

## How to design the optimal eMarketing model

### Abstract

The emergence of e-channels has greatly affected various industries, both by transforming the way in which customers gather information, and more generally by changing the mindset and behavior of consumers. The pharmaceutical industry is no exception. In this new world, it is important not only to provide customers with timely and appropriate information, but also to collect information that relates to stakeholders (i.e. healthcare professionals and patients) through e-channels and leverage it in various activities including sales, marketing and research and development (R&D). This allows the pharmaceutical company to indirectly address the stakeholders' needs. For pharmaceutical companies, the world of e-channels is a gold mine of information, and close collaboration between an eMarketing division and other functions is key to make the most of it. This article discusses how an organization should be setup to realize the power of eMarketing.



### **e-Channel utilization in pharmaceutical companies**

The emergence of e-channels has turned consumers into stakeholders who can simultaneously actively collect and also provide information at the same time. The pharmaceutical industry is no exception, and pharmaceutical marketing must change to accommodate e-channels.

In other industries, it has already become very common to use customers' feedback to improve existing services and products and to develop new ones. If a pharmaceutical company wishes to do the same, their eMarketing division will have to uncover concerns and points of dis-satisfaction of stakeholders (i.e. healthcare professionals (HCPs) and patients) through e-channels. Providing feedback through MRs and e-Channels could be a good opportunity to earn their trust, indirectly resolving these concerns and points of dis-satisfaction.

In order to achieve this in the pharmaceutical industry, it is crucial to organically link direct contact with HCPs (i.e. via MRs, marketing and medical affairs), with indirect communication (i.e. via e-channels).

### **Pursuit of an optimal eMarketing model**

As mentioned above, the essence of eMarketing lies in the collaboration between e-channels and sales force activities in the field. To make this happen, close information sharing between the eMarketing division and other functions, particularly the sales division which has an intimate relationship with HCPs, is required.

However, eMarketing divisions of pharmaceutical companies have often regarded e-channels as a substitute for MRs while MRs tend to consider e-

channels as an "enemy" that could threaten their existence. The importance of information sharing has recently been recognized in the industry, but in most cases, it is still difficult to implement.

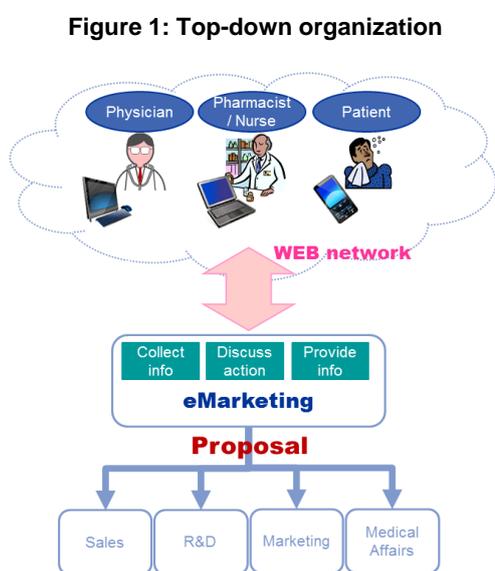
It is crucial for each function to understand the importance of information sharing and take action to achieve it. The eMarketing division should take a proactive approach and gather information from MRs. Likewise, the sales division must actively share its own information, knowing that their information will be linked with information collected via e-channels.

Such collaboration is also required from other functions. The following are examples that can be achieved through collaboration between each function and the eMarketing division:

- Marketing
  - Create detailing messages for each type of target HCP
  - Review targeting of HCPs
- R&D
  - Understand existing unmet needs
  - Improve drug formulation and design combination drugs
- Medical affairs
  - Design clinical research

**Top-down organization: Leadership of management is the key**

To overcome internal difficulty in realizing an optimal eMarketing model, it is necessary to clearly define the role of the eMarketing division, reviewing the current status of the organization. A top-down organization is a good system for eMarketing (figure 1):



**Figure 1: Top-down organization**

In this structure, the eMarketing division proactively discusses with other functions and suggests actions, acting as a communication hub. Therefore, this type of organization requires personnel in the eMarketing division that have an active attitude, as well as skills to

take and play a key role (Figure 2).

