

“I Want My Brand on Social!”

Social media is ubiquitous.

Everyone is on it in some capacity. We are all hands-on experts; but social is very nuanced. How do I leverage creative, messaging, audience, device, time of day, etc., to connect with my customers? A successful start requires focus on a strategy—one that is as individual as the person you are trying to reach.

Being present on social media creates many opportunities for brands to connect with customers intimately. Building relationships with them requires commitment, and participating in their community can be challenging. A successful social media strategy takes careful planning, and ample time to develop, implement and positively impact your brand. Time and perceived risk, along with various other hurdles, often lead Pharma brands to shy away from community and relationship building and focus solely on familiar media tactics in social channels, such as banners and other paid promotional ads. This can be a missed opportunity.

Authentic connections with your customers can improve brand perception, loyalty, advocacy, and result in increased lifetime value. Additionally, Pharma participation in social networks has grown significantly in recent years. According to Unmetric, the top 16 pharmaceutical companies have corporate presences on LinkedIn and Twitter, demonstrating the confidence in the mediums and how social is maturing into strong solutions for enterprise businesses. 1

The initial uncertainty and regulatory challenges of social's earlier years have been overcome by the ever-evolving capabilities of the social platforms to court Pharma and satisfy legal requirements set forth in the draft FDA guidelines. The social course has been paved for Pharma brands and is shifting to support meaningful dialogue with key stakeholders.

In addition to the positive connections to your brand, social media drives efficiencies. The cost savings realized by providing customer service through social channels and warm transferring appropriate calls to your call center in theory would reduce overall call volume and the cost associated. More on social media and customer service later.

Let's Build a Relationship

How do you start to connect with your customers on social media? The same way you



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would with any new relationship—by getting to know your audience: understand what they're interested in, the things they don't like, how they feel about current events. What makes them tick? How do they feel about your brand and view your competitors?

In order to realize the benefits of a successful social strategy, you have to study your customers and know them as well as you would know an intimate friend. Start by reviewing existing market research. Determine where there are behavioral and attitudinal gaps and fill them. Be direct and ask for their opinions, conduct surveys. Your customers will appreciate your effort to understand their pain points and how best to connect with and service them.

Understanding the group dynamic is crucial. Individuals operate much differently than groups of people. How do your customers interact with each other? What do they talk about? How do they talk to each other? What language do they use (are they formal or colloquial)? What is the tone?

Social listening is a powerful tool to understand your audience's interactions and relationships. It can help you determine how you can authentically engage on the groups' terms. Ongoing social listening can also help evolve your communication strategy and serve as a barometer for your engagement success.

Joining the Conversation

Now that you understand your customer

and the group dynamic, you can focus on developing a social strategy that revolves around their needs and interests, while helping achieve your business goals. A successful strategy should put the customers' journey at the center and ease their pain points.

Where can you most effectively connect with your customers, engage in conversation and, if appropriate, solve their problems? How does your brand fit into the dialogue without feeling forced? Where do you have authority and permission to engage? The answers to these questions will help guide how and when you join the conversation and help you plan your content needs and editorial calendar.

Where should you publish your content? Do you need to create a community dedicated to the population you are trying to connect with? You will find that the “if you build it, they will come” philosophy does not apply to a brand's social community, no matter how great your strategy and content.

Engaging a community where they already are is often the best way to reach your customers.

If you are serving a niche audience, or a community that doesn't already exist, paid social media ads and other media channels play an important role to aid discovery of your content and community. Use paid media, as well as your owned channels, to invite customers to join the conversation and draw them into your community. Use the input from your initial research and social listening to determine the most persuasive approach, content and offers.

Developing, implementing, and optimizing a strategy that drives meaningful relationships can take time. The process is rewarding; pharma brands deliver against their core values and connect more intimately with customers. The strong customer relationships you invest in now have the potential to deliver benefits long into the future.

