

Social Media Strategy

Experts share their best practices for developing a social media strategy.



Social media marketing is still a bit daunting for most companies in the life-sciences industry, but some vanguard organizations are already realizing the value of interacting with consumers online. To capture the benefits of the online social media world, many companies over the past three years have begun to apply more resources toward social media as they involve this tactic in their overall marketing media mix. Some of the leaders in the space include Sanofi, Boehringer Ingelheim, and Roche. (See the digital edition for a list of industry leaders.)

The high number of patients — 59%, according to Pew Research — who use online sources to seek out health information is the driving force behind the industry's increase in social media use. Quite simply, companies want to be where their customers are. Our experts say what these companies have discovered is that with a clear strategy and obtainable goals, the benefits of engaging with consumers via social media far exceed the risks.

While surveys show that social media for promotional purposes is growing, one of the primary benefits of participating in conversations online is not so much to sell a product, but to gather pertinent consumer information, directly from consumers about opinions and

behaviors. This, in turn, allows for more specific message targeting.

Moving to a more active role of engaging with consumers whenever possible has enabled the industry a new outlet from which to gather valuable and real-time information directly from consumers, who are transacting more of their lives on social networks than ever before.

In its 2011 report, Pew Research found that of the 74% of American adults who go online, 59% seek health information. Wealthy and middle-class Americans are even more likely to use online resources for health information; of those making \$50,000 to \$75,000, 86% are online and of these consumers, 71% seek health information. For those making more than \$75,000, an impressive 95% are online, and 83% of them are seeking health information online. And finally, of adult Internet users, 66% go online to find disease-specific information, giving rise to unique touch points pharma can use to influence people's health decisions.

"There is much more movement in the healthcare space than even just two years ago," says Malcolm Bohm, CEO, Liquid Grids. "We are working with insurance plans, group practices, hospitals, pharmaceutical, and medical device companies. These organizations aren't just listening and analyzing the information, they are running campaigns across the online communities."

The industry may be more comfortable in a listening role, but by standing on the sidelines of the conversations, it misses many opportunities to connect with consumers and build a sound social media presence.

"Pharma should embrace the prevalence of social media and the opportunity to amplify education, promotion, engagement, intelligence, and forecasting across social platforms," says Mike Marett, senior VP, head of global business development, WorldOne Interactive. "By collaborating with regulatory teams;

"Social media is like a truth serum; companies really can't be disingenuous."

R.J. LEWIS / eHealthcare Solutions



using technology for fine targeting; and harnessing the influential power of bloggers, KOLs, high prescribers, and repurposing approved assets, brands can optimize their social media presence and enrich the educational experience for patients and HCPs.”

Shaping a Social Media Strategy

To determine whether a brand campaign should take advantage of social media channels, marketers need to determine if their customers are even using social media to discuss their healthcare needs.

According to Cutting Edge Information (CEI), marketers need to thoroughly review where the audience is and how it is using social media before deciding to use social media. CEI refers to this process as an audit; Mr. Bohm calls it collecting health intelligence.

“Social health intelligence is critical, otherwise we can’t determine the relative role social media should play,” he says.

Some brands are in a better position to leverage social media than others. There are plenty of disease categories that no one is going to want to talk about on social media, for example, overactive bladder or erectile dysfunction, reports CEI. If consumers aren’t using Facebook to discuss their condition or disease, there is no



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WENDY BLACKBURN
Intouch Solutions

reason for the company or brand to be in the space trying to start a conversation.

However, if an audit shows that there is

sufficient social media activity around the disease state, such as diabetes, companies should tap into the opportunity to connect with consumers and collect crucial information about their behaviors. And that opportunity is huge; about 100 million people are searching, discussing, and sharing their health experiences online every day. Not participating in these discussions with these consumers could be very unwise for pharma, Mr. Bohm says.

“Pew Research shows us that 70% of people are looking for information to help them understand a potential diagnosis online, and 43% of people are on social networks sharing health information every day,” he says. “The industry ignores these people at its own peril.”

In other words, Mr. Bohm says, if people are talking about a disease state online, then absolutely social media has to be a part of a company’s overall strategy and there is no better group to go to for real-time market research.

Set Clearly Defined Goals

After determining where the consumers are, the next step is to set clearly defined goals so that measurement and modification can be done throughout the process to keep the campaign

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF A SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY ►

Experts outline the fundamentals of a successful life-sciences social media strategy.



