



# Driving Brand Opportunity through SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

**C**learly, social networks are playing an increasingly important role in the healthcare decision process. According to the Pew Research Center, a third of Internet users have read someone's commentary about health or medical issues online, and a quarter have consulted online postings reviewing specific drugs or treatments. In addition, a quarter of social network users have followed a friend's health experience on a social network site.

Patients are not the only healthcare stakeholders turning to social media. Caregivers' use of social networks soared by 454% from 2008 to 2012. In addition, a recent CDC study reveals that 59% of physicians use social networking sites.

With social media gaining in influence, pharmaceutical companies are starting to join the conversation. How can pharmaceutical marketers assess the impact of their social media activities — and ensure they are maximizing their return on investment in this critical and growing channel?

The answer lies in moving beyond typical measures to a new metric: social media advocacy.

## Evaluating Social Media Advocacy

We define social media advocacy as creating a compelling experience that audience members pass on to their own social networks, ideally with a personal recommendation that strengthens the message's credibility and impact. Effective advocacy measurement models identify the universe of potential advocates, predict their possible actions and calculate the impact of their activities on the brand, including providing an ROI number to support future social media investments.

While the concept of brands participating in social media isn't new, the advocacy approach to measurement is. It recognizes that simply counting "likes" and "followers" isn't enough to evaluate impact. It's simply too

easy for someone to "like" a page but never return again, adding no value to the brand.

True brand opportunity lies in building advocacy — whether the action is as simple as a patient re-tweeting a brand's web site or as valuable as a physician writing a blog post mentioning the product. Strong advocacy models anticipate the behaviors that will drive the greatest results. They then identify the best social experiences for engaging target audiences and motivating them to take action.

Advocacy's impact on brand health and reputation is not limited to social networks. In fact, its effects reach far beyond social media. The rise in social search is just one example of how advocacy can drive brand opportunity across other digital channels.

## Looking at the Bigger Digital Picture

When evaluating social networks, it's important to remember they are just one part of a full range of digital options that also includes search engines, mobile, and Websites. Consider that 80% of Internet users search for health information online; 86% of physicians use the Internet to access health and prescription information, with 71% using a search engine; and the mobile health market will skyrocket to \$392 million by 2015, with 13,000 consumer health apps and 6,000 professional ones available now, according to data from Pew, CDC, Frost & Sullivan, and MobiHealth. It's easy to see digital's growing power in healthcare.

To create the most productive digital strategies, companies should perform a full diagnostic assessment of all their digital channels. The assessment should include four stages:

- 1. Discovery**, reviewing existing data, and identifying relevant corporate, branded, competitive, and negative keywords and phrases.
- 2. Diagnosis**, assessing conversations, and determining the potential reach and influence

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of their authors to uncover opportunities and challenges in the social media framework.

**3. Prescription**, creating customized recommendations, and specific plans of action, including potential scenarios, next steps, and expected results.

**4. Check up**, tracking the results of digital action plans, and continuing to refine approaches, based on findings, to drive continuous improvement.

## Conclusions

Digital channels are vital components of the marketing mix. They are the most powerful tools for reaching and interacting with target audiences. As companies direct an increasing share of promotional dollars to digital options, it's essential they have reliable ways to assess and strengthen their impact. New metrics, such as social media advocacy, and new approaches, such as digital diagnostic programs, will be critical for accurately measuring and fully optimizing effectiveness and ROI. **PV**

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\*Source: Google 2012