

Be Where the Consumer Is: A Digital Marketing Imperative

- To get their messages across, marketers must reach people through many different forums, based on what the consumer wants and expects.

Pharmaceutical marketing has undergone a profound change in the digital era. Research shows 89% of people in North America alone are online, which means digital marketing must be front and center of any campaign or brand promotion. When marketers are considering digital, they must assess what that means to their strategies. Social media is a forum few can afford to overlook, given the huge proportion of users. An April 2019 statistic shows 4.4 billion people are active Internet users and 3.5 billion active social media users. However, more traditional forums, such as print media and TV, cannot be ignored given that 10% of the U.S. adult population does not use the Internet, according to survey data from the Pew Research Center.

So, it's clear that to reach consumers and healthcare professionals, pharmaceutical companies must stay attuned to technology trends while at the same time ensuring to continue to deliver authentic content.

Technology Trends

Social media offers a huge opportunity to tap into consumer thinking. But finding relevant information can be like finding a needle in a haystack. AI makes it possible to carry out social listening in real time to enable marketers to identify relevant conversations about diseases and treatments. It also allows marketers to target messages to patients based on their specific conditions and experiences with treatments. For example, AI allows marketers to find people's preferences in terms of content, channels and when they want to receive information.

Progressive digital marketers are increasingly tapping into blockchain technologies to track the placement and viewing of their ads. One of the benefits of blockchain is it allows marketers to determine whether clicks are made by customers or bots. It also gives consumers greater control over how their data can be used, helping to improve trust between consumers and marketers.

Crucially, blockchain and AI can also help marketers to better target where their adver-

tising is run and thereby reduce spending on advertising. Segmented ad targeting, enabled by big data and AI, makes it easier to focus advertising where they will get the best return on investment.

Another key digital capability that marketers will need to leverage is programmatic advertising. There is growing investment in programmatic advertising by many industries, but pharma has been slower to move to this form of advertising and marketing, which accounts for just 4% to 5% of pharma budgets. One of the reasons for this lag is concerns over data privacy. However, collaboration with technology partners adept at dealing with privacy issues does present a way to deal with this issue.

Chatbots are becoming another key digital avenue for reaching consumers. While the technology itself has been around for a couple of decades, AI has helped to advance the capabilities. Today, more and more websites are making use of chatbots including in healthcare. Chatbot apps have emerged, such as Your.MD, which uses AI to help consumers find health information. One of the key benefits of chatbots is that, because they use AI they can be personalized to the consumer or patient.

For the pharma marketer, chatbots can be leveraged for various purposes, such as customer support, refill reminders, providing patients with clear labeling information, and even beyond-the-pill programs, such as managing adherence.

Augmented and virtual reality solutions are also becoming a growth market for digital marketing. One company that has tapped into VR is GSK for its migraine product Excedrin. Migraine sufferers used a VR headset to program their symptoms and then shared those results with family and others. This enhanced understanding about migraines and led to an increase in sales.

Keeping the Customer at the Center

Today's consumer is both more informed

and technologically savvy. That means they expect to be able to get information about disease and treatments, and they want to be reached through digital forums. The problem is that digital content isn't always reliable. That's where pharmaceutical marketers play a key role – ensuring patients receive accurate and timely information, through the right forums and when they want it.

The ways in which marketers reach their audiences will continue to grow as customer expectations change. Pharmaceutical companies must ensure they are where their customers are and that they are providing them with the information they want and need. Crucially, that means marketers need to build a close connection with the patient and not simply rely on physicians to provide disease and product information.

So, what does that mean in practice?

Content marketing — blogging, white papers, and website articles — is a popular way to share expertise and ideas, with many organizations paying close attention to using keywords through search engine optimization (SEO) that will boost exposure. Pharmaceutical companies have been slower to adopt content marketing but if managed properly it can be a highly effective way to reach consumers/patients.

