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TOO MUCH MATERIAL
TOO LITTLE TIME

With market share, revenue goals, and stock prices riding on the success of every new product launch, pharmaceutical companies invest substantial resources to equip their mobile sales teams with the information, training, tools, and support systems they need to be successful. Over the last decade these companies have experimented with increasingly sophisticated technologies. While management's goal is to arm its sales professionals with all the resources, technical knowledge, and credibility of the entire organization, the end result is often an overwhelmed salesforce and disappointed physicians.

Sales tools traditionally designed to elicit face-time with physicians typically include product binders, samples, marketing slicks, brochures, clinical studies, product specifications, testimonials, and physician-reimbursement schedules. Due to the limited time drug reps have with physicians, most of these materials end up going to waste and are not used during calls.

HIGH TECH DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN HIGH IMPACT

In addition to the vast amount of sales and marketing materials weighing down reps, pharmaceutical companies also provide their sales teams with high-tech gadgets, such as cell phones, pagers, and laptops, so they can communicate from and gather information in the field. Customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software solutions also are widely deployed with the intent of boosting productivity and sales. These options have proved to be too expensive, cumbersome, and complex for many field sales teams.
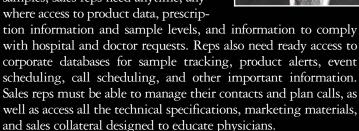
An emerging trend, which addresses the challenges inherent to pharmaceutical sales, is mobile technology. The market for mobile and wireless products and services is expected to grow at a 36% annual clip through 2008, with 2004 and 2005 being the peak-growth years. Several leading-edge companies are implementing new mobile technologies and Web-based CRM packages that deliver the right mix of usability and sales-task automation to ease the burden of information and reporting overload. Few, though, are developing solutions specific enough to meet the unique needs of the pharmaceutical sales environment.

WHAT DO SALES REPS REALLY NEED?

Pharmaceutical sales strategies are shifting toward targeting the "right" physicians at the "right" time, maximizing face time, gaining entry, and ensuring that reps have the appropriate level of information at the point of contact. With the increasing power and prevalence of mobile, tablet, handheld, and Web-based technologies, companies are beginning to realize that they can more effectively prepare their sales teams to sell without literally weighing them down or changing existing business processes.

Catching, or losing, a physician's interest can happen in a matter of seconds. Therefore, sales reps are forced to quickly and suc-cinctly convey their product's key differences and immediately respond to questions. Whether scheduling calls, adhering to the POA, strengthening relationships, or better managing their samples, sales reps need anytime, anywhere access to product data, prescription information and sample levels, and information to comply with hospital and doctor requests. Reps also need ready access to corporate databases for sample tracking, product alerts, event scheduling, call scheduling, and other important information. Sales reps must be able to manage their contacts and plan calls, as well as access all the technical specifications, marketing materials, and sales collateral designed to educate physicians.

While studies show that reps tend not to use Web-only or stand-alone PC-based CRM systems, the combination of mobile and Web-based solutions is being embraced.

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT SOLUTION

Select an option that is pharma specific. It is important to select a vendor that truly understands the pharmaceutical environment. This is especially critical if the solution will be used for sample management because it must be PDMA compliant.

Sales reps are faced with a multitude of physical challenges. Physicians rarely have time to listen to presentations in their offices; therefore, sales meetings often occur while walking to meet patients or during a quick break. With a small window of opportunity to gain the doctor's attention and trust, reps must have all the appropriate tools to give the best presentation possible — without having to juggle an armful of sales materials.

Choose a solution that complies with medical environmental restrictions. Another consideration when evaluating mobile solutions is restrictions on using technical devices to facilitate sales presentations in hospitals or medical centers. Using cellular technology in the medical environment is generally banned for fear that it might cause interference with electronic equipment. Therefore, any solution an organization might choose should have functionality even when wireless access is turned off.

Opt for a technology that complements the organization's culture. What technology solutions have been introduced to the sales team in the past? What worked and what did not? Did certain technologies only work well with a handful of individuals? It is important to identify the company's sales trends to understand why certain sales reps are more successful than others when adapting to new devices and technologies.

Pick a solution that justifies the investment. Before implementing a solution, it is vital to develop a ROI equation. What are the sales numbers today? And, where should they be? Determine the

team's sales goals and if implementing mobile technologies will assist in reaching those goals. With increased efficiency, how many extra sales calls or visits will the rep be able to make? How many additional prescriptions should be expected?

Choosing a mobile sales solution also means saving money by significantly reducing the need and costs associated with printing and distributing paper-based marketing materials. Analysts estimate that 18% of corporate printed material becomes outdated within 30 days. Once the mobile solution is implemented, how much will it cost to maintain/upgrade? Will it be less costly than the price of additional paper materials and inventory?

Companies can realize substantial savings through improved sample management. A barcode-enabled mobile solution can dramatically improve sample tracking. Rather than reps spending hours writing down product and lot numbers, which are then faxed to a data-entry team, they can spend mere minutes scanning these numbers, which are then automatically synchronized and reconciled with corporate sample-management systems. Rep-to-rep sample transfers in the field also can be easily traced using mobile sample-management technologies. Also, short-dated or expired products can be easily and quickly identified and sorted. These measures can save companies millions.

Determine whether it makes more sense to build or buy. Another issue to consider is whether the new mobile technology will be compatible with existing legacy systems. If not, will it operate independently? A pharmaceutical company's IT department must make sure it can support new solutions and platforms and that the vendor it chooses can do the same. Some IT departments decide to develop mobile solutions internally thinking that it is an easy undertaking. There are several good development tools available on the market that make this possible. But for reliable, enterprise-tested, PDMA compliant software with stable synchronization, integration technology, and Web-administration tools, it is best to compare internal development against established solutions.

After determining the mobile solution that will work best for the sales team, it is important to decide if that solution will deliver the ROI results needed.

If adding a new solution will not improve efficiency and service while increasing sales, it is most likely not worth implementing. On the other hand, a mobile solution with all the elements necessary to support an organization's sales effort can dramatically boost profits.

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