

# The Rise of the Virtual Rep

**F**or more than three decades, detailing has been one of the cornerstones of the pharmaceutical industry's communications with physicians. Thanks to recent advances in technology, what started out as face-to-face meetings between pharmaceutical sales representatives and physicians has evolved into a remote detail experience that reflects the same goal: a more fully informed prescriber.

The original method of detailing printed materials worked well for many years. But everything changed in 2010 when Apple released the iPad. The door to a virtual world opened as printed detail pieces could be converted into eDetails, an interactive digital version, which could be shown on a small portable electronic device. Instead of carrying a bag full of printed materials, the rep's iPad could now contain all the materials he or she would need for physicians' visits. The portability of the iPad made it better suited for the quick meetings reps often had with physicians when they were between seeing patients. Companies such as Veeva, Skura, IMS, Pitcher, and others developed complete customer relationship management (CRM) platforms to not only show eDetails but to capture data about what was shown, send emails, and document all the rep's interactions with the physician. Using the recorded analytics, the pharmaceutical companies could refine their messaging and provide physicians with more tailored and engaging presentations. These platforms became the standard method of detailing.

## Remote eDetailing

Several years ago, a new technology emerged, remote eDetailing. Through a video conference call, the rep presents the eDetail to the physician virtually. Because these meetings are scheduled, there is a better chance of them being uninterrupted, offering the opportunity for a more complete presentation. Physicians have found that after a virtual call, they retain the presented information better than when the rep presents in person. According to Veeva Systems, a leader in CRM platforms, a typical face-to-face call averages only two minutes.<sup>1</sup> When reps use remote eDetailing, their calls are two to eight times longer, with an average call of 14 minutes.<sup>2</sup> Another



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added benefit, by not having travel to meet in-person a rep can cover a larger territory and be able to get to those physicians who are in more remote locations. They also have the opportunity to meet with physicians in hospitals prohibiting in-person detailing. According to Veeva, 85% of physicians have expressed interest in meeting reps online.<sup>3</sup>

## Getting the Most from Remote

Typically, there are two ways reps can provide remote eDetailing to their physicians. Most of the major CRM platform companies, including Veeva, IQVIA, Pitcher, and Agnitio can enable this feature in the customer's existing CRM platform. Once enabled, a rep can schedule a virtual meeting, present approved content, and have the meeting's analytics captured to help the rep and the pharma company improve engagement efforts.

The second alternative is for reps to use Zoom, MS Teams, or another video conference platform to present their materials. The rep can open the content on his iPad or desktop computer and share his screen with the physician. This method does work, but it does not provide the same ease of use or provide a safeguard that only approved content is presented. While both a CRM platform and video conferencing afford the opportunity to show the needed content, there are differences. With

a video conference system, there is no oversight about what is being presented, nor is there any tracking or metrics coming from the meeting. Reps can use any documents they have on their computer. On a CRM platform, the rep only has approved content available, and analytics are captured for everything shown, all of which helps to ensure the CRM platform is more compliant.

While remote eDetailing has been available for several years, its value became even more apparent over the last 18 months. The COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for reps to visit physicians in person, leaving virtual meetings as the only option. According to statistics from Veeva, post-COVID eDetail virtual calls lasted an average of 19 minutes,<sup>2</sup> an increase of five minutes from the eDetailing that was done prior to the pandemic. This is particularly impressive considering pre-COVID face-to-face calls were averaging only two minutes.<sup>1</sup> Many physicians have already started using video conferencing to interact with their patients, so switching to virtual eDetailing was a natural transition for them.

In-person meetings will never be replaced, but a combination of face-to-face and remote eDetailing gives reps more powerful tools to communicate with physicians. According to Andy Fuchs, VP Commercial Strategy, Veeva Systems, "We believe this hybrid rep, this concept of using face-to-face strategically with digital engagements to supplement that relationship, will be the way forward." With these ongoing advancements in digital communications, the virtual rep is now better equipped to offer more detailed and comprehensive education to physicians, which in turn can only help those doctors provide better healthcare to the patients they serve. **PV**

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Veeva Systems Pulse Data Aug 2020 (US Data)

<sup>2</sup> Veeva Systems Pulse Data Sep 2020 (US Data)

<sup>3</sup> Veeva Systems, M3 Survey of 700+ HCPs 6/20

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