WENDY BLACKBURN
Executive VP
Intouch Solutions

Passion, Governance, Flexibility

A passion for the patient is absolutely paramount to a successful life-sciences social media strategy. Companies that get ‘it’ put the patient’s needs and concerns at the core of their social program, and everything else is secondary. If a company’s goal is simply to broadcast its brand messages in another channel, please, just don’t. This approach doesn’t help anyone — patients, the industry, and especially the brand.

A well-defined workflow lays out the play-by-play of a variety of social scenarios so the team is prepared. And, perhaps just as important is clear governance, which serves as a security blanket for those less comfortable with the what ifs inherent with social media. And make no mistake, there will be surprises. There will be a need to shift and flex and roll with the punches, because social media is full of

unknowns. The pharma industry struggles with this. But if a program isn’t built with some level of flexibility, it will break early and often.



R.J. LEWIS
President and CEO
eHealthcare Solutions

Responsiveness, Usefulness, and Genuineness

Three important elements of a life-sciences social media strategy include: responsiveness, usefulness, and genuineness. Providing a timely response is very important as social media is somewhere between email or texting and direct mail in terms of expectations — and probably falling a lot closer to email. If customers are seeking an answer to a question, they want it within hours — in minutes, ideally — but not in days. The answer they receive should also be useful. Companies need to provide valuable information and links to relevant resources that are truly useful in answering their customers’ questions or in addressing their concerns. Simply linking to a brand.com site for more information is

not very useful. The social media team needs to find the page that addresses customers’ question and link them directly to that page. This is an interaction with a valuable customer and an excellent opportunity to wow them and leave them feeling special. Finally, be genuine. Social media is a very personal communication. It’s a bridge between mass media and one-on-one communication. If companies are genuine, people can tell and will respect them for it. If they are not, they can also tell, and they will take it personally.



MALCOLM BOHM
CEO
Liquid Grids

Data, Data, and More Data

The three most important elements in social media strategy involve healthcare intelligence and translating this data to an effective campaign, companies need to know: what their consumers are discussing; what stage of the disease they are discussing; and personalizing that information based on that intelligence.



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MALCOLM BOHM / Liquid Grids

on track. According to Wendy Blackburn, executive VP at Intouch Solutions, this is a crucial element in any social media strategy.

“If social media is approached as a random experiment, there is no way to know if it was successful,” she says. “Having and stating clearly defined goals helps ensure everyone is beginning with the end-goal in mind.”

The industry needs to be sure it is using the valuable information it collects during these interactions, or else its messages might miss the mark. Taking the data and determining who is online, knowing what is being discussed, understanding what the concerns are, and ascertaining how pharma can fill the need by tailoring messages that resonate are the ultimate goals for a company to have on social media.

Missing the mark on messaging could actually do more harm, Mr. Bohm says.

For example, if a company puts out generic diabetes information to people who are recording their HbA1c values every morning, every day, online, those patients are not going to respond well to that message, since they understand their disease very well.

“Marketers need to tailor content to what they are hearing and ensure they are addressing patient needs,” Mr. Bohm says. “For example, if consumers are talking about symptoms, provide them with a symptom checker; if they are talking about treatments, give them information on the different treatment options.”

However, he advises against providing all of the information on a Facebook timeline, or

other social media, because that is not the place for it.

“A better strategy is to connect with patients and provide them with another place to go to get more information,” Mr. Bohm says. “Over the past two or three years, companies have been setting up a social presence on Facebook and Twitter to raise their visibility. However, those efforts often resulted in only a few hundred ‘likes’ on Facebook, which in comparison with the 1 billion people on the social media platform can be discouraging. We discovered that in the life sciences, a company needs to supply a destination that is very carefully curated with credible and compliant information, that is relatively brand agnostic.”

There’s No Time to be Cautious

Being a social media lagger can put companies at a disadvantage, and consequently result in reactive rather than proactive social media interactions. This is a mistake, our experts say.

“The industry has already found itself in a reactive state because the social media train left the station long ago,” Ms. Blackburn says. “Consumers are seeking healthcare information and having health-related conversations without pharma’s participation already. Anything from here out is playing catch-up.”

Social media best practices inherently demand a proactive approach, she adds. If companies are only reactive, then they are on the defensive. If they’re neutral, that means they’re doing nothing, and the conversation is happening without them.

