

The Rise of the SOCIAL CONGRESS

What is the main draw of international medical congresses? Although some might say it is the robust scientific programs showcasing cutting-edge research, others would say it is the opportunity to exchange ideas and network with peers from across the globe. In either case, social media provides a cost-effective tool to generate conversation around breaking news at congresses and to connect stakeholders with a shared interest. It is increasingly being used by congress organizers, delegates, reporters, analysts, and pharma companies pre-, during, and post-congress to maximize reach and impact.

One of the best examples is the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting, probably the most social congress in the medical calendar. The official hashtag #ASCO13 generated more than 20,000 Twitter mentions and 70 million impressions in a three-week period — an increase of more than 300% compared with 2011. The ASCO leadership were active on social media during the congress and the ASCO Facebook page was updated daily with photos. Oncologists, analysts, and media attended the annual ASCO TweetUp, an informal, live get together for Twitter enthusiasts to meet in person, as well as to tweet. There was even a wallet-size card of social media tips for oncology professionals, encouraging attendees to get involved. Although the congress had more than 32,000 delegates on-site in Chicago, the social media activity meant the key news reached many thousands more physicians, reporters, analysts, and patient advocacy groups around the world.

So how can pharma marketers get involved? Social media is a cost-effective tool to:

- » Generate buzz and anticipation pre-congress
- » Increase share of voice and engagement with key stakeholders during the congress
- » Sustain buzz with post-congress content

Generating Buzz Pre-Congress

The weeks just prior to a congress provide a good opportunity to announce participation, and identify influencers and potential hot topics. Congress organizers will usually promote the congress Twitter hashtag a few months in advance and will start generating conversation around key milestones. Pharma companies can then monitor and join the conversation by announcing abstract acceptances and key sym-

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posia, and directing followers to relevant content such as infographics and background information on the disease area. For example, before the recent American Society of Hematology (ASH) congress, Novartis directed Twitter users to their ASH microsite, which contained general information on myelofibrosis and personalized cell therapy.

One great example of how social media can be used to create excitement and anticipation for a congress is the “Gearing up for ASCO” video created by Genentech. This humorous one-minute YouTube video shows Genentech staff preparing to attend ASCO, packing photos of their loved ones, and one person literally “getting her skates on” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJiC-Rvrs0k>). The video has achieved more than 26,000 views, most of which were pre-ASCO. This was just one part of an overall congress strategy of continued engagement that made Genentech the top pharma company influencer at ASCO 2013 (<http://www.symplur.com/?s=%23asco13&cat=5>).

Increasing Share of Voice and Engagement During the Congress

With the increasing social media activity during congresses, pharma companies need to be active yet targeted in their communications in order to cut through the noise. While Twitter is useful to announce symposia and poster presentations, draw delegates to the booth, and guide media to press releases, competition for share of voice is high.

One way of engaging with stakeholders and generating conversation around a particular

area of interest is via a TweetChat. Boehringer Ingelheim (BI) has led the way in coordinating the first disease area TweetChats during congresses, which are conversations using a unique hashtag, taking place on Twitter at a specific time.

BI recently coordinated #ChatAfib during the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and #ChatCOPD during the European Respiratory Society. Specific “rules of engagement” were announced at the beginning of the TweetChat to ensure that all participants adhered to regulations regarding discussions of specific medicines. The moderator then guided the live discussion among the participants, which included opinion leaders, patient advocacy representatives, and media. The ESC #ChatAfib engaged with 120 users and had 33 active contributors, reaching more than 200,000 Twitter accounts, and generating nearly 3 million impressions.

Sustain Buzz Post-Congress

Pharma can partner with professional organizations to help curate and post the best content generated at the congress to sustain buzz. Recently, Servier sponsored the ESC Science in Perspective YouTube playlist from the annual congress (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLN5RC1OF9yB55pu7c7rMcOPApRvsXfpDN>).

Pharma companies can also use social media evaluation to identify what content stakeholders engaged with — which Twitter links drove traffic to corporate sites, what content was shared — to help guide future content strategy. In addition, via monitoring and congress engagement, new influencers will be identified and new followers and fans gained.

With shrinking budgets squeezing the number of delegates attending medical congresses, social media will become ever more important within the marketing mix. A solid social media strategy is a cost-effective way to amplify congress news and activities, establish and foster stakeholder relationships, and gain insight to guide future activity. **PV**

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