

# Who's afraid of MLR?

**James Chase** charts some of marketers' more positive experiences with their MLR teams and compiles tips for expediting internal approval

All the innovative spirit and digital savvy in the world may not help you once you pass through the doors of med/legal/regulatory (MLR). However, these managers of risk (and creators of roadblocks, depending on your view) were discussed in a much more positive light recently by digital marketers at Digital Pharma East.

Joan Mikardos, senior director, head of Digital Center of Excellence, Sanofi US, reported that her team has a strong partnership with MLR. "We have their trust now, the sky didn't fall down and we can move on." Key to gaining this trust, she said, was starting small, using social, and avoiding chasing shiny objects. "Ninety-five percent of what we did in the social space is not branded. It's not just about promotion. I can't emphasize enough the importance of listening. We never engage for the sake of engaging and [never] talk only about what we want to talk about."

Peter Justason, director, e-marketing, Purdue Pharma, also spoke to the importance of patience.

## 6 tips for gaining approval

- 1 Make friends with the MLR team
- 2 Start small, take your time and collect wins along the way
- 3 Bring examples, from pharma and outside, to demonstrate business value
- 4 Convey the risks of NOT executing a project, especially with social media
- 5 Learn the regulatory environment yourself
- 6 Manage the perceptions of your project internally

"Take your time with MLR," he said. "We work with them to make sure they understand the concept. And if they see others doing something, that reduces the risk."

Joyce Ercolino, director, CSL Behring, noted it is a lot easier to get started in the mobile space. "Everybody in the company is walking around with a device," she said. "We focused on looking at mobile-optimized web. MLR really understood that; they want our information to be accessible."

Ercolino praised her MLR people. "If you request time, they will work with you. If you explain your recommendations, it really is a two-way relationship and a great dialogue. The biggest wins you have are where you work with an individual who is passionate about it."

She also stressed the importance of metrics. "You do have to define your success. That's how you are going to get the buy-in to do it again."

Patricia Choumitsky, senior product manager, consumer relationship and digital marketing, UCB, recommended involving other functions at an early stage and demonstrating the risks of standing still. "We have a number of initiatives that have put the fear of God into our MLR teams," she said. "We get in early and convey the risk of not doing these things. You need good case examples of what happens if you ignore what is being said socially. If you don't get it right up front, the risk you face on the back end is huge. The key is to start with a pilot and communicate, communicate, communicate."

Melissa Bojorquez, director, e-channel marketing, Boehringer Ingelheim, values ideas from other industries. "We take a lot of examples outside of pharma, demonstrate the business value and collect wins along the way," she said. Bojorquez also spends a lot of time understanding the legal/regulatory environment. "I know just as much about what MLR is doing as they know about what we are doing." She also makes it a priority to manage the perception of projects internally. "You don't want [a project] to be known as "that expensive project" or "that risky project," so we try to set them up as "that project that is going to make us the leader."

Marc Monseau—founder and principal of MDM Communications, former communications director at Johnson & Johnson and co-chair of the conference—said his experiences of MLR and public affairs were amiable. "We were friends in the process," he said. "If you could tell your story in the right way, they would help push it through. If you don't make them your friends, then you can't do anything." ■