

# Social Media has Revolutionized THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

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It was a cold, snowy November day in 2009, and a large number of people involved in the pharmaceutical industry had trekked down to Washington, D.C., to gather in front of the august body known as the FDA to provide remarks to a proposed set of guidance that the governing body was pondering on the use of social media in drug promotion.

The room was full of the who's who of advertising agencies, healthcare consulting organizations, public relations agencies, and patient advocacy groups. All had unique views and opinions on how the FDA could approach this potential guidance.

Conspicuously absent were the very manufacturers of the drugs that the guidance would impact. A few had shown up, mainly represented by their legal counsel, but in general, this gathering was purely the domain of others surrounding the drug industry.

That should have been a telling sight. All of the others gathered in the room were passionate voices, however the manufacturers were represented by legal departments.

## A Seven-Year Journey

Since that seminal event, in many people's minds the world has changed dramatically and the nascent medium called social media has blossomed into something that is now entwined into the very fabric of our personal lives. Billions of people flock to Facebook daily. Some 90% of journalists now get their news and news ideas from Twitter. LinkedIn has dramatically altered how we find and recruit talent, and YouTube has completely changed how we watch videos. Newcomers like Instagram and Pinterest are also garnering hundreds of millions of users.

Social media outlets have revolutionized the healthcare industry and are quickly becoming the preferred resource for individuals seeking healthcare information. Patients turn to social networking groups to find others who are battling the same diseases (for patients

preparing for the same type of surgery, following the tweets helps demystify the process and ideally reduces anxiety about upcoming operations), share advice, recommend doctors, even send other members a virtual hug, while clinicians connect to share information and learn from each other.

## Traction Challenged

Through it all, the pharmaceutical industry continues to either ignore this medium or dabble in it in a way that feels like an afterthought. There is still a fundamental misunderstanding of this medium and how it could be applied. Granted, the FDA has issued only limited guidance in the past five years, drip-feeding the industry rules that are mainly stopgaps. Let's look at some of the milestones:

- ▶ December 2011: Responding to Unsolicited Requests for Off-Label Information
- ▶ September 2013: Guidance for Industry: Mobile Medical Applications
- ▶ November 2013: Product Name Placement, Size and Prominence in Advertising and Promotional Labeling
- ▶ January 2014: Fulfilling Regulatory Requirements for Post Marketing Submissions of Interactive Promotional Media
- ▶ June 2014: Internet/Social Media Platforms With Character Space Limitations — Presenting Risk and Benefit Information for Prescription Drugs and Medical Devices; and Correcting Independent Third Party Misinformation About Prescription Drugs and Medical Devices

While patients, advocacy groups, and the likes of the Mayo Clinic have flocked to social media, industry has not.

It's not to say nothing is being done — some major companies have established centers of excellence created to understand this medium, hired agencies to help them and manage the process, and educated internal stakeholders.

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Some have dabbled with a single platform, like Twitter (corporate communications) or YouTube.

But most have continued to say “no social media” in relation to the promotion or marketing of their products. When people have dabbled, it has mainly been around paid media on social channels — that is, advertising.

Granted, the OTC side of the business has embraced pieces of social media because the regulatory environment is a bit more favorable, but the approach has been more around advertising and less around engaging.

## Social Media: A Way of Doing Business

Brands have limited roles in our actual social life. We just have to understand how and where we can be part of the conversation.

In our regulated industry, we're limited in what we say, so we say very little. Once we've recited our label, we're going to repeat what's on our label (and maybe offer a coupon).

So, absent of any true guidelines from the FDA, what can the industry do? Particularly now that most every manufacturer is looking at ways to “go beyond the pill” and promote more of a patient-centric approach to their business.

Social media should be viewed more as a way of doing business and less as a means of promotion. While promotion is a component, there are now aspects of social that can be applied to a number of areas, in a compliant way.

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### Socializing the sales rep

The e-detail remains a key component to launching and marketing a drug. But in the process we have created iPad carrying messengers as opposed to real relationship managers. Providing social capabilities to the rep may enable a change in behavior in 2015 and beyond. Companies like Medikly.com are looking at ways of providing the social profile of a doctor. What if you were able to provide that information to the rep? Connecting to Doximity and LinkedIn data will make the profile richer. Knowing that the doctor you are about to visit just posted a blog on the disease or tweeted about a data announcement might be useful and a better conversation starter than the dosing chart on an iPad.

