Marketing Tech Opens New Doors

Omnichannel as company commitment is nothing new to technical marketing in pharma. Digital is everywhere and has everyone's eye and ear. What marketers need now, **Sarah Mahoney** reports, is a broader omnichannel funnel continuously open to deeper customer engagement

When the words "multichannel" and "omnichannel" first started slipping into marketing lexicons a half-decade ago, they were recession-inspired code. They really meant, "Even if we had the budget for TV, no one is watching anymore. And the magazines we used to use have either folded or gone digital anyway."

But as the omnichannel concept has gained steam, everyone in the biosciences — doctors, payers, and consumers — has become increasingly digital. And they are keenly aware that there is a huge difference between marketing that drives awareness (think annoying pop-ups) versus messages that increase engagement.

"While it's true that no one ever gets fired for doing what was done last year," says Dan Stein, SVP, analytics services and product strategies, Crossix, "there is a new level of sophistication creeping in. People are thinking more broadly. They are coming to the understanding that they need to distribute content where people are having conversations." And as the understanding of the complexity of the patient journey grows, marketers also recognize "that there needs to be a good value exchange along the way. They're asking, 'What are we providing? How can we better engage?'"

Crafting a powerful umbrella strategy is only the beginning: It needs to be deliv-

ered in different channels in a genuinely user-centric fashion. There's a growing understanding that each time a brand succeeds in a customer interaction, it deepens the relationship. The problem? While marketers think they are pretty good at this — IBM reports that 81% of all marketers believe that they contextually understand their customers — their customers disagree. Only 38% say they feel understood.

Connecting with disparate audiences

Doing better means carefully developing a strategic message and then delivering it through the right channels, says Christine Coyne, VP of specialty pharmaceuticals at BTG, which is currently launching Vistogard, an antidote to overdoses of certain chemotherapy drugs.

"While providers are all generally aware of the risks of toxicity, my job is to educate them about the specifics without villainizing other drugs and without being overly pedantic," she says. "And at the same time we have

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a very fractured target audience. We've got to communicate with multidisciplinary teams — nursing staff, nurse educators, and clinical pharmacists, those looking at blood results in the lab — as well as doctors. That level of engagement needs to be exquisitely focused."

In this case, that's translated to a strategy that starts the old-fashioned way, via telephone, followed by email, webinars, sit-downs, and presentations. But IBM says the engagement arsenal is growing fast, including more reliance on social media advertising, including buyable pins, video, and more opportunities for personalization as well as increasingly nimble email tools.

However, engagement strategies work best when marketers forget about the word "digital," says Jose Andrade, VP, director of creative technology at Flashpoint Medica, "and just replace it with 'human.'" Thanks in no small way to Apple and its fierce focus on customer-centric development, "marketers are backing away from kitchen-sink efforts, like creating websites and cramming as much into them as possible. The goal is to empower the user to engage in a faster, more meaningful way."

And of course, customers' expectations are rising all the time — something that is true whether the audience is a provider, a payer, or a consumer.

"We all have this sense of immediacy. You're not going to make me click on something four times," he says. "People are unforgiving and highly vocal."

Insightful engagement

Another change is that firms are gradually improving their use of unstructured data. While search strategies often focus on metrics like keyword frequency, Andrade continues, "that's clinical and not very natural. People want to speak naturally, so things like a comment box — often an afterthought — are where you can get key insights. The point is that data itself isn't so helpful. It's making data understandable that's the true opportunity."

Mobile has been a game changer for engagement and indicates smoother sailing for new technologies ahead.

"Apple announced HealthKit in 2014 and worked with the FDA to create mobile guidelines in a few years," says Andrade. "We waited much longer for them to touch Web guidelines." And because you have to go through this gauntlet to get to the app store, "that raised the confidence of healthcare professionals." That's particularly meaningful, he says, for companies focused on smaller targets rather than on blockbuster drugs.

But there are obstacles to engagement, including the lingering problem of companies neglecting the back end of digital efforts. "Companies build these linear digital experiences and they're fraught with regulatory review,"

Andrade points out. "They have to explain everything, right down to the architecture, and then it's getting red-marked at the process stage. But the deadline isn't changing. So as you're rushing, you're not thinking about metrics or course corrections, for instance."

There is plenty of shortsighted investment, too, Andrade points out. "Around November, marketing teams will realize that they've got, let's say, $1 million left in their multichannel budget and panic that they'll lose it if they don't use it," he says. "So they do something that just isn't useful and don't realize they could lose millions by spending that $1 million in the wrong way."

Even when companies discover powerful engagement tools, there's still a question of establishing ROI and deciding how much to spend on them. Coyne's company, for instance, is in the middle of finishing up what she says is a terrific app to support its snake anti-venom product and help the estimated 7,000 people who are bit by a poisonous snake in the U.S. each year.

"Snakebites don't happen every day, so even EMTs and ERs aren't prepared to deal with them," she says, "and when bites happen, time equals tissue. Many of the things people think to do — like use a tourniquet — are wrong." The app walks them through the procedure, even using geo-targeting to help pinpoint types of snake. "But the question becomes, 'How much should I spend to keep this app front and center to hikers, patients, and doctors every single year, when snake season rolls around? Do we spend half a million a year to generate awareness?'"

Finding broader engagement options

While apps and websites can offer terrific opportunities for those seeking product information, marketers do better when they think about engagement in much broader terms. "Humans, even sick people, don't always think of themselves as sick," says Stein. "They aren't always raising their hands asking questions about their condition. So how can we engage with them better?"

Tech advances are making it easier. The last six months have seen a distinct improvement in buying media programmatically, "making it much easier and more efficient to buy more broadly," he says. "It's very innovative, with many agencies creating their own trading desks."

Targeting, too, is gaining in sophistication. "A lot of innovation has come from figuring out whom to target," Stein adds. For example, "We can create a model around type 2 diabetes, informed by healthcare data and defined by consumer data, including shopping habits and demographics. So we can recommend to clients and agencies that they use this combination of weighted variables.

"We've created a few hundred models that we can

Apple's focus on customer-centricity let HealthKit users engage meaningfully without a lot of work

distribute to a few dozen platforms," he points out. "And we can reach them no matter what they're doing, including addressable buys in TV." (While retargeting has also gained in precision and sophistication, Stein thinks healthcare companies will continue to steer clear of it owing to HIPAA concerns. "Let's say a man searches something about Viagra on the family computer," he says. "Do we really want those ads to retarget his wife or kids when they log on later?")

Generating feedback

Some of Stein's favorite engagement examples involve the use of relatively low-tech speaker programs. "By using analytics to decide where you should host these events, who the best audience is, whether you should be targeting nurse practitioners or the highest-prescribing doctors, these are really effective and well-received. And it's because they're delivered at the appropriate time, when there is lots of opportunity for questions and feedback."

It all makes for an exciting moment in the industry. "But it's really important to think about a crawl-walk-run strategy," he says. "It just isn't possible to flip a switch that says 'multichannel' and have it work. If a campaign involves TV, print, and digital, you need to evaluate each channel individually. Taking advantage of all these tools of engagement requires a willingness to step back and reassess what's working and what isn't."

Adds Andrade, "Ultimately, engagement is all about communication and being user-centric. That means you know who your audience is and what they need, and you are solving a problem that will empower them, and deliver it in the right channels. That doesn't mean defining it just in an app, but in life." ∎

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