Search and Social Media for the
PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Much has been said about the role of social media as a marketing vehicle. It offers customers and audiences a way to interact with brands like never before. The paradigm of audience has shifted as our "push" messaging has evolved to a conversation. In the pharmaceutical industry, we are looking to participate in this conversation despite challenges that are presented by both fair balance and best practices.

Social media platforms are evolving rapidly, so the opportunities to engage are increasing constantly. Yet, because of the FDA's guidelines on social media — or lack thereof — our industry seems to be stuck in second gear.

There is some social media engagement within certain health categories, but even these are shackled by vague requirements.

Interestingly enough, there are some pharma-appropriate ways that brands can actually participate in social without being exposed to unnecessary risk.

Facebook and Google are leading the way for brands to become more social, viral, and relevant to target audiences.

Why Social?

Your brand's audience is already social. All brands are, actually. People are talking about brands online and probably in social networks.

Social media is important to marketers because both consumers and healthcare professionals spend a lot of time on social networks. According to Nielsen's "State of the Media: The Social Media Report," released in September 2011, 22.5% of the time spent online by Americans is on a social networking website. This makes it stickier than online gaming and the number one category leader for what people do when they are online.

Social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn are evolving faster, which means they are more essential to target users. These sites are refining, reorganizing, and reinventing how and when users engage with brands.

Of course, the open nature of the conversation makes it increasingly more difficult for pharmaceutical companies (or other highly

Contributed by

CHRISTOPHER CULLMANN,
Vice President, Digital Strategist, *Ogilvy CommonHealth Interactive Marketing, part of Ogilvy CommonHealth Worldwide*

regulated industries) to participate. Information that may be deemed "safe" to share on Facebook may not be appropriate for your brand page. Your legal team doesn't want you to host a Facebook Fan Page where people are sharing health information in an open forum.

There are many things that are not appropriate for sharing, especially by a pharma brand. And yet, if you do not participate, the brand message may not be shared accurately. Fortunately, there are some basic steps to create safe engagements with a target audience.

A New Outlook: Social Media and Search

A little-understood but critical aspect to social media marketing is the impact of "social" on search marketing. Google, Facebook, and Twitter are all very aware of the influence that your circle of friends have on your decision making. They are taking steps to strengthen these social ties that are often expanded and enhanced in social networks.

FACEBOOK, for example, uses a single search utility for everything. This field is used to search for everything from friends to keywords. Results update as you type and are

shown as a list beneath the box. Results are categorized by friends, apps, pages, groups, etc. You can select from the list or select to see more from a link at the bottom.

If there isn't a strong result within Facebook, results from the Internet are shown as a service from Microsoft's search engine Bing. Optimally, having a well trafficked Facebook brand page would net your brand as a result inside Facebook's network. This is an excellent advantage for those brands that have a presence, in any form, within Facebook.

Let's pause for a moment and consider the Facebook Fan Page. If there is a Fan Page or a Facebook Group, Facebook will offer this as a result. They want you to stay on their website.

But there's more to it than that. Facebook also offers some clues to the way your friends are using Facebook. If a friend is participating in a Fan Page or a Group, Facebook is going to tell you who has clicked "like" for this page.

If some of your friends "like" a page, then you may want to as well. That's a connection that is socially relevant to those two users.

Smart stuff, right? But Facebook is even smarter than that because they allow any website to share a connection by way of their "like" button. This button acts as an extension of the Facebook experience anywhere the "like" button can be applied. In short, Facebook brings elements of the web right over to Facebook. People are seeing their friends validate external websites.

Here's the best part: it is an endorsement that is limited to a user's own social network. As a brand manager, you have no visibility to what's actually being said, so there's no personally identifiable information or visibility to adverse events.

Google+ and +1

Facebook is the most famous social net-

work, but there are others. Google has also moved aggressively, integrating many channels to engage audiences.

With the launch of Google+ this summer, they began to offer a destination that is competitive with Facebook in the hopes of taking some of their majority market share. Although the number of participants is still low in comparison with Facebook's, Google's tight integration with search gives it an edge.

