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How to Do Digital: 5 Steps to Kick Start Dynamic Digital Initiatives

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Everyone in the life sciences industry talks about how vital it is to integrate digital into commercial strategies in order to more efficiently target audiences, engage in relevant conversations, and improve conversion. The question is: How?

Without a proven “how to do digital” manual, industry marketers have largely relied on trial and error—the results of which serve as a rough guide for subsequent approaches. However, with the advent of powerful data capture and storage technologies, along with the availability of cloud-based software solutions, the industry can finally gain rich customer insights faster, which can help drive audience behaviors.

The Digital Disconnect

Today, most physicians—upwards of 98%, according to Manhattan Research’s *Taking the Pulse* U.S. 2015 study—use digital resources monthly or more often to find medical information. Yet in spite of such an overwhelming majority of healthcare professionals (HCPs) connecting digitally, life sciences companies still invest 93% of their marketing budgets in analog channels, including static assets to support their face-to-face engagement. The life sciences industry lags behind nearly all other industries implementing digital strategies, despite digital’s inherent channel efficiencies.

“Physicians are drowning in information and layers of clinical standards, quality measures and guidelines they need to follow,” says Monique Levy, Vice President of Research, Manhattan Research. “In the new clinical workflow, physicians need life sciences companies to provide more relevant, discoverable, personalized, cross-channel content and support, and this can only happen if pharma digital maturity leaps forward. Physicians believe pharma can add value but they won’t work too hard to find what they need.”

Brian McHale, Enterprise Multichannel Marketing, Global Commercial Operations at Pfizer, offers one example of how pharma can effectively use digital in the multichannel promotional mix. At ePharma in New York City, McHale spoke about how Pfizer successfully integrated digital marketing with

sales force engagements by leveraging cloud software, compliant content and customer interaction data. McHale explained how Pfizer launched a re-triggered email program to enhance relationships with physicians by providing timely and relevant information via physicians' preferred channel. More than two-thirds of HCPs prefer to receive industry news, product announcements, research and educational opportunity information through email, according to a 2014 HubSpot survey.

Of course, many other approaches are available, and each company's commercial strategy will be different—uniquely designed based on the region, therapeutic area, product, budget and audience. But they all should have a compounding effect on commercial success. With each interaction, the HCP informs the company about where they are on the product journey—what information they want, how they want to receive it, and when. Life sciences companies that capture and analyze this data can use each touch point to build on the last to drive increasingly more personalized communications across all channels.

Developing a Digital Disruption Plan

Follow these five key steps to establish your own effective multichannel digital strategy:

1. Measure a broad view of customer interactions across channels and customer-facing teams. Determining which channels to employ and the right mix of channels must begin by understanding the ecosystem around the target audience. Pull together data from all channels where possible, including traditional, analog channels to create a holistic but singular customer view. Link all of the data sources together to provide sales, marketing and medical teams with easy and appropriate access, plus the ability to analyze and update the customer profile in real time.

2. Extract customer insights based upon actual channel use and message response.

A cross-channel view of customers, in conjunction with their responses to the content delivered in each channel, permits life sciences companies to unearth accurate insights about customer preferences. But this must be based on real data, not derived inferences from, say, a blind survey.

One approach is to segment the entire customer journey into several phases, with each phase corresponding to a measured level of engagement. If an HCP is entirely new to the condition, the treatment options or drug brand, this may be reflected with a score of zero on a scale of 0 to 5. On the other hand, a key opinion leader in the disease state and an evangelist of the product may score a five. In this way, the commercial team has a clear sense of where the customer is on the journey and can tailor content and successive interactions appropriately.

3. Tailor content across all channels according to these new insights.

Traditionally, life sciences customer-facing teams across sales, marketing and medical had little or no visibility to customer interactions outside of their discipline. As a result, HCPs had a disjointed experience across touch points. With new cloud technology, it is now possible to coordinate and tailor each engagement based on a complete understanding of customer needs.

Whether the customer chooses to interact with the company via personal, digital or even medical communications, he can finally maintain a continuous conversation that picks up wherever and with whomever it was off. Ongoing personalization increases content relevance to the customer over time, as more brand contact leads to greater data fidelity. Adaptive content can then be served up according to customer preferences.

4. Implement processes and capabilities to ensure timely, updated content across all channels. Processes built to support traditional, lengthy content refresh cycles no longer meet the needs of fast-paced digital engagement. The problem is compounded in a digital multichannel environment with the added challenge of accommodating regulatory reviews. So, enabling more channels without addressing the content development process and timelines can actually do more harm than good by exposing the audience to stale materials more frequently.

A comprehensive, easy-to-use content management system (CMS) can not only solve this problem, but also make content-heavy multichannel programs more cost effective. Streamlining the end-to-end process from content creation to distribution across all channels with a modern CMS improves creativity, speed to market, message consistency and overall compliance—especially when it comes to updating marketing materials.

5. Learn fast, and evolve faster to avoid hitting “replay” on a single course of action. Competitive advantage will go to companies that leverage customer data—along with the best content creation and distribution capabilities—to deliver the most relevant information to their customers at the moment they want it. Cloud solutions today make this economical and scalable because they allow commercial teams to learn on the fly.

Marketers are no longer bound to a “one size fits all” content approach for each large customer segment. Instead, commercial teams can engage with customers individually and at a much faster pace. It frees teams to reach out in various ways, more often, and then learn from those interactions. Data from these engagements informs subsequent interactions for a dynamic, ever evolving personal approach.

If you're one of the many life sciences companies finally making a full commitment to digital, remember not to over-engineer the process. Begin with a hypothesis about the multichannel approach and test it in a small, controlled way so no team bites off more than they can manage. Start with a single brand. Learn by doing, and then deploy more widely as your approach

evolves.