

# Commanders & Chiefs: INNOVATORS

Chief innovators provide their insights on what innovation means to them, keys to driving innovation, and what it takes to foster an innovation-driven company culture.

## Defining Innovation

**GARDE.** We define innovation as breaking business barriers through measurable and unique client-focused solutions. These solutions are by no means static; they are dynamic and shift with time, resources, needs, and the business climate. Innovation requires being nimble and flexible. We execute innovative approaches by offering a combination of skill sets and services. Our innovative approaches field a tightly integrated network of innovative individuals — a talent pool whose collective experiences, accomplishments, breadth of capabilities, and depth of understanding are unrivaled in the industry. We believe innovation makes the complex simple.

**MALLON.** Innovation is more than being creative; innovative ideas must be able to be implemented flawlessly, sustained continuously and evaluated frequently. We define innovation as new products, services, or experiences that spring forth from real-world data to improve patient engagement, optimize support services, and inform brand decisions for our clients. Teams must align with a clear focus on “what are we solving for?” Innovation must include insights directly from patients on the front lines and a knowledge of their support ecosystem to understand the interdependencies that might impact their ability to successfully manage their therapy.

**VANDEBELT.** I define innovation as changing the status quo for the better. Innovation is about thinking and learning.

I believe it is important to continually find new and better ways to get things done that expand our knowledge, deepen our understanding, increase quality and achieve better outcomes.

Oracle defines innovation as an invention, a new product, or a new service that is successful in the market. What I like about this definition is that successful in the market implies to me that the new product or service is being used and providing value.

**VANDERVEER.** Defining innovation is easy. Webster says it’s the “introduction of something new.” But what?

I use three main criteria in categorizing innovations in pharmaceutical marketing. First, is the innovation a genuinely new creation, or are we “introducing” something into pharmaceutical marketing that has long been successfully used in other verticals? The latter is typically the safer and more efficient way to innovate. Second, is the innovation genuinely useful, or is it just a “bright, shiny new thing?” For example, the introduction of behavioral economics into pharmaceutical marketing several years ago was certainly recognized as innovative, but its practical applications were limited at best. Finally, is the innovation limited in scope, or does it provide an entirely new way of thinking about something? Think-Gen’s Habit Engineering, for example, takes our marketing focus off influencing prescribing decisions and redirects it toward creating and supporting prescribing habits.

## Driving Innovation

**GARDE.** We drive innovation through unique thinking regarding the healthcare consumer journey. We don’t think about people as patients, we think about them as people with individual perspectives and challenges that need to be overcome. We also do the same for caregivers and family influencers in healthcare decision-making. Healthcare is not easy, and as an agency we understand the lifetime journey of healthcare consumers. We have operationalized this ability through partnerships, such as with real-time market research entities that have helped our clients to continuously gain insights into the mindset of healthcare consumers across multiple demographics. We are able to gain insights on psychographics, marketing channels, social media influence, and changing trends. We have applied this innovative approach to gather insights across women’s health, diagnostic therapies for multiple disease states, preventative health, Medicare coverage, and the general trends

for medical cannabis. The ability to gather data insights allows us to quickly modify the consumer journey map, which in turn leads to more impactful tactical solutions with better outcomes for consumers and ROI for our clients.

**MALLON.** We continuously ask, “how can we improve patients’ ability to successfully manage their therapy?” In doing so, we have developed a proprietary Insight Incubator process. Qualitative and quantitative insights are captured daily on the phones through patient and provider conversations, in person by our clinical nurse educators, and through ongoing call monitoring, team conference calls, and advisory boards. We systematically pull this information as well as the barriers and aspects of a client’s product or therapy that may need to be addressed. We provide the client with concise, meaningful analytics and insights on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis (based on client preference), as well as conduct more in-depth quarterly business reviews to assess the business.

**VANDEBELT.** Innovation can be driven from many angles, but we see it being driven primarily by market insight and technology. As a software company, we invest heavily in pushing the boundaries of technology to constantly challenge the current state. One exciting example of this is with the application of artificial intelligence to clinical and safety processes — there is so much potential there. The second, and probably the most important driver, is the voice of our customers. Unless software is solving real problems in the market, it’s not actually useful. And, the only way to understand where the pain lies and where innovation is needed is to talk to your customers and the market. That is where the real insight comes from that drives innovation.

**VANDERVEER.** I drive innovation by using three key strategies that I have learned in the past. First, I am constantly spinning the radar scope, looking for great ideas that are working

successfully in other markets that have not yet found their way into our vertical.

For example, years ago, I ported Micromarketing, a vision that I discovered in Rapp and Collins' seminal book, *The Great Marketing Turnaround*, into our industry from consumer marketing.

Second, I am bringing onto the team the leading expert that I have identified in each of the innovative ways of thinking about marketing. These are professionals who have literally "written the book" on their areas of expertise and have 10 years or more experience in the application of their innovations.

