

# Pharmaceutical Sales Strategies Post-COVID-19: The Benefits of Virtual Engagement

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## **Pharmaceutical Sales Strategies Post-COVID-19: The Benefits of Virtual Engagement**

By **Ann Poorboy**  
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In less than a week, in the face of a pandemic, the pharmaceutical sales model changed forever. In-person healthcare provider (HCP) visits came to a screeching halt and brand marketers scrambled to find ways to educate and engage these providers remotely. While the pandemic may have taken us by surprise, we should acknowledge that, even before the pandemic, pharmaceutical sales teams faced significant challenges. Consider that:

- **Access to HCPs has been declining steadily over the past decade, as independent providers continue to merge into larger groups and networks**
- **Field representatives are working larger territories as their team counts decline. Many are offsetting this challenge by focusing on a smaller number of higher decile prescribers**
- **HCPs are finding it difficult to fully understand the risk and benefits of more complex specialty therapies in the absence of conversations with representatives**

One solution for these challenges is to engage HCPs – virtually. The idea of virtual engagement is not new. Articles written nearly a decade ago outline potential models for remote sales. In 2015, pharmaceutical solutions provider TrialCard launched its Virtual Engagement (VE) service, proving that this model was not only viable, it was highly successful. By the end of 2016, TrialCard VE had demonstrated proven results in the areas of:

- **Disease Awareness**
- **Branded Campaigns**
- **Vacant and Whitespace Territory Coverage**
- **Lead Generation Services for Orphan Drugs**

## **IN-PERSON ACCESS WILL NEVER RETURN TO 2019 LEVELS**

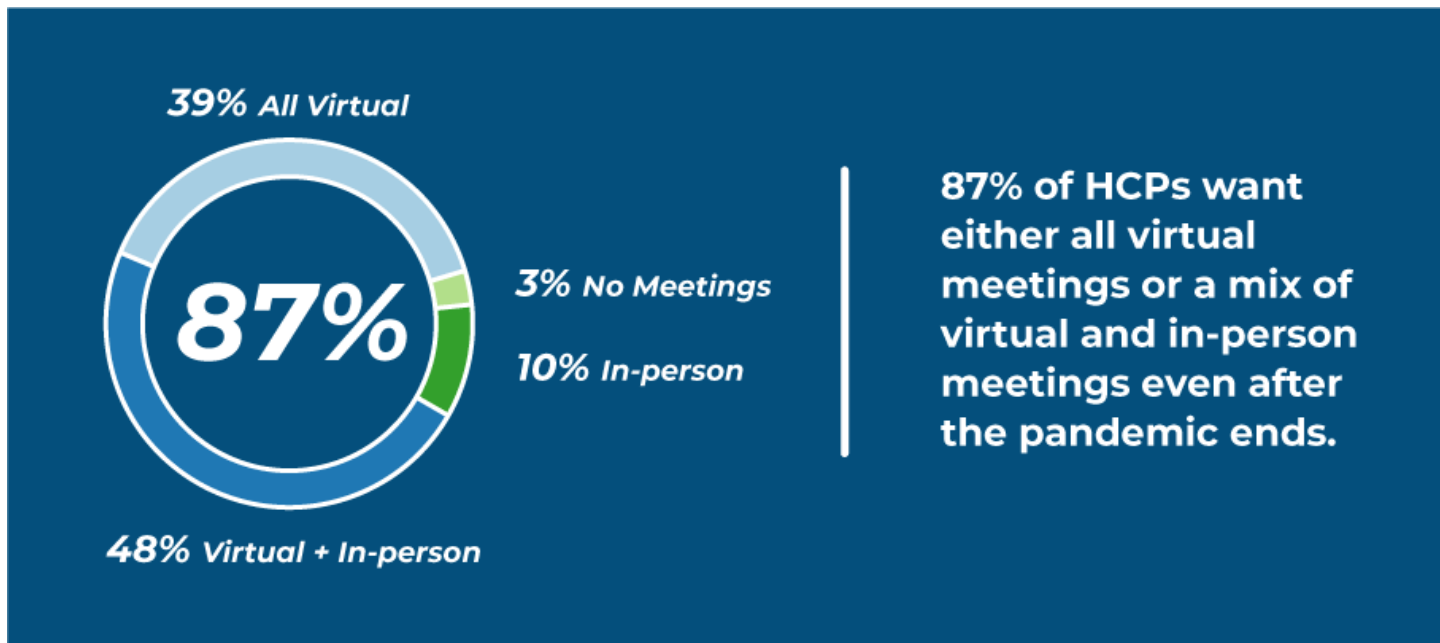
Decreasing access to HCPs has been a long-standing challenge for pharmaceutical brand marketers as many private practices and independent hospitals join bigger groups and health systems. The pandemic introduced a new financial hardship on physicians as patients delayed a wide range of healthcare services due to a myriad of factors:

