



Robin Robinson



Collaboration within the COMMERCIALIZATION PROCESS

Collaboration internally is as important to success as external partnerships.

According to a recent Strategy& report about how to overcome industry obstacles with a cross-functional strategy, beyond the many external challenges that pharma is facing that require collaboration with outside partners, pharma also must address divides within its internal commercial culture in order to be successful.

As an industry that has long operated through silos that separate R&D, commercial, production, and supply chain, as well as each of those silos being walled-off from external-facing functions that are responsible for managing relationships with regulators, policymakers, the medical community, and

the rest of the industry, it's time for pharma to review its internal processes to create a more efficient patient-access process. These internal conditions affect drug approval times and pricing, influence support for specific drugs by the medical community, and seriously hinder financial performance.

The report states pharmaceutical companies need to restructure their operating models in a way that brings all of these interdependent functions together and it suggests using critical teams. These teams should be directly responsible for gathering information, developing insights, and drawing up strategic plans about the facets of the pharmaceutical business

that are often overlooked in the formal organizational structure, namely: regulatory affairs, pricing and market access, government affairs, and medical affairs. These four categories are the subteams of a pharma company's critical team.

As a concept, critical teams are not new; most pharmaceutical companies already rely on experts in external healthcare industry activities for ad hoc strategic advice and direction. But that does not go far enough; it fails to apply the critical team as a bridge across key functions. Thus, the ability of the team to effectively advance the needs of the entire organization is significantly diminished.

Challenges of Cross-functional Collaboration

There are many other challenges to cross-functional collaboration, including getting these four subteams to work together so that not only will a drug meet FDA approval, but payers will also be willing to reimburse it.

"One challenge for the commercial process is the need to collaborate to develop a product that would not only receive FDA approval but also have a product profile that would be covered by payers," says Curt Staab, VP, emerging life sciences network, TGaS Advisors. "Bringing in commercial expertise too late to impact the value proposition was listed as one of the top challenges in our study."



The collaboration across commercial disciplines requires understanding the natural interdependencies between medical, field resourcing, public relations, advertising, as well as consumer, patient, and payer conversations.

AMY HUTNIK
inVentiv Health



TGaS Advisors conducted a study with 15 chief commercial officers of pre-commercial companies that showed that a market access leader is one of the first commercial hires, necessary for collaboration with clinical to develop the product profile and payer value.

Vendor collaboration can also be a challenge, Mr. Staab adds. Vendor collaboration goes well when the partner is completing defined tasks with oversight from skilled in-house employees. Project management skills are vital to coordinate the cross-functional collaboration. CCOs from the study all agreed that good project management skills are needed but were mixed on whether it is better to use internal resources or a PMO vendor.

“One CCO stated he had ‘outsourced everything and it didn’t go well because we didn’t know the business well enough to guide the vendors,’” Mr. Staab reports.

Cross-functional collaboration inside the walls of the manufacturer is complex, says Amy Hutnik, chief growth officer, inVentiv Health. This makes it very challenging for client partners to integrate and collaborate internally.

“This era is demanding collaboration and efficiency due to both economic pressures and audience expectations,” Ms. Hutnik says. “The collaboration across commercial disciplines requires curiosity and savvy across the commercial spectrum and understanding the natural interdependencies between medical, field resourcing, public relations, advertising, as well as consumer, patient, and payer conversations.”

Within and outside organizations, it is a difficult process to know what information to share, with whom, when, and under what circumstances, not only because of proprietary concerns but also in response to regulatory and competitive issues, says Erik Dalton, executive VP, Healthcasts.

The most effective remedy for this is buy-in from the leadership at the top, which sets the tone for intelligent collaboration and an understanding of the overall benefits gained from cross-functional collaboration.

“Getting people on board early helps, and when streamlined collaboration happens the commercial process is more of a success,” Mr. Dalton says.

External collaborations too can be extremely beneficial if those partnerships can assist with information sharing across the organization or to streamline processes, for instance, by supplying HCP-level data on marketing tactics that can be shared with the field force, delivering additional customer insights that can be used across marketing strategies, or initiating turnkey development of new digital marketing assets leveraging established mes-



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SHAUN URBAN
Ogilvy CommonHealth
Worldwide



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ASHIK DESAI
Outcome Health

saging or content being used by the field force or other departments to complement efforts.

Life-sciences companies are not the only companies struggling with internal and external collaborations. Large network agency members must collaborate among their various business units, and these alliances are not without their challenges.