“The industry has to be proactive,” Mr. Bohm says. “We find certain pharmaceutical companies are absolutely petrified they are going to hear something they don’t want to hear. If these companies would embrace social media they would realize that the benefits are much greater than the perceived risk.”

When assessing the risk, the industry must use both macro and micro guidelines, Ms. Blackburn says.

“At a macro level, each company must consider its own tolerance for risk,” she says. “At the micro level, brands must consider factors such as overall communications goals, the disease category, integration across channels, and audience behavior.”

R.J. Lewis, president and CEO of eHealthcare Solutions, says there may be times when a reactive or neutral stance may be in order, and a blanket proactive approach might backfire.

“Being genuine is more important than the



“Pharma needs to proactively harness the power of social media to better educate and inform patients, not promote its products.”

MIKE MARETT / WorldOne Interactive

actual response,” he says. “Pharmaceutical companies must gauge the nature of the discussion, feedback, comments, and inquires and respond, or proactively start a conversation accordingly. Whichever point of view a company takes, be it reactive, proactive, or neutral, it is incredibly important that it be genuine. Social media is like a truth serum; a company can’t be disingenuous because it will come across that way.”

Mr. Lewis adds that social media can’t be approached from a global perspective because as with any conversation, the response will depend in large part on what the other party says or asks. In certain situations, such as with a customer asking a question, a reactive posture is fine. In other instances, such as if there is a drug shortage or some negative press that is likely to “light up the Twittersphere,” a company will want to take a more proactive approach to communicating with its customers.

Another challenge facing companies that are struggling with their social media strategy is deciding where the responsibility should lie within the organization.

Mr. Lewis cautions that the responsible department must fully embrace the principles of permission marketing and customer dialogue, in order to be effective.

“With the growth of social media, the mass media mindset of shouting out a message louder than anyone else must be abandoned,” he says. “By definition, when you shout, you can no longer hear. That is exactly the wrong approach with social media.” **PV**



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Busting Myths *and* Identifying Approaches

Experts debunk beliefs that often surround discussions about developing a social media strategy for the pharmaceutical industry and identify best-in-class approaches.

One of the biggest obstacles identified by people within and around the life-sciences industry when it comes to social media involves a fear of negative comments or, worse yet, having to post adverse events.

Wendy Blackburn, executive VP at In-touch Solutions, says it's much more complicated than that.

"Yes, adverse events are a challenge in knowing how to track and report them, but there is also the issues of overstating claims,

brand mentions that trigger fair balance, and a whole slew of other knowns and unknowns that pose the biggest challenges," she says.

Malcolm Bohm, CEO of Liquid Grids, says his company has analyzed more than 500 million health conversations and of these less than 2% mention a brand.

"These conversations are all about the disease," he says. "The pharmaceutical industry as a whole ran after brand sentiment online, trying to influence what people are saying about the brand. But companies and brand managers

are missing a huge opportunity by not providing information about the disease. Social media is not so much for branding, as it is a great tool for empowering people with the right information."

When it comes to any tactic the be all and end all, comes down to ROI, and one of the biggest arguments against social media is that it can't be measured.

Mike Marett, senior VP, head of global business development, at WorldOne Interactive, says this is one myth that definitely needs to be busted.

"Social media can be measured," he says. "Companies can measure engagement in a variety of ways to demonstrate efficacy of social engagement and intelligence initiatives across platforms particularly for healthcare professional marketing."

