healthcare's comparatively strict regulations may be too burdensome for the e-commerce giant to make a meaningful impact. And drugs, unlike most goods Amazon sells, cannot be shipped together with other products.

It's not unusual to see a disrupter in a marketplace spark established players to up their game, which is what is happening in the case of CVS. According to PwC, CVS Health operates a pharmacy within three miles of 80% of Americans. Such ubiquity in neighborhoods gives retail pharmacies the chance to redefine themselves, seizing more central roles as key players and partners in the new health economy.

Analysts say CVS Health's bid to acquire health insurer Aetna is a smart way of staving off competition from Amazon.com. The reported $66 billion deal between CVS and Aetna would be the largest in health insurance history. The move is viewed by many on Wall Street as a strategic play to bolster the defenses of both companies against a potential move by Amazon into the industry.

To counter Amazon's potential encroachment into its space, CVS announced that it plans to bring prescriptions to customers' doors with next-day delivery starting in 2018, akin to Amazon's competitive shipping method for Prime members. According to company reports, free delivery will be available within hours for prescription orders, as well as a selection of OTC products, starting in New York in December. Next in line are Miami, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco in 2018, followed by the rest of the country. CVS also reported that it would be partnering with Walgreens Boots Alliance in starting the 30,000-store network in an attempt to reduce costs both for the company and for pharmacy benefit management (PBM) members.

According to RBC Capital Markets Analyst George Hill in a CNBC interview, Amazon's ability to impact the business over the near to mid term is low, but the ability to impact the stock is high. Further, CVS would lose the ability to control its own destiny if it didn't do something. Mr. Hill projected this could be as much $260 billion in revenue in 2019.

Wal-Mart got into the pharmacy business with a $4 generic back in 2006, which took a lot of market cap out of the drug retailers, analysts say. Wal-Mart eventually got into mail order in 2007-2008 and had 4,000 locations to pick up a prescription, yet analysts don't really think of the company as being that disruptive.

More Services

According to PwC research, consumers would embrace more services if offered by their retail pharmacies. And yet, pharmacies are just beginning to leverage their assets and develop business models to relieve the pressure of filling more prescriptions, more quickly, at a lower cost. They say the value chain is being re-engineered by powerful global drivers — downward pressure on costs, increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, an aging population, surging consumerism, the embrace of value-based models, the arrival of new entrants, and transformative advances in technology.

PwC research found that one of the most valuable assets in delivering value-based solutions is the pharmacist, consistently named among the most trusted professionals in the health industry yet largely relegated to dispensing activities in the United States.

And with consumer expectations rising, tools that have classically been used in other consumer-facing industries will need to be applied more liberally to a healthcare setting to determine what, why and how services are delivered. PV