

The GLP-1 revolution:

How weight-loss drugs are
reshaping U.K. grocery retail

Introduction

The United Kingdom faces a health crisis. Nearly a third of adults in the U.K.—more than 15 million people—are classed as obese, driving chronic disease, soaring healthcare costs, and decreased quality of life. Enter GLP-1 agonists, a groundbreaking class of drugs initially developed to treat diabetes, but increasingly recognised for their extraordinary weight-loss and longevity, increasing potential.

The GLP-1 drug safety profile, growing affordability, and impact on food-buying behaviour are all disruptive ingredients that will create far-reaching effects with a pace of change that could leave many retailers playing catch-up.

The shift to use these drugs to aid weight loss comes at a time of growing awareness about the quality of the food we eat, how it affects our bodies, and holistic approaches that could have major positive impacts on individuals and society.

There is increasing regulatory interest and growing consumer awareness of foods that are high in fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) and ultra-processed foods. Scientific and technological developments are also giving people more insight into their individual responses to food, for example, the gut microbiome analysis offered by the Kings College spin-out, ZOE.

Celebrity adoption has also boosted awareness: Oprah Winfrey spoke on her podcast about how she used a GLP-1 agonist to help her lose weight and Kourtney Kardashian-Barker's supplements brand Lemme has released a GLP-1 supplement (rather than GLP-1 agonist) designed to help users manage weight.

Why the GLP-1 agonists are breaking new ground

GLP-1s, or glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists, have evolved from niche diabetes medications to frontline treatments in obesity management. They work by biologically mimicking GLP-1, a hormone naturally produced in the intestines. GLP-1 enhances insulin secretion, inhibits glucagon production, and, notably, slows gastric emptying, which means the effects of the drugs directly lead to reduced appetite, fewer cravings, and reduced caloric intake.

Three key brands account for almost 100% of the market share:

- Wegovy and Ozempic (both semaglutides), produced by Novo Nordisk. Wegovy achieves an average weight reduction of **15-17%** over one year
- Mounjaro (tirzepatide), produced by Eli Lilly, demonstrated weight loss outcomes as high as **22.5%**. Tirzepatide mimics GLP-1 and a hormone known as GIP; the combination has proven to have a stronger impact on lowering blood sugar and accelerating weight loss.

In general, users consistently report dramatic reductions in calorie intake, often by nearly a third, leading to average weight losses ranging from 7% to more than 20% of total body weight within a year.

The effect of GLP-1 agonists will be far-reaching, affecting how much people spend, what they buy, lifestyles, and health.

Crosss industry disruption



Pharmaceuticals and biotech – Revenue up for GLP-1 drug producers, reduced demand elsewhere



Healthcare – Reducing NHS costs, lower unemployment and productivity gains



Food and beverage manufacturing – Sales impacts on unhealthy products



Grocery retail and supermarkets – Smaller baskets, impulse buys down



Restaurants and fast food – Less eating out, higher demand for small-plate dining



Alcohol and beverages – Lower alcohol consumption



Weight and diet services – Pressure on subscriptions



Fitness and gym – Gym attendance could be lower, but new marketing opportunities



Fashion and apparel – Smaller plus-size market, demand from wardrobe overhauls



Insurance and financial services – Healthier customers a long-term tailwind, longer payout obligations for annuity and pension providers



