

# Direct to the ePharma Consumer

## — In the AGE OF CONNECTIVITY

It is not a passing fad but a permanent shift. E-pharma consumers are here to stay, requiring pharmaceutical and medical device companies to adapt to the new digital environment. However, to understand the hesitancy of the pharma industry and FDA toward direct-to-ePharma consumers, it is helpful to look back 30 years ago to when direct-to-consumer advertising was first introduced in 1983, by Boots Pharmaceuticals, for

its prescription brand of ibuprofen (Rufen). At the time, regulators and major pharma companies resisted the direct-to-consumer approach. A two-year moratorium was immediately enacted by FDA — and initially supported by most major pharma companies. The moratorium was intended to allow regulators time to more fully explore the “risks and benefits” of going direct to consumer. While industry and the FDA viewed it as risky, patients on the other hand viewed it as necessary. AIDS activists were demanding the right to become actively involved in their healthcare, and ironically the then U.S. Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop publicly called for patients to become “empowered healthcare consumers.”

### What Was Old Is New Again

Today, three decades later, in the face of digital marketing, some of the same hesitancy by regulators and industry surrounds the direct to ePharma consumer approach. But this time there is a major difference, while FDA deliberates, and industry’s legal, regulatory, and compliance teams take time to garner institutional knowledge about digital media, patients are leading the charge. Patients are already propelling the broader adoption of direct-to-consumer strategies globally through

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the use of portable digital devices, and it’s happening at warp speed, leaving the industry to catch up.

Consider that more than 90% of patients and or their families now conduct online research before seeking medical intervention. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of adults go online looking for broader health and pharmaceutical-related information.

This trend requires industry and doctors to embrace the most empowered ePharma consumers that ei-

ther group has ever encountered. Constant Internet connectivity — together with the rapid adoption of mobile devices — is changing how we market prescription products and clinical trials direct to ePharma consumers, caregivers, and others.

### Timing is Everything

It’s not a question of if, but when...and the answer is now.

While direct selling to patients through multiple channels has been around since the Boots’ TV and print campaign in 1983, recent technology advances have had a significant impact on consumer behavior, not only in healthcare but in daily living as well.

By 2015, it is estimated that more than 50% of all retail sales will be either online or influenced by the online channel demonstrating the integral use of the Internet in all aspects of daily living.

In the traditional model, industry’s principal customer remains the doctor, who serves as gate keeper, prescriber, and learned intermediary. However, as other industries such as retail companies, financial institutions, consumer products manufacturers, restaurants, and travel-related firms have found, their customers, consumers of all ages, are leveraging

the benefits of an integrated, multi-channel approach, offering mobile applications and online options that make it easy and convenient for customers to execute transactions, access information, and make informed decisions, regardless of location.

Given how quickly patient expectations are rising, direct-to-consumer models that include mobile-enabled digital strategies in a constantly connected future will help differentiate a product or clinical trial from competitors. Tailored messages and information are delivered by a patient’s choice of communication: SMS, email, automated voicemail, direct mail, or a combination. On the commercial side, marketers are finding success in integrating co-pay benefit programs to individual patient needs, on-demand access to experts, and community support.

The most successful direct-to-ePharma consumer campaigns are those that foster a more effective dialogue with patients. Engaging patients online as they are looking for information and integrating that information with programs that are accessible offline and through mobile is the new model for both the commercial and clinical trial sides of the industry.

### Digital Knows No Boundaries

This is not just a U.S. phenomenon either. It’s a global one, as empowerment is occurring in countries with traditional social hierarchies. And while some doctors might prefer patients not to be well informed, patients on the other hand expect to be able to research and obtain product information anytime and anywhere, using whichever channel — or combination of channels — they find most convenient. The same goes for clinical trials as well.

Direct-to-ePharma consumer marketing requires an integrated business model where all channels — digital and physical — work together seamlessly to connect with patients and guide them to diagnosis, medical specialists, treatments and or clinical trials.

Today, ePharma consumers want access to condition education in innovative and engaging formats with personalized assessments. Condi-

tion-specific online videos for example, bring to life the experiences of real people living with real conditions — from allergies to Alzheimer's — as well as caregivers and expert insights. Videos showcase challenges, questions, struggles, humour, relationships, and everyday issues of the patient and caregiver journey. For clinical trials they ease anxiety and address concerns. Importantly, users can come back at their convenience, bookmark it, create their own playlists, rate videos, or send to a friend or family member, further expanding the reach of a direct-to-ePharma consumer campaign.