“In general, we have observed limited collaboration between the functional entities of network agencies,” says Kevin Julian, managing director, Accenture Life Sciences North America. “As a result, the client suffers from the number of handoffs between these functional groups.”

Global clients have also reported challenges with local agency entities presenting different solutions in different markets, without connection to the global product strategy, he adds.

Large agency networks try to drive collaboration across myriad agency stakeholders on behalf of clients, but those solutions are sometimes exposed by the fact that all those teams, while under the same network umbrella, are actually incited primarily by their own team’s discrete success, Ms. Hutnik says.

She suggests using data-enabled approaches to design efficient, effective planning, implementation, and optimization across channels for clients. “That requires nimbleness to leverage expertise from all communications disciplines in real time, on behalf of what the

data tells us, and what will amplify our clients’ brand performance,” she says.

“For agencies to collaborate most effectively across a network, a few guiding principles must exist,” says Shaun Urban, managing partner, Ogilvy. “First, the best interest of the client and brand must always be front and center. Next, the culture across the network and within the agencies must be collaborative rather than competitive to fortify this client-first mindset. Incentives that are dominated by network performance — rather than individual agency performance — and client satisfaction are key to drive the desired collaborative behaviors across the network. And lastly, a mobile talent environment must be created and nurtured by management for both the benefit of the client as well as the growth and development of agency staff.”

Maintaining Brand Integrity Across Multi-channel Collaboration

Marketing in a multi-channel world often requires brands having different agencies managing different aspects of the campaign and the challenge is to communicate between agencies effectively so that the brand story remains intact across all functions that handle it.

These challenges can be met in several ways, including setting the brand story early in the process, using a patient-centric strategy that provides a meaningful experience.

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CURT STAAB
TGaS Advisors



“Success in this landscape means using the channels as an advantage to enrich the story, which requires an investment of time and alignment on the brand story on the front end,” says Ashik Desai, executive VP, business growth and analytics, Outcome Health. “Marketers should not be figuring the brand story out along the way.”

Once the story is set, he says, the multi-channel world should work in surround, not in silo. In order to do so, he suggests making sure that each brand story is not only consistent, but also appropriate for the platform in which it is delivered.

Content is king and arguably the most important asset for a brand, Mr. Urban says. “A rigorous and thoughtful content strategy and management system is the single most important aspect to ensure a brand’s story is integrated and consistent,” he says. “This holds true for brands with several agency partners or for brands that work with just a select few agencies.”

Mr. Urban suggests employing a lead



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ERIK DALTON
Healthcasts

agency model with an agency expert in content strategy and management, and a communications plan that aligns communication objectives — behavior change, content, audience, and channels — as the blueprint that all agency partners should follow.

In an increasingly competitive market, a strong patient-centric engagement strategy owned by the product marketing organization is a critical differentiator, Mr. Julian says. A comprehensive strategy is integrated to deliver customer needs, focuses on data driven insights, and emphasizes a personalized engagement model.

The era of specialization has shaped not just client-side organizational structure but agencies as well, and has resulted in a channel-centric marketing framework as the de facto approach, says Prodeep Bose, executive VP, growth and innovation, The Bloc.

“In the evolution from brand advertising to brand experience, the idea of brand integrity must evolve from style sheets to an experiential model that defines customer experience,” he says.

A brand experience that is meaningful in the context of a customer must be rooted in customer-centric planning processes that depend on a customer experience lead who defines and maintains a stra-

tegic framework for brand experience across all channels. Whether user experience for the website, messaging cadence for an email program, or sales call planning, maintaining the integrity of the brand experience needs a champion. Such a champion needs to be established in a trusted advisory role to ensure that the expression of multichannel strategy into tactics is in support of a well-defined experience framework, Mr. Bose says.

The key to successful collaboration across internal teams relies on constant sharing of information.

“There should be an understanding of how to share material across teams to make sure this is happening once messaging and segmentation is approved,” Mr. Dalton says. “Once the C-suite has set a strategy and structure for internal, and sometimes external, command and control to keep everyone singing from the same hymnal, we need ongoing sharing.”

This information then flows downward to guide not only the relevant marketing campaigns but the internal understanding of what the company stands for.

There has to be a handful of “playing well in the sandbox” rules that ensure brand message integrity and consistency across brands for the good of the corporate image. For instance, a visual aid can be repurposed for a digital NPP program, videos can be used in multiple formats and across multiple channels, access materials can be pushed out digitally to extend awareness of patient-support initiatives. ^{PV}



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