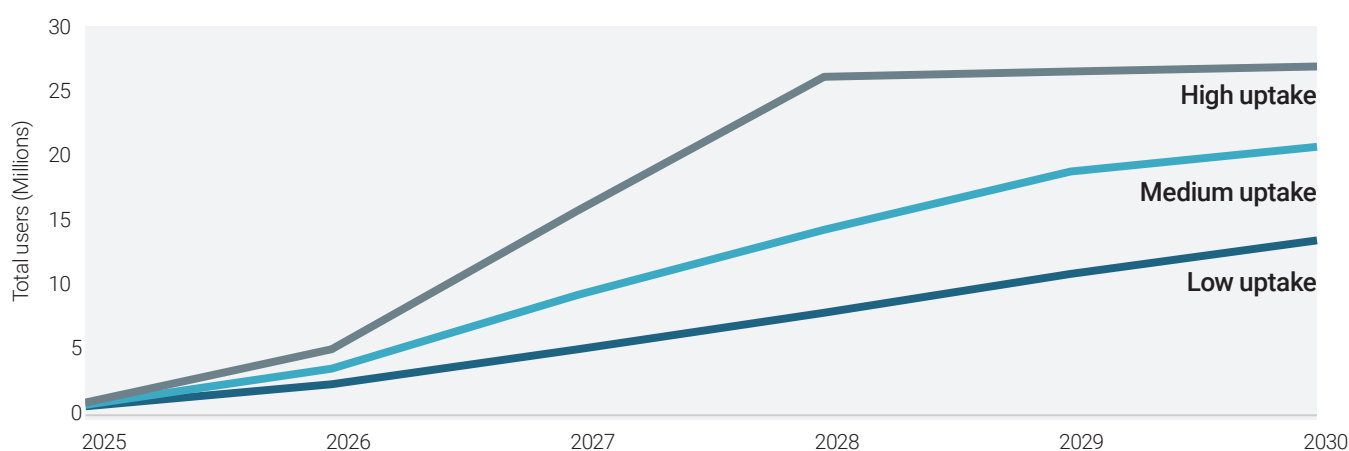
Gambling and tobacco – Changes to neural responses could have major longer term impacts on other markets heavily impacted by cravings and addiction

Major GLP-1 drug adoption comes to the U.K.

Starting this year, the NHS will begin a substantial rollout of GLP-1 medications in the U.K. This coincides with a sharp uptick in consumer awareness to kick-start widespread adoption.

It now looks likely that a daily pill form of a GLP-1 and GIP-focused medication could be available as early as the next 12 months, after Eli Lilly announced a successful Phase 3 trial of its Mounjaro weight management drug. Tirzepatide in pill form reduced weight by 8% on average. This will further expand GLP-1 drug adoption, as we can see in these high, medium, and low uptake scenarios.

Figure 1: Scenarios for five-year growth in U.K. GLP-1 drug users (Total users, millions)



From the current base of 430,000 users – mostly private purchasers, rather than NHS prescription – the U.K. Government is focused on scaling up NHS users to 3.4m over 12 years. Even with the inevitable bottlenecks of a NHS rollout, we estimate ~1.7m patients could be prescribed GLP-1 agonists on the NHS by 2030. Pharmaceutical firms Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk are expanding their supply capacity as we write.

The rapid increase in drug adoption will be driven by private, wealthier buyers initially, but once a pill form is widely available – from 2026 – this will extend to all households. In our high uptake scenario, this includes the pill being used by people who are overweight but not classed as obese.

The widespread disruptive effects from the rollout of GLP-1 drugs could extend even further. Research is ongoing into their use as transformative therapies, mitigating cardiovascular risk, chronic kidney

disease, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), and even neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. GLP-1s have already been shown to reduce major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) in users, and impart anti-inflammatory effects that reduce kidney wear and brain plaque build-up.¹

Early exploration is also being made into the positive psychological effects from reducing cravings and the consequential reduction in harmful addiction. This could lead to lower levels of gambling and help people give up smoking.

The impact for U.K. retailers from the use of GLP-1 medication in weight management – our focus here – could be seismic. We estimate up to 50% of U.K. households could adopt these medications by 2030, triggering billions of pounds in spending shifts and fundamentally reshaping grocery retail dynamics.

1. [Biospace](#), [Nature Communications](#), [The Health Suite](#)


The retail effects of GLP-1

The U.S. experience with GLP-1 agonists offers insights into possible U.K. market dynamics. However, broader adoption of GLP-1 medication, driven by NHS rollout in the U.K., could materially alter the spending shifts created this side of the Atlantic.