Third, I am working with these experts to educate our clients on their innovative ways of thinking about pharmaceutical marketing. Presentations at industry conferences, in-house workshops and seminars, etc. simultaneously bring the clients up to speed on these innovations and introduce them to the relevant services that we offer.

## Fostering an Innovation-Driven Company

**GARDE.** The keys to fostering an innovation-driven company are highlighted by hiring the right type of staff — plain and simple — and by providing them the opportunity as well as training and resources to think differently. It's also key to not rely on the pharma marketing status quo and same old thinking.

We believe that taking best practices from CPG segments combined with health and wellness marketing approaches will drive innovation. So will being proactive in thinking and applying strategic imperatives in light of emerging channels such as point of care (POC), telemedicine, and social media, and disruptors such as Amazon. Companies need to have a stable of consumers, life-sciences professionals, health and wellness experts, market access resources, diagnostic-experienced folks, health technology partners, and folks familiar with the distribution landscape across your team. This integrated team allows us to focus on creating innovative and relevant human-to-human experiences for all stakeholders. For example, POC imperatives need to capitalize on the consumer/family caregiver mindset in the healthcare professional's office without losing the human element. It's not a patient brochure or video, it's a deeply emotional and vital human experience. Emerging telemedicine techniques are not just about medical technology, but also about the need to provide consumers and family caregivers the experiences they crave that go beyond the disease, patient condition, or the drug/device solution. Social media strategies need a diverse team. One day you have it all figured out, and

the next day you need a strategy for TikTok. Innovation never stops.

**MALLON.** Innovation has always been an integral part of our culture. We provide every employee in every role with a process, resources, and tools to be innovative — whether that means improving an internal company process or improving how an individual performs his or her specific role. We developed a dynamic, cross-functional program that included a series of innovation labs to solve challenging problems, developed an innovation toolkit to provide our teams with the resources to creatively brainstorm and approach business challenges, and ultimately apply the key learnings. We shouldn't just tell people to be innovative; we have to give them the tools and training to do it.

**VANDEBELT.** Quite simply, you need reliable information, time for individuals to think, and teams to bounce ideas off and to test innovations. It's important to focus on and invest in what needs to change in both the near and distant future. Each company needs to sort out how to fit this into the company operating systems. I encourage all to tap their IQ, EQ, and curiosity to sort out beliefs versus facts and ask probing questions to uncover potential biases. Reach out and learn from those who "own the pain" to have brutally honest information and understand the current state. Create a culture that is open-minded and rewards the willingness to change direction when a blind spot is uncovered.

**VANDERVEER.** I have found that there are three keys to fostering an innovation-driven company. First and foremost, you need to convince management to take the risk of focusing on innovation and believing that revenues will follow. If you innovate correctly and efficiently, and get recognized as being an innovative company, they most certainly will. Second and relatedly, the company needs to provide its most innovative professionals with the time and other resources necessary to innovate. A company that relies on innovation only coming from team members whose major remit is managing day-to-day business most certainly will remain stuck in the present. The third and final key to fostering an innovation-driven company is to show each and every team member how to use productized versions of your company's innovations to meet their clients' marketing needs. Most clients don't want to buy innovations. They want to buy recognizable improvements over things that they are currently buying. Show them how your company's innovations do just that, and watch the revenue roll in. **PV**

## The Commanders & Chiefs



**TIMMY GARDE**

Chief Innovation Leader,  
LevLane

LevLane Life Sciences builds emotional connections. The agency offers a unique model that allows its teams to crack the code on linking brands and all of their constituents by applying expert thinking across the industry's eco-system — provider, patient, payer, et al — for unique, ROI-focused solutions.



**ABIGAIL MALLON**

Senior VP, Strategic Account  
Management and Innovation  
and Chief Compliance Officer,  
VMS BioMarketing

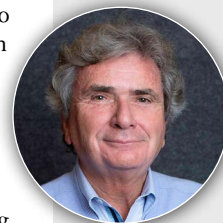
VMS BioMarketing provides clinical educator solutions focused on empowering healthcare providers and patients through product support, education, and training. The company designs and delivers patient-support solutions that improve adherence and help providers ensure an effective patient start after the therapy decision has been made.



**KATHERINE VANDEBELT**

Global Head of Clinical  
Innovation,  
Oracle Health Sciences

Oracle Health Sciences helps companies get therapies to market faster and detect risks earlier by offering a complete set of clinical and safety solutions that support critical processes throughout the clinical development life-cycle — from study design and startup to conduct, close-out, and post-marketing.



**RICHARD VANDERVEER**

Chief Innovation Officer,  
ThinkGen

ThinkGen delivers actionable results that help clients thrive in competitive and complex markets by bringing together both market research expertise from the vendor side, and long-term marketing and sales experience from the client side.