## Contributed by Shelley Spencer

IF IT'S BROKE, FIX IT
# A FRESH LOOK AT PHYSICIAN ACCESS

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It's time to take a fresh look at a big problem — physician access. In a 2008 Arista survey of pharmaceutical managers, almost 90% reported a decrease in face-to-face physician access over the past five years. What was surprising was the magnitude of the problem; pharmaceutical managers ranked physician access as their No. 1 marketing challenge, saying it was more troublesome than competition, product weaknesses, or salesforce limitations.

As I pondered the data, I noticed an odd kink in the way the access issue was being approached. To be blunt, the wrong questions are being asked. The tendency is to ask marketer-focused questions such as "What do doctors think of my marketing tactics?" and "How can I make our salesforce more appealing?" Instead, marketers should ask physician-focused questions such as "What type of practice-related information do doctors need?" and "When and where do they go to find the information they need?" Helping doctors get the information they need — serving their needs more completely — will help companies gain access to them. So what do doctors need?

### WHERE PHYSICIANS LOOK FOR INFORMATION

There is the assumption that doctors think they already have all the answers and therefore don't need new information. Wrong, doctors need and want new information.

- PCPs encounter more than 500 clinical topics each year, and they use about 2 million information bytes to manage patients. Most of the information is obtained from memory, and some of it is wrong.
- About half of patient visits result in practice-related questions that can't be answered from the physician's memory.
- To answer these questions, doctors typically engage in two types of information seeking. The first is intra-visit fact-finding; about 60% of questions occur in the exam room and take about 20 seconds to answer. The second type is inter-visit research, questions that require 5 to 10 minutes or longer to answer.
- Fact-finding is commonly done with PDAs; especially for checking drug references and clinical guidelines.
- Research increasingly occurs via computers/Internet, usually during breaks in the day or at home after work. The top Internet resources used by PCPs are drug information sites; they use these more than Medline, journals, or textbooks.

### SERVING PHYSICIANS' INFORMATION NEEDS

There are several ways marketers can use technology to serve physicians' information needs. For intra-visit fact-finding, PDAs are vital, especially in the hands of PCPs. They love PDA-based tools such as dosage calculators, lab standards, and clinical-practice guidelines. Many PDA applications are free downloads; a major opportunity is to serve the information needs of doctors. Marketers should identify for their brand or disease category several top-quality PDA downloads that can help doctors improve their productivity. They should make these downloads available on their professionals-only Website, and then guide physicians to the site.

For inter-visit research, the Internet-connected PC is where the action is. Fortunately, the leading Internet resources used by PCPs are drug information sites. According to the report eHealth Solutions for Pharma from Business Insights, drug-specific Websites are popular with doctors for several reasons:

- They are provided by every major manufacturer.
- They are considered trustworthy sources of information.
- They are specific to the immediate needs of physicians.
- They are the most highly advertised online resources.

The challenge is to ensure these sites meet doctors' needs. Unfortunately, current sites are often uninviting, static, and just plain boring. They lack the creative and technological features that attract and engage physicians. There are things that can be done better, such as:

- Better Content. The eHealth Solutions report suggests improving professionals-only Websites by upgrading professional development content, including product and disease information, CME opportunities, and online forums; patient resources, including educational materials, disease management and compliance tools, and clinical trial information; and clinical tools.
- Better Interactivity. A number of Website-based tools can help doctors get the information they want while helping companies gain access: true e-sampling (no phone, fax, or signature); Web chats, whereby physicians can request real-time support or service providers can proactively send a request to a site visitor; on-demand video detailing, live interactive discussions via phone and Webcam to answer physicians' specific questions; and event registration, whereby doctors can self-register for upcoming peer events, view pre-event material, and download post-event content.

This approach is really a simple formula: Gain access to doctors by helping them access the information they need. It's an idea that's stood the test of time: "He who wishes to secure the good of others, has already secured his own." — Confucius (551 BC – 479 BC)

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