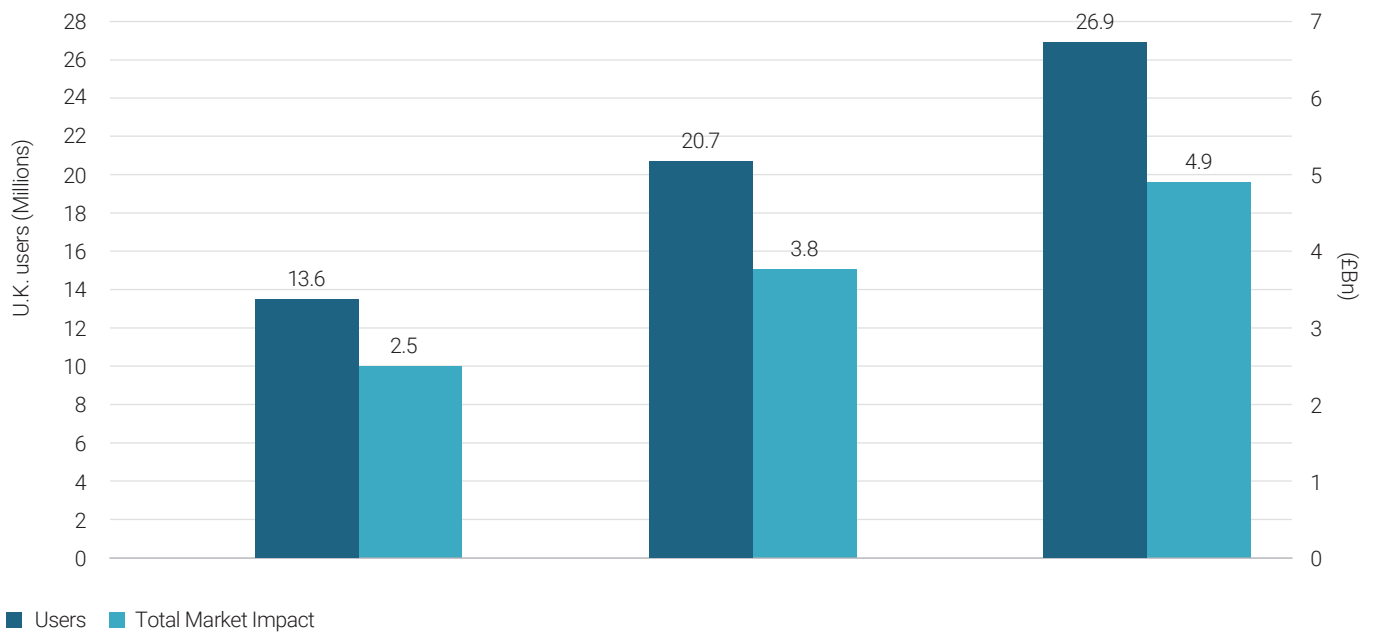
American retailers report a \$416 fall in annual grocery spend in households with at least one GLP-1 medication user. And a radical overhaul of what consumers buy: purchases of fresh produce and high-protein foods surged by nearly 80%.²

The increasing adoption of GLP-1 medications will have a direct impact on the size of the £222bn U.K. grocery market – shown below in the possible impacts of GLP-1 agonist users increasing to as high as 26.9 million.

Figure 2: Potential decrease in grocery spend and market impact

	ALL	LOW INCOME	HIGH INCOME
 Potential % change in grocery spending post-adoption	-5.5%	-4.2%	-8.7%

Source: The No-Hunger Games: How GLP-1 Medication Adoption is Changing Consumer Food Demand by Sylvia Hristakeva, Jura Liaukonyte, Leo Feler:: SSRN



Source: Spend reduction methodology (Cornell study)

2. Cornell Research, Food Dive, 2025

While the overall impact on the grocery market is relatively small, what shoppers actually buy is set to change dramatically, as well as broader effects on demand across other sectors. This class of drug is also affecting how people approach dieting. Weight-loss programme provider Weight Watchers [filed for bankruptcy in the U.S. in May](#), struggling with high levels of debt as subscription revenue fell.

The graphic below, based on Nielsen IQ U.S. consumer data, shows how GLP-1 medication users can make surprisingly big swings in purchasing decisions towards supplements, foods, and drinks that are better for their health. These figures represent the buying decisions of wealthy GLP-1 medications users. The broader take-up of GLP-1 agonists in the U.K. could lead to different swings in product selection.

Many GLP-1 friendly products offer potential to be positioned as premium products. This means that where category volume shifts do happen, there will be opportunity for retailers to trade up GLP-1 users towards more premium, higher-margin products. This will be particularly relevant for the earliest adopters in the U.K., who are likely to be from higher-income households, and more able to trade up.

