

With digital growing at an ever-faster pace, how can pharma keep up in 2013? Five experts offer some insight on the gains that have been made—and the hurdles the industry still faces

On the



Lisa Flaiz
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1
In what areas has pharma made the most digital progress in the past year?

Buoyed by Big Data's possibilities, the pharma marketing community seems reinvigorated around digital, not only as a marketing tool, but as an important decision support tool. We are seeing progress in our approach to analytics as marketers, and that includes breaking out of the traditional ROI mold and integrating engagement and other important qualitative measures that can demonstrate a customer's affinity to a brand. Making connections with customers "beyond the pill" is driving brand advocacy.

Pharma may not be on par with consumer powerhouses like Nike and Coke, but in many cases its digital marketing is leading both highly regulated industries and the broader category of health and wellness. This year saw innovative tools that let doctors share screens at the point of care, early social CRM efforts by launch brands, and a real drive to powerful content marketing in disease states as diverse as diabetes and multiple sclerosis.

2
What are the key challenges and the most frustrating barriers to progress?

Pharma has two key challenges: Trust and Accessibility. As an industry, we have struggled to gain the trust of our community. Digital, particularly social media, has enabled us to change the way we engage with stakeholders. Being accessible and responsive is counter to our heritage of not being able to engage with customers in real time. But now we have leveraged digital to not just respond to, but indeed, even to reach out to, our patients and other stakeholders.

The single biggest challenge to digital innovation is still internal communication. We make assumptions about what we can and can't do; about what will and won't make a real business impact. Bringing the core stakeholders—marketing, regulatory, and technology—together at the point of ideation can change all that. When that team comes together the question changes from *can we* to *how will we?*

3
What will be the biggest trends in this space over the next couple of years?

Consumers will take a more active role in managing their own healthcare. This represents a significant opportunity for pharma. As an industry, we will seek to create ways to support customers in the management of their overall health and wellness, aligning with their values and putting a larger emphasis on overall health outcomes. This means increasing our role in facilitating the delivery of healthcare across the entire healthcare supply chain and not just at the pharmacy counter.

Look for a resurgence of unbranded digital marketing. Recent studies have shown that it can deliver more qualified prospects than branded and convert at similar rates over time. More importantly, unbranded is our opportunity to re-inspire frustrated, sidelined patients. To bring them back to new treatments and new hope. Also look for big changes in pharma's CRM strategy as social recruitment and content marketing personalize our laggard one-size-fits-all approach.

digital curve



Patricia MacWilliams
Head of Health-care Industry, Google

Online video has been one area of innovation. In pharma, the ability for video to tell a story is extremely important. Marketers are no longer confined to the 30-second spot and have a distribution platform where they can reach millions. Shire, for example, created an interactive brand channel on YouTube to promote its “Own It” initiative, along with videos of celebrities speaking out about ADHD and encouraging viewers to learn more.

At many pharma companies, the approval process for new advertising environments, new platforms, and new forms of messaging can be time-intensive. At the same time, digital platforms evolve at a rapid pace, and consumers and HCPs increasingly expect to find health information across all screens and in a variety of formats. Pharma advertisers may lag behind other categories if they do not address the speed with which they adapt to their customers’ expectations.

Creating a multi-screen strategy is top-of-mind for most healthcare marketers. 71% of people will take some sort of action as a result of finding health information on a mobile device, whether it’s discussing a prescription drug with a physician or changing their treatment regimen. Mobile research is driving decisions, and if you don’t have a consistent presence across all screens you’re missing out on reaching potential customers.



Marc Monseau
Founder, MDM Communications

At a number of organizations, we’ve seen a renewed focus on creating an infrastructure to support and encourage the use of digital in marketing and communications. From the creation of “centers of excellence” at companies like J&J, to positions dedicated to online relationship development, such as the diabetes community liaison at Sanofi, companies are slowly adopting approaches seen in other industries to support and sustain innovative digital programs that deliver business results.

One issue that dogs the industry is the failure to appreciate and understand what audiences are seeking online. The reality is that people are not necessarily seeking branded information. While branded content has a place, the real and often untapped opportunity is to position to the company and the brand as a provider of useful and actionable information that can help improve health outcomes. To better understand this, companies need to improve their listening and analysis capabilities.

Over the long term, the efforts undertaken at Sanofi to develop closer relationships with the diabetes community through an in-house community manager will become a model that other companies will be forced to emulate as more patients—and physicians—expect that level of customer support, interaction and service.



Keith Yocum
Director, Online Advertising, New England Journal of Medicine

We’re absolutely encouraged about digital advertising opportunities. We see signs of experimentation on a wide front including everything from brand-lift surveys to sophisticated iPad ad units. Pharma’s motto is “Show Me,” and understandably they will not invest heavily unless they see positive ROI staring them in the face. We see a big shift toward targeting and micro-targeting of audiences, a feature tailor-made for digital.

Pharma’s unique regulatory environment causes hyper-sensitivity and med-legal tangles that bog down decision-making. We see a lot of planning and scheduling of programs, but also witness a fair amount of delays and cancellations due to med-legal and creative issues. If we have any frustration it’s around these issues. We also find that digital campaigns are still being judged by “direct-response” standards, which may be fine for Google AdSense programs but not so useful for display.

There is enormous momentum to build deeper partnerships with advertisers and work towards more creative solutions. One of the primary challenges facing all digital marketers is fragmentation of audiences due to new devices and platforms, primarily social. Mobile/tablet growth is exploding as well, but marketing solutions are difficult to employ due to screen size (mobile) and expense (iPad). Regardless, where there is advertising interest there will be solutions and they will emerge sooner rather than later.