



Embracing Virtual: Elevating Engagement in Pharma & Medtech

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Pharmaceutical companies are reinventing the ways they deliver content to healthcare professionals (HCPs), increasingly relying on digital and virtual channels.
- Digital technologies enable personalizing engagement with HCPs.
- Digital opinion leaders are the new key opinion leaders.
- Virtual and hybrid approaches open new opportunities for engaging with patients.

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OVERVIEW

The ways that pharma companies communicate with healthcare professionals are evolving, driven by advances in digitalization in all spheres of public and private life. Physicians increasingly prefer engagements to feel less like sales pitches and more like curated content adapted to their area of expertise or research interests, as well as their availability. The pharmaceutical industry understands this, wants to deliver, and is working to equip marketing and commercial teams with the right capabilities.

CONTEXT

A panel of medical affairs, marketing, and digital transformation experts convened by Within3, an insight-gathering technology platform for the life sciences industry, discussed the value of virtual engagement for improving the experience of both healthcare professionals and patients.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Pharmaceutical companies are reinventing the ways they deliver content to healthcare professionals (HCPs), increasingly relying on digital and virtual channels.

The COVID-19 pandemic put front and center the issue of how the pharmaceutical industry communicates and engages with providers. With many face-to-face meetings canceled and migrating online, the shift evidenced the practicality of using virtual outreach to conduct business and the preference of many HCPs, even prior to the pandemic, to do so.

HCPs have been asking us to improve all the channels we use to communicate with them: remote interaction with medical reps, virtual meetings, websites, emails. So we are adjusting the way we produce content, but we should adjust all our systems, including our go-to-market model. This change was planned to happen sometime within the next 10 years, but because of COVID-19, it has been accelerated.

Dmitry Schourov, Pfizer

Figuring out an appropriate omnichannel engagement strategy is not just a nice thing to do to respond to customers' evolving preferences, but has become an imperative in a fiercely competitive market. It is estimated that over the next three to five years the industry will experience significant advancements in digitalization and companies that don't keep up may find themselves outmaneuvered by competitors.

The future is a hybrid engagement model and we have to become experts in those channels to make sure we are not offering the wrong content over the wrong channel or trying to engage a healthcare professional in a way that is convenient for us, but not convenient for them.

Lance Hill, Within3



Digital technologies enable personalizing engagement with HCPs.

Deploying virtual engagement tools can enable marketers to determine the optimal time, best way, and what content to use when reaching out to HCPs. Technology gives marketers the ability to understand HCPs' preferences for how and when they prefer to engage with pharma companies. Digital engagement tools provide marketers with insight into HCP participation and allow personalized reminders and follow-up. Marketers can then use this information to tailor their marketing and communications activities to fit a HCP's demonstrated habits and preferences. For example, if an HCP shows that they are most likely to open emails mid-week, in the evening, outreach teams will know that sending promotional emails at 2pm on a Monday, when physicians are more likely to be busy seeing patients, is to be avoided. This is an illustration of how digital technologies can personalize interactions and improve results.

Understanding the hours that HCPs want to be talked to allows us to personalize the engagement experience.

Christopher Nugent, Kiniksa Pharmaceuticals

Digital opinion leaders are the new key opinion leaders.

Pharma companies are reassessing their engagement strategies, not only in terms of *how* and *when* they talk to HCPs, but also *who* they talk to. Until now, key opinion leaders (KOLs) have been the main focus, targeted for their visibility and ability to influence others, thanks to their academic appointments, publications, speaking engagements, and seats on editorial boards or medical societies. But perceptions of who is a medical influencer are changing. HCPs who rise to prominence through other spheres of influence, such as social media, are beginning to take their place.

To stay relevant, companies are beginning to pay more attention to these emerging digital opinion leaders and incorporate new metrics to identify them. They represent a growing segment of the HCP workforce, are generally younger than traditional KOLs, and many are digital natives—so the engagement outreach they are more likely to respond to is one that is aligned with a digital-first mindset.

As far as how to identify these digital KOLs, one successful method is network analytics. The key criteria to look for is not who among them tweets the most, but rather the place they occupy within their respective web of influence (center, edge, periphery, or somewhere in between), who else they are connected to, and what professional topics they are involved with. That way medical affairs and marketing teams have a better way of triangulating who matters, in what context, and as a consequence, they can be much more focused and targeted in engaging with them.

The great thing about that new set of HCPs is that it incorporates a lot of what the life sciences industry is often looking for: up-and-coming opinion leaders, folks who are earlier on in their career trajectory, and who we want to try and identify and establish relationships with.

Barry Lubarsky, Medical Affairs Strategy, Alkermes

Virtual and hybrid approaches open new opportunities for engaging with patients.

