

Tapping *into* NEW MARKET Research Opportunities

The growing use of social media is creating new resources for researchers.

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SCOTT EVANGELISTA / Deloitte



Social media is changing the rules in many sectors of the health and life-sciences commercial business, and market research is no exception. The way research is designed, executed, and delivered will have to change as companies shift their focus from primary to specialty care, and the role of the various stakeholders takes on different weights. Companies now have both the ability and the need to keep in close, more constant touch with their target audiences and the place to begin is with online recruitment and marketing research online communities (MROC).

“MROCs are extremely valuable tools,” says Chris DeAngelis, VP of sales, North America, Survey Sampling International. “They support research that centers around insights and innovation. Their purpose is to provide continual feedback on ideation, including testing language and social media strategies, as well as evaluating websites and developing product concepts.”

Social networks in general are beneficial for their ability to get to know the consumer and to also receive responses in a very quick time-frame.

“Surveying people using social media creates the opportunity for rapid response,” says Harris Kaplan, CEO of Healogix. “While far from projectable, speed has its value and, as more people become directly engaged, the direct action-ability of this information will increase.”

Marketers can learn a lot by listening to what is being said on the various social media websites where people who suffer a common illness chat and give advice to one another, Mr. Kaplan says.

“What is said in the various chat rooms will ultimately find its way to prescribing physicians and therefore impact revenue in the future,” Mr. Kaplan says.

Several factors are driving the move to online market research, and the most significant may be because that is where consumers are going to share ideas and experiences.

“The combination of vast changes to the market research world and the huge explosion of the Internet, with its accompanying consumer empowerment, have led to big changes in how and where to reach respondents,” says Mr. DeAngelis. “For example, Facebook now has 500-plus million users, half of whom log on every day. The average user is connected to 80 community pages and creates 90 pieces of content each month. People are quite comfortable collaborating or commenting on other people’s views, whether on Facebook or other social networks. Perhaps most importantly, consumers are accustomed to reading other people’s reviews of products and services before actually going out and buying things themselves. As a result, consumers have gained great power.”

Change does not come without its struggles however, and the research industry will need to find a way to provide the information that is pertinent to the product, as opposed to focusing on new ways to collect data.

“Today, information is the fuel driving pharmaceutical decision making, however, as the number of stakeholders grows along with the number of markets now of interest to pharmaceutical companies, market research is challenged to provide the integrated synthesis pharmaceutical marketers need,” Mr. Kaplan says.

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HARRIS KAPLAN / Healogix



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DONNA WRAY / TGaS Advisors

He says researchers have become more divorced from the products they support and the quest for new and unique methodology takes priority over actionability and cost effectiveness.

“Studies are often routinely done because they are remnants of a template created to provide consistency of information across products within a company’s portfolio rather than to address a specific brand or opportunity requirement,” Mr. Kaplan says.

The Evolving Role of Segmentation

Segmentation today is too broad and all encompassing, says Scott Evangelista, principal, national commercial practice leader, Deloitte.

“Today, segmentation is often demographically based with occasional effort to behavior-based but segmentation of the future will be

built on many ongoing threads of information, and will be more focused on the alignment of the best product for the right patient, in the context of how the provider seeks to treat and measure the outcome,” he says.

Segmentation will always remain critical to identifying the appropriate target customers and new technology will open more pathways to consumer information.

“The future will feature customer communication typing tools, which will enhance today’s efforts much like attitudinal segmentation enhanced the behavioral techniques of the last decade,” says Jeff Kozloff, president and CEO of Verilogue. “These techniques will bridge why — as in the attitudes — and what — as in behavior — with how — as in communication — to reach customers and propel decision-making.”

With more physicians and patients participating in online social networks, pharma will have greater opportunities to segment mar-

kets and tailor messages to specific physicians and consumers.

“The limiting factor for segmentation has always been the ability of sales forces to deliver specific messages to different audiences,” Mr. Kaplan says. “As more physicians become computer savvy and become part of networks for aligning decision making, there will be more possibilities to reach them. Additionally, as consumers play an ever more important role, understanding the various segments within this much larger audience will be needed by marketing to prioritize their efforts and develop effective messages.”

MROCs: Six Steps to Optimum Results

Social networking is changing the way the industry looks at its commercial practices, and this includes market research. It is time for the industry to catch up to the new world order where customers and companies engage regularly, based on all of the channel preferences, and needs of the customer. The following suggestions can be used to establish a marketing research online community (MROC).

- 1. Build communities** with a definite purpose in mind. Set clear objectives, and share those goals with community members to make them feel part of the process. Involving members helps drive the most effective innovation and ideation.
- 2. Determine who should be part of the community** and how many members the group should have. Researchers should identify the characteristics, behaviors and traits they want members to possess. It's important to remember that communities don't have to be large to be effective. In fact, the larger the community, the more challenging it can be to manage and engage with members.
- 3. Communicate clearly** the community's boundaries and goals. Recent research by Decision Analyst shows that people are more innovative in environments where boundaries are set versus in those that allow participants to do whatever they want. For communities to be effective, researchers must create the right environment, give people the right tools, and then show people how to use those tools. Keep in mind that not everyone knows how to blog or to post comments, so be sure to teach people how to use the technologies available to them.
- 4. Guide members** in sharing high-level ideas rather than very specific, detailed concepts.
- 5. Remember what really motivates people** to join communities: helping. A 2003 study by Frank & Shaw reveals that the most important motivator among community members is the chance to help others while the least important is financial rewards. This motivation to help is the main reason community members are more engaged, more creative, and more likely to provide candid and thoughtful answers.
- 6. Maintain quality.** Track people's contributions, and replace nonproductive members. Keep people busy, and make sure they stay active. Make sure there is a dedicated manager in place monitoring activity and nurturing the group into a strong, active community.

Source: Survey Sampling International.
For more information, visit surveysampling.com.

Measuring Online Efforts

According to Mr. Evangelista, measurement is measurement, no matter what is being measured.

"The first step is to set the intention of measuring, regardless of the outcomes, and the organization should work to improve techniques over time as it learns what works," he says. "Another important factor in measurement is creating meaningful control groups. Having a control group that isn't perfect is better than none at all, and with time, like the measurement techniques, the groups will improve in standards, and last but not least, researchers need to stop relying on data that anyone can buy and start getting creative about data they can create and maintain a lasting advantage with."

Donna Wray, executive director, management advisor, digital and relationship marketing, TGaS Advisors, reports that the biggest challenge regarding measurement for the industry is not deciding on a best practice, but rather actually having a practice in place that tracks across all media.

The 2011 TGaS Advisors benchmark, Healthcare Professional Relationship Marketing, showed that pharmaceutical companies are still struggling to create the platforms that allow integrated marketing and measures for their brands.

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CHRIS DEANGELIS
SSI



According to Ms. Wray, 46% of companies get a lot of value from the ability to track volume within a tactic, but only 9% from optimizing the mix across tactics. Only 18% of companies bridge the gap between sales and marketing, using reps to follow up on requests via non-personal promotion.

"It would be a best practice just to have cross-media marketing and measurement," Ms. Wray says. **PV**

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