

SESSION SPOTLIGHT:

Strategic Alliances: When and How to Partner for Growth

Partnerships to aid innovation

At AHNTI EU, leaders from Zoetis, Boehringer Ingelheim, MSD Animal Health and Elanco came together to discuss how strategic partnerships are shaping innovation and commercialisation in animal health. Moderated by Rimma Driscoll of Zoetis, the panel explored when partnerships make sense, how founders should approach them, and how alliances can accelerate the path from discovery to market.

Key Takeaways

- Partnerships are essential for combining scientific innovation with development and commercialization expertise
- Collaboration models are expanding beyond licensing to include venture investment and strategic alliances
- Licensing agreements can improve capital efficiency and provide validation for early stage companies
- Successful partnerships require strong strategic fit, internal champions and clear governance structures
- The most effective alliances are built on shared vision, trust and long term alignment

“Partnerships genuinely create value by bringing complementary strengths together: founders bring bold ideas and speed, while strategics bring development expertise, global reach and the ability to take something all the way to the finish line.”

– Megan Grether



A central theme of the discussion was that partnerships are increasingly essential to innovation. While large animal health companies maintain strong internal research capabilities, much of the most exciting science is emerging from startups, universities and early-stage biotechnology companies. Strategic alliances allow companies to combine complementary strengths, pairing scientific creativity and speed with development expertise, regulatory experience, and global commercialisation capabilities.

The panel also highlighted how the partnership landscape has evolved. In addition to traditional licensing and acquisition deals, companies are now using a wider range of collaboration models, including minority equity investments, venture partnerships, and research collaborations. These approaches allow companies to support emerging innovators earlier and increase the likelihood of success for promising technologies.

For founders, partnerships can also play a critical role in capital efficiency. Licensing agreements, for example, can provide upfront funding while allowing larger partners to take on the most expensive stages of development and commercialisation. In addition, involvement from established animal health companies can serve as a signal of validation for investors and increase access to future funding.

However, the panel stressed that successful partnerships require careful alignment. Founders must understand how their technology fits into a partner's strategy, identify internal champions within the organisation, and clearly define what success looks like for both sides. Governance structures and decision-making processes are equally important, particularly when unexpected challenges arise during development.

Ultimately, the discussion reinforced that the best alliances are built on trust, transparency and shared long-term goals. When both sides focus on leveraging their respective strengths, partnerships can accelerate innovation and bring new solutions to veterinarians, farmers and pet owners faster.



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