However, content marketing must focus on the needs and expectations of the customer, not on what the company is trying to promote. That means focusing on conditions, symptoms, behaviors, etc., and providing valuable insights, not specifically brand focused. Content must be differentiated to be of interest to consumers and tap into the concerns of consumers. One way that marketers can and are using content marketing is by sharing patient stories, using different forums and ways to promote those voices — video blogs, YouTube and different social media forums such as Facebook and Instagram, etc.

It's also important to consider how consumers access content and product information. A majority of people (80%) access the internet from their mobile devices, so it's vital that websites are mobile friendly.

Reaching consumers or patients through

digital touchpoints can advance healthcare knowledge and ultimately improve health outcomes. Healthcare apps are a proven way to reach patients/consumers with useful content. Companies that have used these technologies include Merck and Pfizer.

Merck gave out dual healthcare apps to providers and patients providing medical content, treatment information, and the lat-

est knowledge on diseases and symptoms. The apps helped to improve the company's connection with physicians and consumers. Meanwhile, Pfizer's LivingWith healthcare app makes it easy for cancer patients and their physicians, as well as support groups and caregivers, to connect remotely.

Pharmaceutical companies must be ready with a strong digital marketing approach.

After all, information about their products is out there whether they like it or not. That information can be negative – for example, if a patient had a bad experience with a drug he or she may well share that experience on social media. Thus, it's vital that pharma marketers effectively communicate the benefits of their products through digital forums and with reliable, trusted information. PV

EXECUTIVE VIEWPOINTS



**Arun Divakaruni,
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Providing Value to Patients

Digital health tools are useful only to the degree they provide value to the patient. Several digital tools are already making a meaningful difference. For example, some allow personal connections within rare disease patient communities, spurring advocacy, research, and hope. Chatbots now engage patients on condition-related issues they may feel uncomfortable talking about with healthcare professionals. Location-based apps have been used to help people with ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease find a clean bathroom when dealing with a flare. Meditation apps can even offer some patients with insomnia or anxiety an alternative to medication. I believe we will reach a point where digital health tools will help patients manage most, if not all, diseases.

Creating Digital Stewardship

The future of digital health marketing will look very similar to what we're seeing now in consumer packaged goods. Health companies have amassed so much data: the key is using those data effectively — with appropriate protections in place, of course. As physician social networks mature, it will only be a matter of time before "pilot"

marketing programs become standard practice. As a healthcare professional, I hope our industry becomes an example of digital stewardship because we are engaging in serious medical issues, and we must avoid the spamming and intrusive behaviors we've all experienced digitally in the past.



Colleen Carter

Head of Marketing and
Business Development,
Fingerpaint

Creating a Personal Brand Experience

Digital tools and data allow us to go beyond simple engagement. These tools allow us to know the patients better than they know themselves. And with that information, we can focus on optimizing a personal brand experience for them — one that anticipates their needs and objectives and considers their biases and preferences. We can dive deeper into what motivates them and is of value to them, accelerating the journey to adoption, adherence, and, ultimately, advocacy.

Transforming Digital Into a Human Experience

Personalized solutions will be sought out and, in very real ways, demanded. Today, digital marketing tools leverage AI to function, behave, and even speak more like a human — and they do so in real time. For example, imagine a world where marketers will be able to infer the intent of

the physician, patient, and care-partner and then reach out at the very best time and in the most effective way to deliver a personalized message anticipating an individual's need; or an AI rep making follow-up calls after an office visit. The possibilities are endless when we consider that AI can transform a digital engagement into a human experience.



Brandie Linfante

Senior VP, Engagement
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AI and its Future Promise

We still haven't reached the full potential of AI regarding client trials. While AI, machine-based learning, and analytics have helped with advancements in trial design, patient recruitment, and monitoring systems for study adherence. It's a work in progress that holds much promise for future advancements.

Navigating the Challenges

While AI is poised to transform several industries, including healthcare, there are some big challenges to achieve seamless integration; these include limitations in available data, accuracy of data, interoperability issues and solutions that can work together in real time, data-security concerns, trouble with improving the level of empathy, and finding appropriate recourse when AI goes wrong.