

SIX SOCIAL SHIFTS: Trends Affecting Pharma Now

Like all things digital, the social media environment is moving so fast that even news from just three months ago seems old. The regulatory environment of pharma exacerbates the challenge to stay ahead of this social world. The pharma industry was anything but an early adopter in the social space. The waiting game was two-fold, with pharma first waiting for the medium to prove its staying power and then for the FDA to release guidelines for it. In the midst of no guidelines having been issued, pharma conceded that the medium was too big to ignore and begun embracing social media by creating communities on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.

Having conquered the initial boundaries of participating in social media, here are six social shifts that we see burgeoning in social:

Shift 1: Integrated Social Media Marketing

Pharma's social media campaigns are often an afterthought compared to other marketing channels. For example, pharma commercials direct viewers to resources like websites, magazine ads, or hotlines for more information without mention of social destinations. Similar to our assimilation into digital marketing, we need social seamlessly integrated with our other marketing touch-points; augmenting the commercial or print ad that brings our brands to life.

Shift 2: Emphasis on Engagement

As the size of consumers' networks increase, they see diminishing returns in the value of those relationships. This shift is already causing social networks to rethink their approach. Google+ has Circles, and Facebook implemented functionality making it easy to customize which contacts' content appears in your newsfeed. Now, consumers can "connect" with another user but can choose to not receive her updates — so who's to say that we're being heard? This shift will cause need for our social metrics to place greater emphasis on engagement and less on the measurement of our network's growth. Identifying messaging that creates engagement will ensure that we are

providing an experience to our connections that is newsfeed/timeline-worthy.

Shift 3: Social Search

A study from The Pew Research Center revealed that 80% of online adults use the Internet to search for health information. Would they find your brand's content? Currently, websites can increase their chances of being found through SEO best practices but heavy keyword competition is just one reason most pharma sites do not rank well in search engine results. High rankings will become even more difficult to achieve as search engines implement widely anticipated social search algorithms, which will prioritize the rank of content that has been created or shared by the social network of the one initiating the query. The first thing we can do in favor of this shift is to integrate social sharing tools in our web properties. These tools will allow consumers to share our content, thereby increasing the chance for a higher rank.

Shift 4: Micro Health Communities

Mega networks like Facebook and Twitter steal the social media headlines but in the background we've seen the rise of micro health communities. These communities are connecting people facing similar health challenges allowing them to discuss more specialized topics that might not lend well to sharing on mega networks like Facebook. We're also seeing an uptick in physician adoption of professional communities. A 2011 Manhattan Research report shows nearly a 10% increase of physicians adopting social networks for professional purposes. As consumers and physicians turn to supplemental networks for more targeted conversations, pharma's social presence will need to move alongside them. A proactive step would be for pharma to create communities that allow for disease state conversations while providing information and

Contributed by



WHITNEY POMA,
Social Media Analyst
GSW Worldwide

resources that are accurate and trustworthy.

Shift 5: Social Media as a Springboard for Action

In the past 24 months, social media has achieved mainstream relevance. 2011 proved to be a year of using social media to organize everything from flash-mobs to the Occupy Wall Street movement. Consumers already use social media to organize

around health issues but soon they will transform these conversations into action. Pharmaceutical companies can capitalize on this shift by using social media to organize their own movement or better yet, partner with consumers in their actions to raise awareness or fight for a cause.

Shift 6: Collaborating to Create Pharma Friendly Social Channels

Social media platforms weren't built to operate within pharma's regulatory environment. Recognizing shared value, YouTube worked directly with pharma companies and together they created a solution that eased the concerns preventing pharma from participating. Now, over 45 pharma and healthcare social media channels are providing on-demand videos to consumers. We need to initiate collaboration with key social media platforms to address our concerns, and then begin to leverage these channels for the value they provide our consumers.

Although some of these shifts will happen faster than others, companies that work proactively in social media will establish a lead in the marketplace that will take years for their competitors to regain. **PV**

GSW Worldwide is a full-service healthcare advertising agency.

▼ For more information, visit gsw-w.com.



(This is healthcare)

Read our perspective on how gaming is changing healthcare:

Watch our prototype on how gaming could change healthcare:



slideshare



<http://bit.ly/sHaNE9>



YouTube



<http://bit.ly/gTUVcz>



iQ is a dedicated lab focused on leveraging technology and consumer trends to accelerate healthcare marketing and ultimately improve people's lives. Learn more at:

WhatsYourDigitaliQ.com