

Navigating the NEW COMMUNICATIONS LANDSCAPE

The ways patients seek and share information—both in and out of the doctor's office—are undergoing radical change. From the rise of the Internet to the explosion of social media to the growing patient demand for active participation in treatment decisions, a multitude of forces are converging to re-shape the healthcare communications landscape. Pharmaceutical companies must understand the new communication channels and dynamics—and know how to use them effectively—to be successful in reaching and informing their patient constituencies.

To gain deeper insight into new communication patterns and trends, Survey Sampling International (SSI) and The Research Intelligence Group (TRIG) performed several recent studies. This article shares some highlights of their findings—and what they mean for healthcare marketers.

Social Media Use Is Exploding

An SSI study among 1,453 US adults shows social media use is pervasive among all age groups. Pharmaceutical manufacturers thinking social media is not an important communications channel for the older demographics that are targets for many medications need to think again.

Unsurprisingly, the SSI research shows more than 90% of those from 13 – 34 are visiting social media sites. Findings also reveal, however, that 70% of those 65 and older also are using social media. In fact, about half of respondents in the study's two oldest segments—55 – 64 and 65+—have visited social networks within the last week. In addition, all age groups—including the oldest—have a core group of “avid” users spending 5+ hours a week social networking. The “avids” are most likely to share their opinions about a brand, as well as to answer quick polls and post comments to a discussion. They have the loudest voice—so can be important allies in spreading the word about a product.

Doctors Are Still the Primary Information Source—but Patients Are Not Satisfied

TRIG's study of 22,581 adults in 23 coun-



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In its Internet Project Survey, Pew states that 4 out of 5 Internet users have searched for healthcare information online. Two-thirds look for information on a specific disease.

Clearly, the Internet is an accepted part of our everyday lives. As it gains dominance, we see other trusted sources decline. For example, in just a 6-month period, the SSI study also shows a noticeable decline across all countries in the percentage of consumers who read a printed newspaper with the past week.

tries, executed through the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WINTM) founded by TRIG, finds that patients around the world still turn to their doctors as their primary source of healthcare information. Many, however, are not satisfied with the communications process in their doctors' offices. Less than half say they are informed about alternative medications—and just 23% report that their physicians encourage questions. In addition, only a quarter are happy with their involvement in health decisions.

This dissatisfaction with how physicians communicate is impacting how patients evaluate their overall treatment. Only 3 out of 10 rate their care as excellent—and just 34% believe their doctors treat them with respect. Using the Net Promoter Score loyalty metric, TRIG also finds that less than half (44%) would recommend their doctors.

Pharmaceutical companies can make a difference. By providing physicians with educational materials to use with patients, they can help improve communications between doctors and patients.

Internet Surpasses TV as a Valued Information Source

Although the Internet is now a mature medium, it continues to gain in its perceived value. In an SSI study of about 9,000 adults across nine countries, respondents rate the Internet as a more valuable information source than TV.

Conclusions

To communicate effectively, pharmaceutical manufacturers must continuously monitor the changing communications landscape—and put together the right mix of channels to reach their target audiences. In addition, they must master new skills as the old “one-way” model of companies communicating out to patients is being replaced by new opportunities for “two-way” communications—chances to listen to targets through social networks. Marketers who learn how to use new channels—and integrate them with traditional media—will be most successful in having their messages heard. **PV**

For 34 years, Survey Sampling International has been the premier global provider of sampling solutions for survey research. SSI reaches patients, caregivers, physicians and allied health professionals worldwide via online, landline telephone and mobile/wireless. For more information, visit surveysampling.com. Mr. DeAngelis can be reached at Chris_DeAngelis@surveysampling.com.

The Research Intelligence Group, TRiG, provides a specially selected team of U.S.-based research professionals who have a shared history of bringing their combined experience and knowledge to bear in every research engagement.

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