The Need for Content

How much content do you need? This will vary greatly by customer. Many cite the 10-4-1 rule as the best practice for publishing content. The 10-4-1 rule focuses on striking balance when publishing content on social media. For every 15 posts, 10 should be content written/sourced externally, 4 should be unique content written by you, and 1 should be “promotional.” Keep in mind that this is a suggestion. The best practice is to create your own best practice since each audience is different and your content should reflect that nuance.

This also applies to determine best times to publish content. For example, conventional wisdom may dictate posting content during waking hours on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. If you find your customers are most active during evenings vs. the weekend, logic would dictate this is the optimal time to reach them.

Taking the Relationship to the Next Level

The social relationship, like any other good relationship, is not a set it and forget it situation. They require effort and are most successful when there is open and honest dialogue. These relationships require regular attention, a long-term commitment and continuous optimization. Learn from your customers’ conversations, assess which creative is most engaging,

and keep things fresh with a steady stream of content.

Communication is the essence of any community. There must be a reason for your customers to come back and remain engaged. Pharma-focused communities require ongoing monitoring for adverse events (AEs) and inappropriate user-generated content. Brands may feel overwhelmed by the perceived risk or the resourcing burden of social community management. Fortunately, it is much easier today to find partners who are experts in Pharma community management and can simplify AE monitoring, community management and moderation. Partners can provide 24/7 community management that incorporates layers of human and automated moderation, based on a brand’s established guidelines.

If your brand is particularly nervous about community moderation and user-generated content, Facebook may be the best social channel for you to get started. Facebook provides the most robust moderation tools and highest level of control for Pharma brands. It also has the largest audience, almost one-third of the global population.

Social and CRM

Brands can continue to deepen relationships with customers and provide them an even more personalized experience by incorporating social into their Customer Relationship Management (CRM) program. Social CRM is the practice of using social media channels and technology to manage and analyze customer communication and engagement throughout the customer lifecycle.

Social CRM can enhance your relationship and marketing activities across all channels. Traditional CRM typically collects data such as contact history, response rates and demographics. By overlaying data available through social media, such as a customer’s brand sentiment, type of content they’re interested in/engaging with, other brands they engage with, etc., you can enrich an individual customer’s profile. This enhanced view of your customers can help validate and refine existing segmentation. The additional context also helps marketers develop individualized communications across the customer’s channels of choice.

Customer Service

As mentioned above, customer service is an area where social channels can help deepen relationships with your customers and should be part of your overall social strategy. Social media and technology are part of people’s daily lives, and they expect the brands they

support to be there. Consider how much time you spend on both your mobile device and social media—it’s probably more than you’d like to admit.

VentureBeat reports that 49.4% of consumers would rather message a business than call. Customer service facilitated through social media provides value that goes beyond convenience. Meeting your customers where they are is ideal and necessary. In-bound customer queries can be highly meaningful engagement points, and positive service experiences will build brand advocacy. These are opportunities to surprise and delight your customers with exceptional service.

Messenger apps, like Facebook Messenger, are a great way to manage customer service in social. They facilitate 1:1 communication and reduce the risk of highly visible adverse event mentions or public disputes. Messenger gives brands an opportunity to employ a personal touch to help customers.

For example, a patient may have a question about how to use a medication with a more complicated route of administration, such as an injection. Brands can respond through messenger and deliver step-by-step instructions based on preapproved materials, direct the patient to an instructional video, or connect while the patient remains in their channel of choice.

Seeing the Rewards in Your Relationships

As you begin discovery to determine the right approach and resources required for your social initiatives, it is important to remember that your program will only be as effective as the strategy behind it. Developing, implementing, and optimizing a strategy that drives meaningful relationships can take time. The process is rewarding; pharma brands deliver against their core values and connect more intimately with customers. The strong customer relationships you invest in now have the potential to deliver benefits long into the future.

Social provides a platform for communication with and access to your audience. You can listen for audience response and be relevant and timely for patients, caregivers, and professionals. ^{PV}

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