Figure 3: Differences in non-GLP-1 user and GLP-1 user retail spending by product

	Category	Change in purchase volumes YoY		
		Non-GLP-1 User	GLP-1 User	Difference
Health and Beauty Care	 Health and Beauty Care Overall	-1%	14%	+15
	 Electrolyte Supplements	108%	202%	+94
	 Hair Growth Products	-10%	108%	+118
	 GI Care-Anti-Nausea	-9%	77%	+86
	 Iron Supplements	7%	62%	+55
Beverages	 Non-Alcoholic Wine	38%	1158%	+1120
	 Non-Alcoholic Beer	1%	925%	+924
	 Energy Beverages	1%	108%	+107
	 Soft Drinks	-1%	58%	+59
	 Spirits	1%	29%	+28
Other Top Gainers	 Avocados	1%	198%	+197
	 Kiwi	9%	174%	+165
	 Frozen Fruit	12%	145%	+133
	 Milk/Dairy Alternatives	22%	127%	+105
	 Corn Chips	4%	79%	+75

Source: Select statistics from Nielsen IQ/Wells Fargo Report 2024

A reshaped U.K. retail landscape?

The widespread adoption of GLP-1 medications is poised to significantly alter consumer behaviours, leading to distinct shifts in the shape of retail spending.

Potential losers

Snack and confectionery sector

The appetite-suppressing effects of GLP-1 medications have led directly to reduced cravings for high-calorie snacks and sweets. Users have reported a 40%-60% decrease in consumption volume of various snack categories, opting instead for healthier, more expensive alternatives, which will hit the snack and confectionery sector hard.

Convenience stores and discount supermarkets

Convenience stores rely more on sales of ready-to-eat snacks and impulse purchases, which are often HFSS and ultra-processed. This could make them a key loser from the behavioural shifts that GLP-1 agonists will bring.

Premium supermarkets

As the early adopters of GLP-1 medication will be wealthier consumers, able to buy the drug as an injection privately, premium supermarkets such as M&S and Waitrose could see the impacts earlier.

Potential winners

Health-focused food brands

Brands offering nutritious, unprocessed, portion-controlled, and high-protein products are likely to benefit from the shift towards healthier eating habits. As well as healthier choices, GLP-1 medication can affect muscle mass, driving demand for high-protein foods. Meal replacement company Huel has [experienced growing demand for its products](#), with revenue growing 16% to £214 million in 2024.

Retailers with diverse product portfolios

Retailers with a diverse product range, covering all bases, including healthier options, are better positioned to meet evolving consumer demands. This range can lead to increased customer loyalty and market share. This is especially true where a grocer can also dispense GLP-1 drugs, alongside targeted foods and supplements. These retailers are poised to capture the whole value chain around GLP-1 agonist use: supporting the transition onto and eventually off GLP-1 medication. Supermarkets with integrated pharmacies are well-placed to take advantage of a diverse and connected product offering.

Pharmacies and health stores

Pharmacies and health-focused retailers may see an uptick in sales of related products, such as nutritional supplements and wellness items catering to GLP-1 users.

There will be high demand for GLP-1 'wraparound' services. Retailers that can help consumers transition onto, and whilst taking, GLP-1 medications will benefit in supporting them to make healthier lifestyle and purchasing choices. Retailers like Holland & Barrett, who already have specialised weight loss advisors, are well positioned to benefit as accessibility, awareness, and adoption increases.

Partnerships with related health service applications will be valuable. For example, the ZOE app offers personalised nutrition advice based on gut biome, blood fat, and blood sugar monitoring.

How U.K. retailers can adapt for the GLP-1 era

The anticipated rapid increase in GLP-1 medication usage across the U.K. is poised to re-shape established retail norms, creating retail winners and losers along the way. The potential for wider application of GLP-1 agonists in other areas of health could lead to further disruption. By implementing strategic responses, U.K. retailers can be on the front foot of the impacts that GLP-1 drug usage will inevitably have.



Strategic category planning

- Develop and promote products that cater to health-conscious consumers, including high-protein, fibre-rich, and portion-controlled options.
- Partner with nutritionists to create meal kits and plans that cater to new dietary requirements.
- Implement clear labelling to guide consumers toward products suitable for their dietary needs.
- Re-allocate space to fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean meats, and reduce space given to ultra-processed foods.
- Consider the extent to which you want to lead the debate on health and diet, and how this features in your brand positioning, at a company level or in own brand strategies.