Google has also launched an integrated button similar to the Facebook "like" button. This gives content creators and website owners a way for users to provide positive support for content on a given page. If you are a Google+ user, you can also add comments that are posted to your Google+ page.

Like Facebook, Google's +1 and Google+ functionality lowers the barrier for sharing. This sharing happens inside the user's selected social network. That means what they say is not visible to the brand, reducing the exposure to personally identifiable health information.

Since Google is still primarily a search engine, they integrate these social validations into their search results. For example, if you are signed into Google and search for a particular subject, you will see your normal search engine results page (SERP).

There is an additional element if someone in your social circle had found and clicked +1 (Google's term for using their button) on a page appearing in your results: your friend's avatar will appear beneath the search result. This — in effect — is social validation between people who already have friended each other. Nobody else sees this validation, which means it is relevant to these people, but not visible to a brand team.

Search and Social

This integration of your social network with search results is not limited to the **GOOGLE+1** network. Google integrates with many other third-party social services like Twitter, Foursquare, Qoura, and others.

The same way you might see your friend or peer associated with a particular search result, you will find other people from your other social networks appearing beneath particular links.

The resulting effect is a curated list of links vetted by people you already know. This helps you to determine if a particular search result is going to appeal to you.

Microsoft's Bing search engine is following suit using a similar service supporting both Microsoft Live (their previous effort toward a social ecosystem) and Facebook. The integration is not as seamless and they do not offer a social endorsement tool similar to the "like" or +1 buttons.

Microsoft's is not the largest search engine, but, of course, it is a very powerful company. It could quickly become a powerful force in the social search engine segment. The same goes for sites that are not full social networks, but do include social aspects. Consider the social commentary on sites like Amazon, YouTube, Flickr, and even Netflix. There are varying degrees of social sharing, but not all of it is pharma friendly.

What does this mean to a pharmaceutical brand? Social and search are beginning to intermingle in new and interesting ways. Both consumers and healthcare professionals are discussing your brand. Your team may not be able to actively participate, but you can make it easier for them to share your brand story.

Consider your efficacy and safety stories. You want healthcare professionals to be able to quickly and easily share this information with their peers. If they are talking about your brand, you want them to have the correct information. One way to do this is to lower the barrier to safely sharing.

Many digital media channels are making use of the various badges and buttons provided by popular social networks. Any medium, from television programming to mobile apps, can reach beyond their verticals to influence social networks and search engine results.

It may seem as though the world has become a potpourri of buttons and badges. You may have noticed how many websites and online services are featuring buttons for Facebook, **TWITTER**, Google and a myriad of other services. Content creators are hoping to leverage social influence not only to generate traffic, but also to make use of the influence individuals have in their social network. Whether a social network user has five friends or 5,000, their sharing of your content is influence.

A number of third-

party companies have been proving a solution for brands and consolidating the many badges and buttons into a single unit. The market leaders ShareThis and AddThis combine the functionality of all of these services and offer brand owners a single service that gives some insight into how many people are sharing a particular page, what services are popular, and other statistics that can help shape messages and campaigns.

SHARETHIS provides an additional feature that is very friendly to the pharmaceutical industry. Almost all of the buttons and sharing tools outlined here use meta data, the content on your website to help search engines find and process your sites. All of this content needs to be reviewed by your medical and legal team as appropriate.

Practicing Social Media Marketing

Are you making it easy for people to "like" your page? If you place a little button on each page, you make it easy for people to share your content with their own personal network.

The button is easy for brands to apply with code from Facebook. There are a several options to help control the preservation of safety information or required content.

Outside of the social media ecosystems of Facebook and its competitors, there is a halo effect that begins to form as people look for ways to share those pieces of content on the web that they find interesting or helpful. The same effort can help illuminate a key web page for someone who may be lost in a sea of conflicting data and links on a search page.

These wins inside of social networks and the people with influencial voices, big and small, is difficult to measure. Those that measure data and click-through statistics are going to have to look at the effect of individuals and the changes they can make and look at how influence and proximity affect marketing.

Creating engagement from within social networks and the small worlds surrounding a person's friends and families comes from trust. Creating touch points for patients and professionals that offer benefit is at the core of what makes advertising such an exciting craft. ⓅⓋ