

Digital DNA

James Chase looks at how pharma companies are restructuring their organizations—and refocusing their psyches—for a more productive digital push

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While the industry still has plenty to do in building a digital presence among its stakeholders, numerous companies have already restructured internally in preparation for handling larger volumes of more sophisticated digital agendas.

Often these adjustments are process-driven with the end-goal of streamlining the development and approval of digital initiatives. The idea is to implement a single digital strategy across a single platform and a specific set of protocols for developing digital programs, so that once a certain type of project has been approved, other similar projects can follow quickly, building on that framework of knowledge and experiences. This is commonly facilitated by a central digital command or a center of excellence within the organization that works directly with brand teams.

Sanofi has implemented this to good effect, and many others have similar setups. By implementing a protocol blueprint, Pfizer last year managed to launch 10 mobile-optimized brands sites in the space of just four months, according to Todd Kolm, director, emerging channel strategy.

Of course, cultivating a digital DNA requires a change of corporate psyche from the top to the bottom of the organization. Again, Sanofi has been something of a poster child in this respect. “We had a vision of where we wanted to be,” Joan Mikardos, senior director, head of Sanofi’s Digital Center of Excellence, told delegates at the recent Digital Pharma East conference. “But you can’t get there overnight.”

“Digital is just really hard,” declared Jeremy Pincus, senior director, global digital services, GlaxoSmithKline, at the same Digital Pharma event. Pincus



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At Sanofi, Anne Whitaker places a premium on implementing digital strategies throughout the company

cited a profound quote from an anonymous executive: “Digital marketing makes up 15% of my budget, 70% of my team’s time and 90% of my team’s frustration.” Pincus noted that GSK had benefitted from centralizing its digital services.

Changing corporate psyche in pharma is no easy task, of course. “We sometimes still have a mindset that we [pharma] are the keepers of the information, and that you [customers] must consume what we provide for you,” warns Marc Monseau, founder and principal, MDM Communications, and former communications director at Johnson & Johnson. “Change is harder in organizations that are comfortable in their own skin. Innovation needs to become more of the fabric of the organization, and that comes either from a crisis or from senior leadership driving it.” ■