### Socializing customer service

Industry leaders all provide programs for customer service that are manned by call centers all across the United States. There are SOPs that are 10 years old that these centers abide by. These same SOPs could be applied to providing service via social channels, particularly Twitter or Facebook. Banks and financial services companies, that have a similar (but not same) regulatory environment, have figured out how to do this. Combining social listening and customer service could enhance the patient experience and help with the patient-centric positioning most companies are striving to achieve.

### Socializing clinical trials

The single largest issue in clinical trials is patient recruitment and retention. Many trials fail because of the lack of recruits. Yet, the industry continues to use the tried-and-true method of relying on the same investigators to recruit patients. This was fine when there were not many trials and the media landscape was TV, radio, and print. Now we have competing trials at the same center for the same disease, a fragmented media world, and active, vocal patients. Applying social business capabilities to this area should result in better recruitment and retention.

There are a number of companies such as Inspire Health, Patients Like Me, Ben's Friends, and Quality Health that have a large number of patients who are members of their social networks. Companies such as Medici have created large pools of patients on Facebook for recruiting and retaining in trials.

Socializing the clinical trial recruitment process could lead to better trial design and recruitment.

### Socializing the medical meeting

Twitter has been embraced as the social media platform of choice for medical meetings. The meeting organizers create hashtags, KOLs tweet, and even patients are engaged. The rarer the disease, the more the patient knows via this medium. However, in 2015, we foresee growth in the area of KOL social networks around medical meetings, and in general faculty-led learning. Those networks will disseminate information within their networks and discuss things that are currently discussed in person, but in a complaint and secure manner. This will change the way data presentations, KOL management and faculties are created and managed. Companies like within3 and Clinical Mind will play a part in this.

### Moving from Dabbling to Engaging in Social Media

From a pure communications, advertising, and marketing perspective, the pharmaceutical industry has dabbled in a number of social media platforms.

Twitter has been embraced by the corporate communications function to blast out press releases, socially responsible acts committed by the firm, and medical meeting information. However, there is little engagement. This should change now that the FDA has provided guidance on the use of limited-character platforms.

Paid social will grow as more and more media planners come to grips with this medium, especially at drug launch. Planned and managed properly, paid social can be a great vehicle for targeting patients with an unbranded message for disease awareness campaigns. There will still be challenges in using this medium for branded media, primarily due to Important Safety Information (ISI) requirements.

The use of YouTube is a requisite now in most marketing plans. However, it is tied mainly to MOA or KOL videos. Tools such as <http://www.storyvine.com/> are now enabling the capture of true patient/user-generated content that can be moderated and put through the same legal and regulatory framework that exists for other content.

Engaging HCPs in their own social media

environments is also becoming a big part of the marketing mix. Doctor social networks such as Doximity, M3, and Sermo are going beyond the survey and looking at ways to partner with industry on content, media, and engagement. This trend will continue to grow in 2015.

From a patient perspective, the biggest opportunity for pharma will be with Facebook as it begins to hone its healthcare strategy.

Even though pharma already has a presence on Facebook, pharma is all over the map with regard to Facebook communities.

There are unbranded and branded communities, as well as communities based on partnerships with third parties.


Pharma has created product pages, such as <https://www.facebook.com/Podhaler> and <https://www.facebook.com/GilanyaGO>, disease awareness campaigns like <https://www.facebook.com/DRIVE4COPD>, and unbranded presences such as <https://www.facebook.com/merckengage>.

Pharma should look to truly engage the patient on these communities. By partnering with Facebook, pharma companies could:

- ▶ Provide better, up-to-date product and scientific information in a patient-centric language.
- ▶ Work with advocacy communities on Facebook to raise awareness of a disease.
- ▶ Expand the use of Facebook to reach specific audiences, such as rare-disease communities who are very active on Facebook.

### In Summary

The marketing function of the pharmaceutical industry needs to begin focusing on changing its thinking around social media, to more of an engagement-oriented model and less around advertising and promotion. Social should be viewed as an integral part of the overall marketing mix and not silo'd or being the domain of corporate communications.

Granted, this relegates the use of social media to a couple of areas, such as those outlined above. But that is much better than doing nothing at all, or doing it badly. 

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