

## MLR is important. What drives it?

Sorting out competing priorities is one way to expedite medical-legal review. What should drive work flow—great creative for the brand or need to mitigate risk (compliance, legal, medical, regulatory, brand image)?



**Michael Golub**  
MD, FACP  
Chief medical officer,  
Digitas Health LifeBrands

Human consciousness is linear. Accordingly, it is natural to try to prioritize key considerations when analyzing decision-making processes. But for certain complex undertakings, such as pharmaceutical marketing, it is necessary to simultaneously balance many competing priorities. Great creative or regulatory compliance? Yes! Innovative use communications technologies or compliance? Both! Here's why: Pharmaceutical marketing is one of the most tightly regulated forms of communication. Brilliant marketing not thoroughly infused with regulatory awareness is not brilliant. We cannot relegate compliance to a final stage of campaign launch planning. Every step must be informed by the ultimate requirement of regulatory compliance. Otherwise, we are wasting precious time.



**Andy Bender**  
President and founder,  
Polaris

From a compliance perspective, the process starts with a methodology allowing the company to prioritize risks. This allows the company to focus on the risk reward profile of each risk type that optimizes the value of the company and investment made. The methodology typically consists of elements that define risks. The elements typically fall into different categories, like activity type, audience, value of the activity (dollar amount), process, procedures, past audits, etc. To measure the risk and compare or rank the risks, we assign relative values to each of the elements (1 or low to 5 high), and add these up. Some of the elements can be weighted to have a more prominent representation in the overall risk score. The risk scores allow us to rank or prioritize the activities, and help us determine which are risky.



**Angela Tenuta**  
Executive vice president,  
Intouch Solutions Chicago

This issue is vast and multi-faceted. The sheer variation and volume of projects pouring into the MLR funnel are mind-boggling. Our clients currently use an array of solutions including priority scoring, ROI estimating and mandatory turnaround times. But I would like to propose this is not a priority problem so much as it is a volume problem. And clients can learn from their agencies when it comes to managing volume. Implement annual onboarding and basic work forecasting. Hold regular resource scrum meetings. Demand timelines and estimates for all projects, and stick to them. Deploy talented resource managers and give them the tools and support to do their job. Finally, have a “decider”—the one person who shuts down debating, flags top priorities and kills low priorities.



**Steven Michaelson**  
CEO, calcium, a Star Group  
company

It's important to consider multiple factors, including which initiatives are expected to drive business growth and which tactics have a critical path to market. In order to be a hot priority, they should rank high on both criteria. Once deemed a priority item, several things can help expedite the process. Mitigating the level of risk is a critical discussion to have at the outset. Time spent up front to communicate early about conceptual ideas pays off in the end by gaining buy-in and discussing “watch-outs” out of the gate. Preplanning several months out and having a long-term calendar view is also helpful and can be adapted as you go.

**Got a forum question or comment?**  
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