovic: Thank you very much.

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