Reaching the “connected consumer,” today's digital campaigns must incorporate strategies that address fundamental behaviours. These ePatient consumers are increasingly connected:

- » Technically through a wide array of devices,
- » Socially through ever-expanding social networks,
- » Medically through online communities of consequential strangers where ePatients leverage their knowledge with information exchange, and
- » Economically through memberships to online pharmacies that offer discounted prescriptions and medical supplies.

The rapid growth of ePharma consumers has created new opportunities to tap into well defined online patient communications channels for pharmaceutical marketers of prescription drugs and those promoting clinical trials directly to patients.

## E-Population Growth

A number of factors are driving the growth of the ePharma consumer population. Older consumers are increasingly using the Internet as a search tool, with prescription drug information of particular interest in this population. In addition, many people now take multiple prescription medications; in the current economic climate ePharma consumers are carefully considering their therapeutic options. Many cost-conscious older consumers are heading online in search of money-saving coupons and free trials for FDA approved treatments, while other consumers intentionally or by chance seek out clinical trials that offer free study-related medical care and treatment and reimbursement for participation.

The rise in online direct advertising has been

### Guide to Developing a Successful Direct-to-ePharma Consumer Strategy

Steps to Take	Strategy	Tactics
<b>Know your ePharma Consumer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Know the hot spots where your customers go online</li> <li>» Know why they go online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Develop content that is relevant in context to where they engage online.</li> </ul>
<b>Keep it Simple</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Know what ePharma consumer's want to know in order to make informed decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Translate the medical information to lay language.</li> <li>» Ensure that information provided is at a 7th grade level.</li> </ul>
<b>Meet and Greet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Customers have their favorite destinations.</li> <li>» Leverage these intercept points and incorporate them into your touch-point plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Use available analytic data to guide advertising placement and track performance.</li> </ul>
<b>Stay Connected</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Make it as easy as possible for patients to access information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Ensure that all advertising and communications is mobile device friendly.</li> </ul>
<b>Call to Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Include simple steps with contact details that guide patients through the decision-making process to taking an action step.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Incorporate multi-channel steps for patients to turn their decision into action.</li> </ul>

accompanied by a decline in offline advertising, with advertisers looking for more innovative, lower-cost alternatives, and the ability to more precisely reach specific patient populations, especially for clinical trial marketing.

For clinical trials, marketers must find and connect with specific subsets of patients that meet very specific medical criteria. On the commercial side this specificity is generally not required as direct-to-consumer campaigns target patients therapeutically — diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and cardiovascular. Clinical teams that have embraced e-marketing as an integral part of their patient recruitment strategies have found online media costs to be significantly lower, with per-patient recruitment costs up to six times less than offline advertising. But online marketing success requires the artful use of market data and patient understanding.

Succeeding at online marketing is more than simple arithmetic. Instead, a digital marketing team that is well-versed in Web-based outreach must interpret various search engine analytics, and be able to translate that information into a nuanced understanding of various search engine capabilities. Even details such as the direction in which advertisements are positioned on a Web page can influence the effectiveness of outreach campaigns. An effective e-marketing campaign requires constant and daily attention and assessment of performance metrics. Dedicated digital marketing managers bring a highly defined skill set that is required to truly launch successful digital ePharma consumer campaigns that expedi-

tiously deliver patients to clinical trials or to a branded product.

## Lessons From the Past

We have learned over the past several decades of launching and implementing deeply engaging patient activation programs for branded products and clinical trials that a continuous supply of resources for patients are needed at every decision point — from online assessment tools to call centers to accessing clinical research centers on demand. We also know that different types of patients behave differently, and as such, patient communities have provided a window into the lives of patients, affording a depth of knowledge not possible before. Harnessing the power of digital media, information, and data through portable technologies will take direct-to-ePharma consumer campaigns to new heights. **PV**

*Editor's Note: Liz Moench has been at the forefront of marketing innovation in the industry for more than three decades. Her achievements include launching the industry's first direct-to-consumer advertising campaign using television and print in 1983.*

**MediciGlobal** is a direct-to-patient marketing firm specializing in bringing new research opportunities and health products directly to patients.

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