HCPs are not the only stakeholders who stand to benefit from a revamped, digitalized approach to engagement. Although pharma companies in much of the world are restricted from marketing prescription drugs directly to patients, the agility that digital affords to engage with patients and patient advocacy groups can help marketers tap more readily into unique user insights. In addition, for some conditions that are associated with stigma, such as HIV, digital technologies allow patients to provide their perspectives at industry conferences discreetly and without fear of exposing themselves.

The digital world enables us to create layers of identification, so that patients can voice their concerns or give input while blocking their identifying information, and that way we can bring the end user's voice into the room . . . it creates such a momentum—people feel empowered, people feel able to speak up.

Berna Özelgün, Gilead Sciences

BIOGRAPHIES



Lance Hill

Chief Executive Officer, Within3

As Chief Executive Officer of Within3, Lance Hill brings his own brand of energy, leadership, and vision to the company. With the belief that deeper engagement among healthcare professionals results in improved healthcare and better patient outcomes, Lance strategizes with global healthcare decision makers on how to integrate digital collaboration solutions into their businesses as an effective new channel of communication. A veteran in the technology industry, Lance dedicates himself to work he strongly believes in—improving healthcare by providing an easy-to-use, always accessible, digital collaboration solution for healthcare professionals and industry leaders to connect, communicate, and collaborate.



Barry Lubarsky

Vice President, Medical Affairs Strategy, Alkermes

Barry Lubarsky, Ph.D., has spent more than 15 years in various medical affairs roles. He is currently Vice President of Medical Affairs Strategy at Alkermes, Inc, a company focused on developing medicines for addiction, serious mental illness and cancer. In this role, Barry leads the medical director teams that drive strategy and provide medical support for Alkermes' portfolio of approved and investigational drugs. In addition, he has been involved in the rapid digital transformation initiatives within the medical affairs group to improve external engagement with healthcare professionals. Prior to Alkermes, Barry led medical affairs teams in preparing for the launches of products in ophthalmology and personalized genetic medicines for the treatment of patients with cystic fibrosis. Barry has also worked in the areas of hemophilia, inflammation, and dermatology.



Christopher Nugent

Senior Director, Digital Marketing & Strategy, Kiniksa Pharmaceuticals

Christopher Nugent is the Senior Director of Digital Marketing and Strategy at Kiniksa Pharmaceuticals. Prior to this role, Christopher was at Alkermes, where he built the internal capabilities for all digital marketing execution in-house. This included the building and executing all emails campaigns (via Marketo) and deployment of websites (via Kentico) for the whole Alkermes organization. (Brand teams, Medical Affairs, Corporate Comm, etc.). Prior to Alkermes, Christopher was at Palladian Partners where he worked for clients including Definitive Healthcare, Nuance Communications, CA Technologies, and Church & Dwight Pharmaceuticals.



Berna Özelgün

Associate Director, Medical Affairs, Gilead Sciences

Dr. Berna Özelgün was trained as a medical doctor with a degree in Genetics and Bioengineering before joining the pharma industry in the medical team of Mustafa Nevzat-Amgen in 2012, covering the infectious diseases and neurology portfolio, then moving to Novartis to support the autoinflammation function in rare diseases. Since 2015, she has been working on the Gilead Sciences' medical team in HIV. Berna's major interests are epidemiological research and access to diagnosis and care projects, and she serves as the patient and community engagement point of contact in her team, partnering closely with Public Affairs and Government Affairs on awareness, modelling and health economics projects. She also supports European Distributor markets on the commercial team. Besides her role in pharma, she is pursuing a PhD in neuroscience at Yeditepe University.



Dmitry Schourov, PhD

Senior Director, Biopharma Quality Regional Lead, International Developed Markets, Pfizer

Dmitry has more than 20 years' background in senior pharma industry leadership roles in Russia, Germany, France, and globally. Currently he leads the Commercial Quality team in International Developed Markets for Pfizer. Dmitry is an expert in marketing, portfolio management, business & corporate strategy, business analytics & forecasting, training, FFE, digital and operational compliance. Dmitry has been a member of several country, regional, and global Leadership teams, as well as leading/taking part in multiple forums, projects, and working groups across the globe.



Lori Ellis (Moderator)

Custom Content Writer, Informa Pharma Intelligence

Lori has been a storyteller for over 20 years. She has created marketing content for specialty pharmacies and led national marketing campaigns. In the tech industry, she has developed marketing campaigns and assisted companies with rebranding their images and products. As a wordsmith, she has authored, edited, co-authored, and project managed a variety of content from marketing content to clinical studies for companies within the healthcare and tech industries. She has created content for print, digital, and video platforms throughout her career.