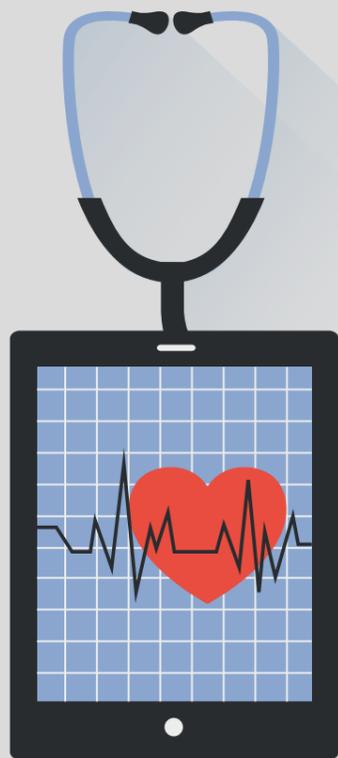




FROM PUSH TO PULL



Increase in the rise of digital channels according to IMS Health Global Pharmaceuticals Marketing Channel Reference 2015



“Don’t find customers for your products, find products for your customers.” Seth Godin’s instructive quote could be the mantra for pharma companies looking to forge successful customer relationships

Pharma sometimes appears like it is struggling to escape a marketing straitjacket, while other industries enjoy the creative freedom to innovate their messaging and take it direct to potential clients.

While the full spectrum of creative marketing enjoyed by the likes of BMW, Toyota, John Lewis or Marks & Spencer may never be available because of regulatory frameworks, there are still lessons to be learnt from their approaches.

Glossy concepts and stunning visuals are the currency of the big commercial players, but these have a transitory appeal. Pharma, by contrast, has the power of scientific knowledge, research and insight, qualities that can be every bit as compelling as a Christmas advertising campaign.

The challenge is to learn from the skill of commercial delivery. These days, successful creative high-street campaigns use smaller, niche spin-offs and targeted, almost personal, messages to anyone identified on social media as having even a slight interest in the company or its products.

CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS

Pharma, however, has been slow to seize the opportunities to use social media to back up the work of sales forces, according to Julie Papanek, principal at Canaan Partners, a tech and healthcare venture capital firm with £3.1 billion of assets under management.

“Is pharma doing enough to connect with physicians? The simple answer is ‘no,’” she says. **“Going back to the basic premise we know from all industries, you need to reach your customers where they are and there has been a large migration in how doctors spend time.”**

“Physicians are spending time on phones, computers and tablets, even when they are moving between wards if they are hospital based. I think that the adoption and integration of mobile so deep into our lives is such an opportunity.”

“These are the platforms the public and physicians have chosen to use. Pharma has to figure how to engage with it. Doctors were one of the fastest iPhone adopters. That tells you something.”

Papanek, who worked at Genentech in a variety of positions spanning marketing, development and business development before joining Canaan, says it is too soon to mothball sales forces and says digital can work in harmony to enrich the message.

“Digital is a big opportunity and I don’t think it is a question of one or the other because they complement each other. It is about

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Julie Papanek, Canada Partners

tailoring the message. Choosing the [right] channel to [reach] the customer is important. Some people prefer emails, some people pen and paper; some people want personal contact, others don’t. This is the key message for pharma: it must segment rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach.”

“With access changing and conversations with payors being more important, you are seeing the emergence of different types of sales forces,” she continues. **“Conversations with customers have a more academic scope, and field reimbursement managers negotiating with regional payors can help get access to products for patients and physicians.”**

Papanek also points to the opportunities for pharma to use data from tracking devices to get a more accurate understanding of the performance of medications. That data then becomes a powerful commodity to use to engage both physician and patient, she adds.

“Pharma should consider establishing a more sophisticated set of services around [its] offering to take the hassle away from the physician, making it easier for [doctors] to make their decisions, by integrating decision support in their workflow and creating clear information for consumers to make informed choices.

“Pharma is in the business of getting paid for great clinical outcomes; that is its purpose and [it] has to prove it.”

NEW PERSPECTIVES

Dr Thomas Hein, president of EphMRA, also sees digital as a positive: **“This is a huge opportunity. If you engage you will do well and build clear relationships. A lot of companies now talk about being customer centric – that means, in the first instance, the physician,”** he says.

“There are good examples, for instance work by UCB that really digs into patient needs to provide a holistic view of the patient. This helps the physician treat them better because they have a greater understanding.”

Bayer showed the potency of an innovative approach by enrolling a cameraperson and interviewer to follow patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) at work and home to see how they were impacted physically, socially and psychologically by the condition.

“It was an eye-opener for physicians. Key opinion leaders said they had never seen that perspective of a patient and could not have imagined what situations they were suffering,” adds Dr Hein. **“Doctors like this level of feedback as it helps them improve as physicians and it also makes them more open to engagement.”**

“A physician needs to know a lot about laboratory opportunities, how to test, what to test for and how to interpret the results, as well as knowing about the pharmaceuticals and clinical presentation of patients, so any help in terms of supporting diagnostic or

treatment pathways is going to be welcome. The way forward is to provide richer, more personalised information on disease areas and supporting tools for the physician for a quicker and better diagnosis, rather than concentrating on specific products.”

Changes in sales culture are needed as the emphasis switches from visiting doctors, according to the **“Rebirth of the Pharmaceutical Sales Force”** report from Accenture. It states: **“A re-invigorated sales capability requires a change to the traditional sales culture. The activities of the sales team no longer focus on visiting with doctors to share information; the focus is on addressing the needs of a broader network of buyers and influencers.”**

“This means pharmaceutical companies need to evaluate the marketplace to identify opportunities for the sales organisation to add value, while ensuring they don’t introduce regulatory and compliance risk. This, in turn, requires the sales organisation to work with marketing and other functional areas to develop tools, services and programs that stakeholders notice and value. Coordination and collaboration among sales resources and between sales and non-sales functions are critical.”

SUCCESS STORIES

The practical results have been clearly demonstrated in a series of collaborations between major pharmaceutical firms and local healthcare groups, facilitated by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry through its Joint Working Initiatives programme.

AstraZeneca found an added level of engagement with two COPD projects: with Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group and a group of doctors in east Surrey.

In the Wirral, the company provided a data interrogation tool for a disease management exercise that included data-sharing with secondary care and healthcare and patient education. It identified 154 new asthma patients, increased awareness and reduced hospital admissions by 21 per cent. The dividend for AstraZeneca was an enhanced public reputation and an improvement in adherence.

In east Surrey, a new computer-guided consultation software package was used to deliver COPD assessments, which resulted in a range of patients getting condition management plans and others being switched to more appropriate treatments. It was another reputational win for the company and led to increased use of its medicines.

The community-based RIPPLE project in Coventry, funded by the Health Foundation and supported by GlaxoSmithKline and the British Lung Foundation, has been acclaimed for its ability to improve wellbeing and reduce anxiety and low self-esteem experienced by patients with severe COPD.

TURNING THE SHIP

It is clear that pharma is getting the message as the use of digital channels increased by 30 per cent in 2014, according to IMS Health Global Pharmaceuticals Marketing Channel Reference 2015, which stated: **“Sales force upgrades, with a focus on an integrated multichannel approach and provision of rich clinical content, reveal a progressive shift away from influence and advertising towards high-value engagements across multiple touchpoints.”**

Sales forces increased globally by 0.8 per cent to 444,112 driven by a slew of new compounds and stabilisation after fallout from the “patent cliff”. However, direct meetings with physicians were down 25.5 per cent while e-meetings had increased by 54.3 per cent compared to 2013 figures.