Data-driven decision making

- Leverage customer data to offer personalised promotions that resonate with the health-focused preferences of GLP-1 users. For instance, purchases of non-alcoholic wine and beer spiked +1158% and +925% for GLP-1 users focused on weight loss..
- Use store catchment and social demographic data to anticipate and act on store-level space implications.



Strategic Partnerships, including new business models

- Collaborate with healthcare providers, fitness centres, and wellness influencers to create comprehensive health initiatives that engage consumers both in-store and online.
- Partnerships can combine drug therapy support or nutritional insight, and target specific consumer groups. For example, Xevant, a data analytics provider, and Ivím Health, a GLP-1 drug administration specialist, have [designed a corporate-focused medical weight-loss solution](#) that incorporates GLP-1 therapy with personalised support.



Alex Gourlay

Executive Chair, Holland & Barrett

GLP-1 agonists are a class of drug with a good safety record that will, in a relatively short timeframe, become a mass drug, like statins or penicillin. What's exciting from my perspective – and from the Holland & Barrett perspective – is the enormous unmet customer need for people to know how to take better care of themselves. If you think that sounds over-optimistic, just look to the data in America.

People are looking for a different solution; something that acts differently. And the core difference of this drug is it doesn't work on the stomach. It works on the brain pathway. It reduces the sugar and salt addiction that we have all become used to.

We designed a strategy about four years ago focused on adding quality years to life – increasing our healthspan, not just our lifespan. And we're well placed to respond to a trend-breaker like this classification of drug. There haven't been many situations in my career – and I've been around for 45 years – where the level of change is going to happen so quickly, also driven by technology and data. The opportunity is to genuinely help consumers make healthier choices.

That's not about adding a GLP-1 label to products to show how it's GLP-1-friendly. People read the labels. They want to know what's behind the labels and understand what's in the food: the response has got to be authentic. It's got to be well developed, well presented, and well understood. That's the opportunity, particularly for grocery and retail.

My key takeaways are to look to America to start to understand what the trends could look like in the U.K. and, secondly, be really clear on what your business needs to defend in terms of products and services – and, equally, what you need to build to respond to these trends.

Lastly, think about accelerating these trends because of the decades people currently spend eating unhealthy food, which is reducing their healthspan. These drugs have a transformative potential to add true quality of life for many people.



Scan the QR code to
watch our full interview
with Alex Gourlay



Matt Clark

Partner & Managing Director, EMEA Retail, AlixPartners

The recent news of Eli Lilly's successful Phase 3 tablet form is a real indicator of the speed and the scale of the transformation that GLP-1 agonists could bring to the buying habits for a major proportion of U.K. consumers. As the makers of Mounjaro move from a jab to a pill, GLP-1 medication will become easier and cheaper to take, with the potential to have a much bigger impact on how customers buy food and how they look after their health – far quicker than many people were expecting.

There's a real risk of being overtaken by events, but getting ahead of these trends presents an enormous upside to take advantage of.

U.K. retail has big questions to answer to be ahead of these developments. How do you help customers on a different type of weight loss journey: going onto a GLP-1 drug, coming off the drug, and how does this play out through the fundamental aspects of retail?

Take category management: how do you use your space in store? What is your product hierarchy? What are your promotional strategies? And of course, how do you deal with suppliers because if you are an unhealthy snack food supplier, this trend will put your volumes under pressure?