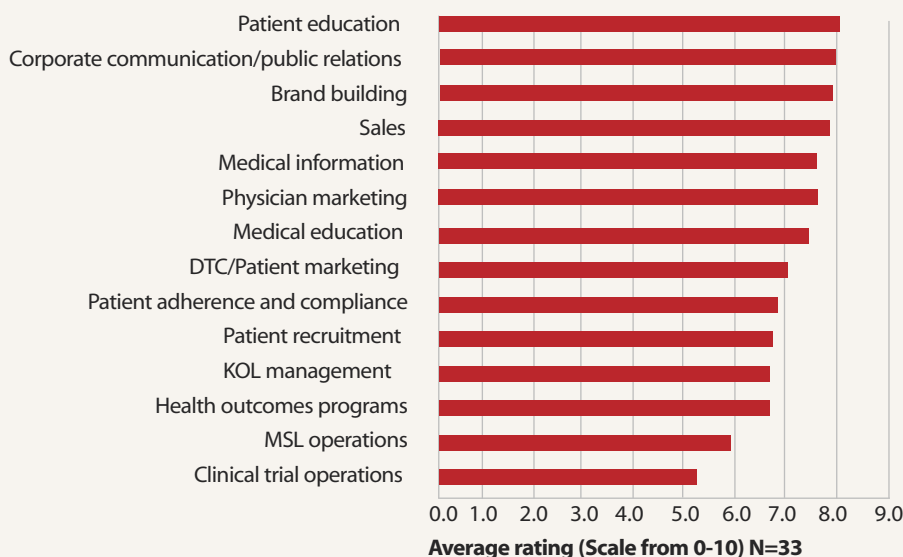
Social Mavericks

There are several pharmaceutical companies that are not only busting the myths but busting through the social media blockade and employing best-in-class properties and engaging consumers and patients in a meaningful way.

The Digital Health Coalition (DHC) and Klick Health joined together on the Social Media Landscape: Pharmaceutical and Device project.

They identified the sites and strategies they believed represent the latest thinking in the pharma and device industries today. The organizers of the project hesitate to call them "best practices, because they are not, but they are "best-in-class" properties that were analyzed against multiple criteria and vary per channel. (Please see the chart.) Some of the cri-

Ratings of Positive Impact Potential of Social Media, by Activity Type



Note: This graph below shows the ratings of potential positive impact on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing maximum potential positive impact. No activity rated lower than an average of 5, and only two activities — MSL operations and clinical trials — rated lower than a 6.5 average.

Source: Cutting Edge Information

teria are: popularity of channel compared with peers, editorial strategy evident in posts, interaction with audience, engagement of audience, integration with other digital properties, and regulatory adherence. The DHC indexed 3,500 social properties in the pharma, biotech, and medical device verticals.

Conclusions from this study, from a regulatory perspective, found that corporate channels are much more advanced than branded or condition channels; DTC rules about the ISI are clear; take a consumer approach vector to information, while making sure there is compliance to all vectors; and the FDA understands

that user-generated content is the user's info and that sharing content is okay, as long as a company doesn't populate the shared content with material that violates the rules.


They say the next horizon is to find a way to interact in a branded context.

When it comes to insights from a corporate perspective, the research found that offline brand awareness equals online

followers; the bigger a company is offline, the bigger it is online. Another finding underscores the need to understand the role of the social property and track the metrics that matter.

The wiki is interactive with live links to the different sites — more than 150 overall — on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The project welcomes new contributions to the list and provides a mechanism for that.

Please see the accompanying chart for the top 10 best-in-class representatives in the three categories.

▼ For more information, visit <http://digital-healthcoalition.org/publications/social-media-landscape/> 

“Adverse events are a challenge in knowing how to track and report them, but there are other issues as well.”

WENDY BLACKBURN / Intouch Solutions



The 10 Ten Best-in-Class Across Social Media

FACEBOOK

Company	Link	Type
Accera	Axona	Brand
Allergan	Latisse	Brand
AstraZeneca	Latisse	Brand
Bayer	Bayer	Corporate
GSK	GlaxoSmithKline	Corporate
Johnson & Johnson	Johnson & Johnson Network	Corporate
Medtronic	Medtronic Diabetes	Disease
Millennium	Millennium	Corporate
Novartis	GilenyaGO	Brand
Novartis	Novartis	Corporate

YOUTUBE

Company	Link	Type
Boehringer Ingelheim	Boehringer Ingelheim	Corporate
Boston Scientific	Boston Scientific Endo	Disease
Johnson & Johnson	JNJ Health	Corporate
Medtronic	Medtronic Diabetes	Disease
Millennium	Millennium	Corporate
Novartis	Novartis	Corporate
Novartis	Gilenya	Brand
Pfizer	Pfizer News	Corporate
Pfizer	Viagra	Brand
Amgen	Amgen	Corporate

TWITTER

Company	Link	Type
AstraZeneca	AstraZeneca	Corporate
Boehringer Ingelheim	Boehringer	Corporate
GSK	GSK US	Corporate
Johnson & Johnson	JNJ Comm	Corporate
Lilly	LillyPad	Corporate
Millennium	Millennium US	Corporate
Novartis	Novartis	Corporate
Novo Nordisk	Race with Insulin	Disease
Pfizer	Pfizer News	Corporate
Roche	Roche	Corporate

Source: Digital Health Coalition, digitalhealthcoalition.org