

A MARKETING SMORGASBORD

MOVING 'BEYOND THE PUSH' AND OFFERING DOCTORS A SMORGASBORD OF INFORMATION IS THE BIG MARKETING CHALLENGE FOR PHARMA, SAYS DR TIM RINGROSE, CEO OF M3 EUROPE

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'Provide more education', 'do less of a hard sell' and 'be more human' – these are some of the things doctors in the top five European countries want from pharma, according to a recent survey. But how does this wish-list marry with the reality of what pharma offers to doctors and the way it interacts with them?

Pharma spends millions of pounds on 'push' marketing. As a result, it often focuses too heavily on delivering promotional messages that tick strategic marketing boxes but fail to provide doctors with the resources they actually need.

Evidence shows that doctors do not want to be marketed to in that way; they want more information from pharma and they want it on their terms. For example, they are interested in new products, but all they want to know is whether these products are better, safer and/or cheaper – and can quickly see through marketing spin.

Doctors also like a smorgasbord of self-service medical information they can access as and when it suits them – a way of working that has been made a lot easier by the internet, which they have embraced. For example, statistics from the 2012 Manhattan Research *Taking the Pulse Europe* survey show 89% of doctors use online healthcare professional networks for medical information, while 53% use message boards, communities, social networks and blogs at least monthly.

Furthermore, the research shows that 41% of doctors say these HCP portals influence their clinical decisions, compared with just 20% for pharma websites. And 41% say doctor portals influence prescribing decisions, compared with 81% for colleagues and 32% for sales representatives.

While doctors have been quick to spot the potential of the internet for information, education and collaboration, the pharma industry remains unconvinced; hence it spends only 6% of its marketing budgets on digital, according to Cegedim Strategic Data, and continues to devote most of this to own brand.com websites.

Research suggests this reticence results from a lack of strategy, a lack of conviction about the value of digital and an understandable anxiety about regulation and compliance. Credibility is also a problem, with data suggesting that only 3% of doctors think online pharma company resources are credible and 42% saying they never visit their websites.

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So how can pharma overcome these challenges and create resources that will resonate with doctors? Firstly, it is helpful to think about what motivates



individuals to use the internet. As consumers we love a sense of community, the opportunity to express ourselves and the ability to share knowledge – exactly the things that digital technology is enabling us to do better and faster.

We need to translate those basic needs into sales and marketing activities by looking at what customers are doing in their own world and how they interact. We need to meet them in their own environment, find out what they want and define how we can build the content they need. Obviously, there's got to be a 'win-win' for pharma, and the information it provides must meet its commercial objectives. But it must add value to healthcare professionals too, or it will fail.

As Deni Baschiera, from the eBusiness team at Bristol-Myers Squibb, recently explained at the eforpharma conference in Barcelona: "Doctors want knowledge and they want to have their questions answered. However, you need to do it in an environment where there is a level of trust. Pharma websites are not the first place doctors look for information on diseases, or even about the drugs that pharma manufactures."

He added: "It's not about the quantity of information. It's about the quality of information and presenting it in a way that is easy for doctors to digest and consume. Doctors don't have time for pages and pages of detail. Before you decide on the

macro-strategy you need to listen. You need to do an online digital landscape analysis in specific markets and match that against specific customers.

"You must understand what your customers need and set that against your marketing objectives. You must think about what unmet needs your customers may have, or what knowledge gaps. If you serve those needs within a multi-channel ecosystem then you can do both push and pull."

Engaging with doctors via independent online networks they already use and trust can help pharma overcome credibility issues as well as giving it access to a ready-made audience. Such channels also provide opportunities for pharma to research their audience's wants and needs, monitor their response to campaigns and tailor resources accordingly.

This can help pharma companies work in a different way; one that recognises that doctors want data and transparency from them as much as consumers want life-saving and life-enhancing treatments. Paradoxically, while doctors struggle to access the information they need from pharma, many patients who may be willing to take risks on new, but potentially life-saving drugs, particularly in the area of oncology, are prevented from doing so because of barriers imposed by regulators, commissioners and payers.

By establishing a meaningful dialogue with target groups of doctors and payers – and engaging with them on their terms – pharma can build on changes that are happening in some areas, particularly around orphan drugs, where excitement about their potential is reversing traditional barriers to market. In some cases, pharma companies are struggling to keep up with the speed at which regulators are keen to work.

Engaging with doctors on their terms and giving them the right tools, including access to information, must surely be one of the best ways to help break down the barriers that exist between doctors and pharma, and patients and new life-saving treatments. Indeed, it can help pharma to address one of its biggest challenges, which is not about 'moving beyond the pill' but moving beyond the 'push' in sales and marketing. ■

For more information on M3, the global provider of technology services in healthcare, and its new European Division, which includes www.doctors.net.uk, www.mdlinx.com, and www.networksinhealth.com, please call Tim Ringrose on +44 (0)1235 828400, or email tim.ringrose@eu.m3.com