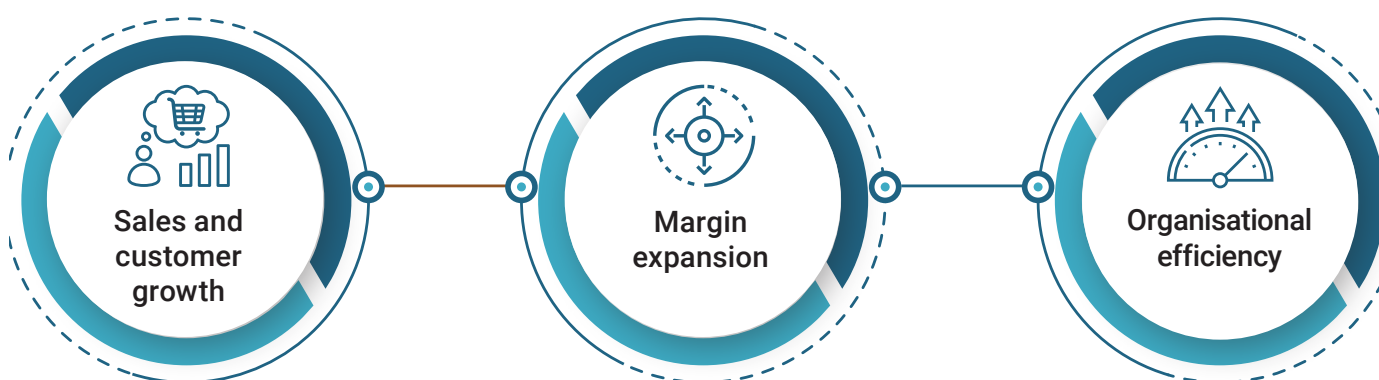
Another big retail implication on the horizon is in channel dynamics. The last few years have seen real growth in convenience retail, in the snack-based products that people buy at service stations and on the high street. The changes in product choices we've seen from taking GLP-1 drugs suggest dramatic changes in product ranges in certain channels. Even in bigger stores with more diversified SKU ranges, the percentage change to product offers could be significant.

We have already seen the impact GLP-1 medications are having in the U.S., from changing customer behaviour to the accelerator effect from the introduction of these drugs at a time where data and AI are being used more and more to help people manage their health. There is little doubt that we are about to see a significant shift in both customer behaviour and how retailers respond to that here in the U.K.

AlixPartners: navigating retail transformation amidst GLP-1 adoption

The increasing adoption of GLP-1 medications is poised to reshape consumer behaviours across U.K. retail. This will be a transformative period, presenting both challenges and opportunities for U.K. retailers. Retailers can navigate this evolving landscape effectively, implementing strategies that can match shifting consumer behaviours:

Our offerings to drive sales, margin, and efficiency



- Strategic partnerships
- Brand and banner strategy
- Category and product strategy; SKU footprint
- Go-to-market strategy
- Marketing effectiveness
- Customer segmentation
- Customer lifetime value
- Digital penetration and online conversion

- Profit not profitability
- Productivity (e.g. GMROI)
- Price optimisation
- Promotional and clearance strategy
- Inventory reduction
- Merchandising strategy
- COGS improvement and strategic sourcing

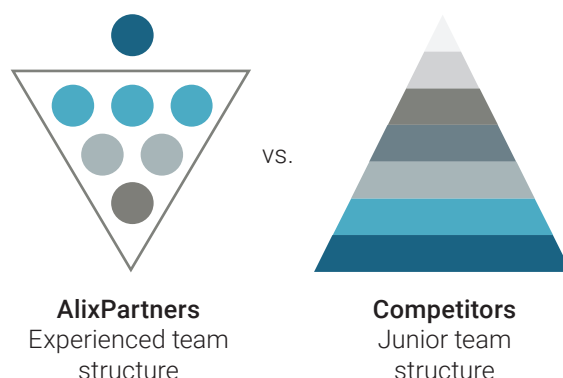
- Embedding 'Digital-First Retail'
- Central cost review
- Capability gaps
- Technology modernisation
- Breaking down silos

True experts focused on delivering measurable value

- We do the work together with your team
- We drive results to the P&L, not just studies and reports
- Focus on speed and results with proven value delivery

Our unique approach to consulting

- We deploy experienced senior teams
- Our leadership works day-to-day with you



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About us

For more than 40 years, AlixPartners has helped businesses around the world respond quickly and decisively to their most critical challenges – circumstances as diverse as urgent performance improvement, accelerated transformation, complex restructuring and risk mitigation.

These are the moments when everything is on the line – a sudden shift in the market, an unexpected performance decline, a time-sensitive deal, a fork-in-the-road decision. But it's not what we do that makes a difference, it's how we do it.

Tackling situations when time is of the essence is part of our DNA – so we adopt an action-oriented approach at all times. We work in small, highly qualified teams with specific industry and functional expertise, and we operate at pace, moving quickly from analysis to implementation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our clients until the job is done, and only measure our success in terms of the results we deliver.

Our approach enables us to help our clients confront and overcome truly future-defining challenges. We partner with you to make the right decisions and take the right actions. And we are right by your side. When it really matters.

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