

Social Media: Humanizing The Brand

Engaging and Educating

Social media has become the bedrock of Internet culture and most corporations are eager to mine its data. According to a Harvard Business Review study, “The New Conversation: Taking Social Media from Talk to Action”, two-thirds of the 2100 companies surveyed said they were using or planning to use social media. But less than 23% of those companies were extracting data with social media analytics; only 7% were able to integrate social media into marketing activities. Despite the huge growth of social media use by pharmaceutical consumers, pharma companies, like their peers in other industries, have not yet learned how to use analytics to conquer the Mount Everest of data for actionable insights.

Some pharma executives have taken notice of these trends. *Pharmaceutical Executive* and SAS conducted in-depth interviews with senior pharma executives. We found out that companies are eager to use social media analytics to engage patients and humanize their brands. They just don't know how to do it. The following white paper offers some suggestions.

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Social Media: Best Uses

There are many reasons why pharma should become involved with social media: A 2011 report by the Pew Research Center noted that 80% of all American Internet users look up information about a specific disease or treatment online; 34% of Internet users read other people’s comments on medical issues; 25% watch online health videos.

Engagement and education

Traditional pharmaceutical industry marketing uses a “push” model. It combines DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) advertising with a huge sales force to connect with physicians. That model is changing dramatically. “Shout” marketing by the industry is being transformed into more patient-centric “influencer” marketing, a development that is having a profound impact on the pharma industry.

Social media empowers patients to exchange information about themselves and their health management. Pharma companies need to listen to key influencers who might appear in a variety of venues including health management, websites, YouTube videos, Twitter, and blogs. By harnessing consumer-generated content, pharma companies can learn how to recruit new consumers, share risk information, and monitor brand attrition. Pharma

executives in marketing, legal, and research can follow marketplace sentiment and understand issues in real-time.

But first they must listen; they must learn to talk *with* consumers, not talk *at* them. By engaging consumers and learning about their experiences, pharma companies can then fine-tune and humanize the brand.

“Social media is a wonderful way to get immediate real-time feedback,” said one executive interviewed by *Pharmaceutical Executive/SAS*. Another noted: “It gives you a close connection to your audience.” Yet most respondents admitted that their firms were still “dipping their toes in the water” of social media, unwilling to take the plunge

Fears and Concerns About Social Media

Many of the senior executives interviewed realized the benefits of social media. However, they expressed several of the following concerns that kept their companies from a full commitment to utilizing social media analytics:

Ambiguous regulatory environment.

Interviewees were concerned about adverse effect reporting and fair balance guidelines. “There is a lack of clarity from the FDA, which is causing a lot of angst and concern.”

Another interviewee noted “As soon as the regulatory bodies in and outside the US make a determination of pharma’s role in social media and what’s permissible and not permissible, that should allow everything to proceed at a slow and steady pace.”

ROI is not evident

To get buy-in from the CIO, CFO or CMO, respondents said they need to explain the impact of social media on sales and the brand. Respondents are most interested in monitoring brand reputation, patient needs, switch adoption, product attrition and patient support programs.

Suggestions To Ease Senior Management's Doubts

Interviewees also mentioned several features in social analytics that would win them over:

Make buy-in cross-disciplinary

Marketing and R&D all need to be on board with any decision to acquire social media analytics. Legal/compliance should be kept current about regulatory issues arising from the reporting of adverse events. “A central [cross-disciplinary] group can ensure consistency and a methodology to ensure that people abide by whatever regulatory framework happens,” noted one executive.

Set up usage guidelines

Roche and Johnson & Johnson were ahead of the curve in establishing guidelines for the use of their social media. For example, in its “Social Media Principles,” Roche sets forth rules for being transparent about company affiliation when Roche users scout for sentiment about their products and adverse event reporting. Roche corporate representatives are also advised to respect privacy and copyright laws.

A respondent to the Pharmaceutical Executive/SAS survey agreed: “There is a lot to be said about [preserving consumer] anonymity—it gives you a closer connection to your audience.”

Explain the value proposition

Consumers via social media create important data about their experience with a particular drug or its competitors. They also express their concerns about their medical condition and their suggestions for improving product use. This treasure trove of consumer intelligence can unlock value and educate about the benefits of the brand.

Social Media Analytics: Extracting the Best Data

High on the interviewees’ list for necessary features for utilizing social media analytics would include:

“**Executives are interested in monitoring brand reputation, patient needs, and switch adoption.**”

Deep industry knowledge

Solution providers must understand the pharma industry. “I’d be far more reliant on someone who’s executed social media and can measure social media across pharma,” said one senior pharma executive. Another concurred: “The pharma industry’s needs are nothing like the needs of others. I think they need to understand where pharma is going and what pharma wants to accomplish—what the regulatory issues are and whether their solution is appropriate for pharma.” This includes the ability to serve two separate audiences—Health Care Providers (HCPs) and consumers. “We can’t have a blanket approach to our physician and patient bases,” said one senior manager.

Strategic perspective

Respondents said they are looking for a strategic partnership—a consultative, vendor-based model. “I would prefer to have an outside vendor to become experts on it [social media analytics], because I think that you’re most likely to get innovations that way,” said one executive. Most interviewees agreed that an in-house model is harder to build.

Real-time, on-demand solutions

Given the rapid pace of information exchange in social media like Twitter and Facebook, social media analytics should

be able to capture data in real-time. “It’s a wonderful way to get immediate real-time feedback,” said a brand manager.

Complete data capture and integration

Social media analytics should be linked to Facebook, Twitter, and influential health management sites and blogs. In addition, data from the scientific and investor community should be easily accessible. Users need to be able to integrate the latest research developments stored in PubMed and scientific/medical journals. Users should also be able to keep tabs on financial and business publications such as the *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal* so that they can interpret corporate sentiment about new drug releases or existing drug updates.

Clean data

Of the trillions of entries on the Internet, not all are meaningful or trustworthy. Data need to be cleaned to mine the most relevant sentiment and opinions affecting your business. To reach this goal, social media analytics should have good natural speech recognition. They should also provide the right categories for data classification based on a broad knowledge of the pharma industry.

Customizable delivery

Social analytics dashboards and workbenches should be

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adaptable to the sizable delivery needs of your company. Look for cross-functional applications that include marketing, PR, R&D, and legal/compliance. Users should be able to create required charts, graphs and text-based documents for their department reports and presentations.

Global capabilities with multilingual support

Social media is a worldwide phenomenon. Analytics packages should therefore offer multilingual support in major languages of global markets. One marketing manager said: “I have research running in North America, South America, Europe, Asia/Pacific. And I get questions from Scandinavia and the Middle East. I have a global scope.’

Limitless Insights

The amount of patient insights available on the Internet is virtually limitless. Patients are freely expressing their opinions about their medication and health management experiences. By using social media analytics, companies can better understand what is being said about them, their products and their competition. It’s an opportunity for customer engagement, education and better decision-making.

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