- **Fear of exposure to COVID-19**
- **Many physician offices/clinics remained closed for an extended period**
- **Some patients lost their jobs—and their health insurance**
- **Many no longer had access to childcare and could not keep appointments**

Declining revenues and increasing costs were reasons many independent providers indicated they were open to the idea of a merger or acquisition (Brookshire, 2020):

- **69% are open to the idea of a merger or acquisition**
- **30% indicated they would sell their practice in the next two years**
- **44% of physicians are employed by hospitals or health systems (PAI, 2019)**
- **55% of health-system owned practices are no-see (SK&A, 2017)**

HCPs have increasingly indicated an overwhelming preference for virtual engagement, with 87% acknowledging they prefer either all virtual or a mix of virtual and in-person meetings moving forward (Accenture, 2020).



While HCPs are growing more comfortable with remote engagements from pharma reps, they are overwhelmed as they struggle to see patients, tackle an increasing level of administrative work, and adapt to new telehealth and electronic health record technologies. In short, their simple request is that industry not waste their valuable time.

- **65% of providers surveyed said they wanted specific information on helping patients manage their conditions (Accenture, 2020).**

### STAYING RELEVANT

One of the most common provider complaints is that pharmaceutical representatives aren't delivering any new and relevant data. Providers want to be treated as professionals and not as marketing targets. They wish to learn how to better treat patients but are too often faced with representatives intent on delivering a canned sales message. Some HCPs also feel that pharmaceutical companies have been spamming them with digital content and have failed to truly understand the impact of the pandemic on providers, their practices, and their patients.

HCPs desire highly relevant information from pharma, and they want it delivered from credible sources.

Pharmaceutical sales teams can no longer rely solely on their ability to build relationships with HCPs. They must also provide value during each interaction.

### PHARMA MARKETERS NEED AGILITY NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE

To effectively engage with HCPs remotely, it is vital to follow a few best practices:

#### Invest in top talent

At TrialCard, our intensive interview process is designed to hire the very best. We uncover core skills that identify which reps will be successful in a virtual environment.

#### Invest in training

Transitioning from a field-based position to a virtual role requires training. TrialCard's experienced sales managers show team members how to apply longstanding sales skills to a virtual environment. In learning how to use Zoom or Webex, new reps are taught how to detect verbal cues in lieu of reading body language. This is a specialized skill that requires extensive training to master.

## Simplify your approach

Before one can impact the patient journey, it is necessary to understand the HCP's journey in a remote world. To be successful, virtual sales teams need to sharpen their instincts about what matters to each doctor and must be prepared to deliver that information in a clear, compelling, and compliant way. Like many American workers, physicians are facing digital meeting fatigue. Physicians have expressed that their existing patients are their primary concern. They welcome new information and insights about disease states and available therapies when it is delivered in a professional manner. At TrialCard, we ensure our team provides value to the HCP on every call.

## TRIALCARD VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

TrialCard has pioneered and perfected the virtual pharmaceutical sales model over the past five years. We can design a comprehensive outbound campaign that features services like:

- **Branded Details**
- **Disease Awareness**
- **In-services**
- **Institutional Account Management**
- **Pharmacy Awareness**
- **Prescriber Education**
- **Rare Disease Lead Generation**
- **Vacant Territories**
- **Whitespace Territories**

## TALK TO US TODAY ABOUT YOUR VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT NEEDS

To learn more about how TrialCard's Virtual Engagement sales model can complement your existing sales team's efforts, please contact us at [sales@trialcard.com](mailto:sales@trialcard.com).

## REFERENCES:

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## About TrialCard

TrialCard Incorporated provides patient affordability, medication access and adherence, patient support, and clinical trial services on behalf of biopharmaceutical manufacturers. Founded in 2000, TrialCard has connected over 35 million patients with more than \$18 billion in branded drug savings to date. The company is headquartered in Morrisville, North Carolina.

For more information about TrialCard, please visit [www.trialcard.com](http://www.trialcard.com).

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