

Five digital pharma experts benchmark the industry's progress and project the next big digital trends

There's work to do

1
What has encouraged you the most during the past year in digital pharma? In what areas is progress being made?



Wendy Blackburn
Executive Vice President
Intouch Solutions

On the whole, pharmaceutical companies are embracing digital. The majority of people understand its impact. Digital budgets are finally matching up to the value of the channel and the time consumers and HCPs spend interacting with it. Clients are opening their minds to the fact that digital marketing is far more than websites and banner ads. We've been helping clients explore ways to dive deeper with the use of data and customization, with great results.



Jim Curtis
Chief Revenue Officer
Remedy Health Media

What has encouraged us most is the increased focus on marketing to the person not the patient. We have seen more emphasis on authentic inspiration and real emotional storytelling that has the ability to engage with patients and inspire them to be adherent. We are also encouraged to see this coupled with data—making the use of big data more compelling and effective. Last, we have seen all of this with an increased focus on mobile.



Robert Bedford
EVP, Sales and Marketing
MediScripts

We have been encouraged to develop new point-of-care solutions that address pharma's need to offer value beyond the pill. The industry as a whole is creating new opportunities to deliver promotional messages to targeted prescribers alongside unbranded clinical content. Progress is also being made in developing methods to fit within a physician's daily workflow without being intrusive.



Peter Justason
Director,
eMarketing
Purdue Pharma

The trend of more brands investing more in digital marketing, recognizing the contribution it can have on the brand's bottom line regardless of where the brand is in its life cycle. The actual digital tactic will vary by life cycle stage but overall investment will be up.



Zoe Dunn
Principal
Hale Advisors

The industry overall is continuing its commitment to the patient by creating marketing roles that specify patient engagement and/or community management. Focusing on the unique needs of the patient will help elevate the industry into a more personal relationship with the stakeholders it serves. Compliance and persistency, adherence and complimentary lifestyle commitments to change, will ultimately lead to better health outcomes.

2
What has frustrated you? Where do the most serious challenges and roadblocks lie and what can be done to overcome them?

There are still marketers more focused on the "art" than the "science," but today's pharmaceutical marketing requires blending both. Some argue that the pendulum is swinging more toward the science side. Understanding the psychology behind health decisions and using data to predict, program and optimize marketing—that is what is becoming more and more important. I see some marketers—understandably—struggling to change their focus.

What has frustrated us most with pharma marketing/communications across the advertising industry over the past year is the inconsistency among third-party verification vendors as they measure viewability and detect fraud. It's not that we don't believe this is extremely important—it is. However, the large discrepancies in results and methodology between vendors makes it a true challenge to get a clear picture of reality.

Healthcare legislation is challenging how pharma marketers reach physicians at the point of care. A payment model based on performance and pressures to adopt new technology place demands on physicians and shift their daily workflow. Engaging with prescribers in this new environment requires pharma to integrate new digital channels into their marketing mix and invest resources into segmentation and message customization.

Despite the larger investment, often at both the brand and the agency, digital marketing is often staffed by the most junior people, and the senior people with little experience with digital marketing hold digital programs to a higher standard that traditional marketing cannot produce.

We are working with an outdated reward system—one that focuses on the first product sale rather than subsequent sales. That leaves a lot of money on the table. We need to focus on longer-term initiatives that support the HCP and patient and reducing the churn in brand personnel for continuity of strategy and message. If we keep promoting people out of their roles for doing a good job, they will cease to do a good job at all.

3
What will the next 12 months look like? What will be the key trends and where do you expect to see progress?

We are excited to see programmatic media buying gaining traction and expect it to explode in 2015. Programmatic provides pharma the tools to personalize media outreach at the speed of the individual customer's need. Hypertargeting is efficient and quantifiable. I'd like to see more measurement in the year ahead. The ongoing hunt for elusive ROI isn't about the fact the ROI isn't there. It's about planning carefully so that programs are measurable and tied to prescription-level data.

Pharma will continue to do more to engage, in an authentic way, with people living with chronic conditions, likely through storytelling and progress with building emotion connections. We also see a technology shift for platform-agnostic communication, for example, ad technology like HTML5—enabling a scrolling ISI—being widely adopted, allowing mobile to be a more meaningful platform. We also believe the industry will see great progress with measurement methodology.

Physicians are currently embracing the value of engaging with peers in secure communities. These social platforms will open the door for pharma to be able to reach physicians with promotional messages at the point of care when physicians are making clinical decisions. More marketers will embrace the mobile revolution in 2015 as physicians continue to use smartphones and tablets as integral parts of their daily practice.

I think that the trend of greater investment will continue as well as investment targeting digital vehicles that can be tracked back to a specific HCP, reducing broadcast tactics like the traditional banner ad. Mobile program investment will take a higher share of that investment.

I expect to see more digital programs that directly engage HCPs and patients as well as comfort and commitment to resourcing the management of these programs as they increase. I believe many marketers are more willing to experiment with new communications channels—even if only at a pilot level. I also believe that digital has reached a tipping point and has become a way of doing business instead of just being a unique channel.