- Hypothesis formation / information gathering:
  - Form hypotheses based on key words from various points of view, such as sales, marketing, and R&D (requires good intuition about “words that HCPs and patients are likely to use” and “words that are likely to be used for a certain product”)
  - Expected roles of eMarketing include comparing the hypothesis with data collected by MRs through face-to-face interactions with HCPs, to recognize unmet needs in the real world
- Action planning:
  - Suggest future actions to other functions and negotiate to implement those actions based on collected information
  - In addition to knowledge of various other functions (i.e. sales, medical, etc), internal networking and communication skills are required
- Information transmission:
  - Create eMarketing contents that can satisfy customers’ unmet needs through collaboration with other functions
  - After release of contents, evaluate the effect and discuss future improvement

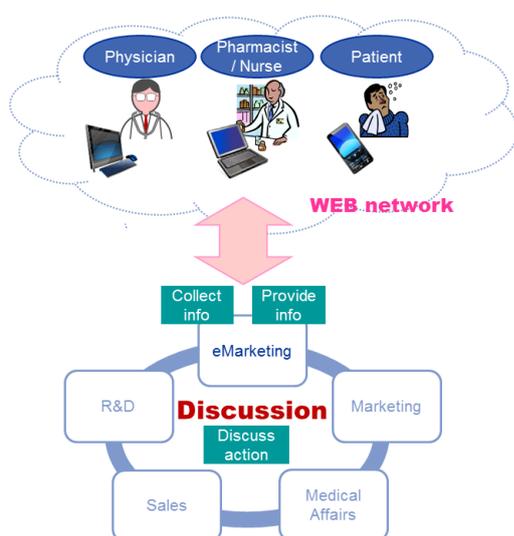
**Figure 2: Steps to implement eMarketing and required skills**

	Hypothesis formation / information gathering	Action planning	Information transmission
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form hypothesis on information to be collected via e-channel</li> <li>• Define search key words (e.g. “Allergic rhinitis AND sleepiness”)</li> <li>• Perform text mining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify issues based on the information</li> <li>• Define solution plan (e.g. potential formulation to improve product, communication plan for HCPs)</li> <li>• Discuss / negotiate with other functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare websites for HCPs and patients</li> <li>• Increase PV (page view), navigate to own website</li> </ul>
Required skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge about unmet needs, products, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Good understanding on characteristics of web posting</b></li> <li>• <b>Capability to utilize analytical software</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logical thinking</li> <li>• Knowledge about sales, formulation, mechanism, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Good understanding on economic / patient-reported outcomes</b></li> <li>• <b>Internal personal network, and ability to create network</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Message / content building capability</li> <li>• <b>Capability to develop web content</b></li> <li>• <b>Good understanding on SEO (Search Engine Optimization)</b></li> </ul>

**Consensus-driven organization: cross-functional information sharing is the key**

While the top-down organization is ideal, there are some challenges in finding such highly skilled personnel or adopting the top-down concept due to the company culture. Alternatively, a consensus-driven organization model in which a committee consisting of cross-functional members is formed to discuss actions in a company may be implemented (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Consensus-driven organization**



- Hypothesis formation / information gathering:
  - Form hypotheses on key words based on inputs from other internal functions including sales, marketing, and R&D
  - eMarketing division performs text mining and data processing
- Action planning:
  - Based on the above data, discuss and examine contents of detailing and action plans for each stakeholder in the committee
- Information transmission:
  - The eMarketing division manages the progress of required actions and collects

data. The Committee to validates the results, where required.

One of the advantages of a consensus-driven organization is that it is more likely to develop proper and realistic action plans because the cross-functional team can combine their knowledge together and actively discuss plans. On the other hand, unlike the top-down organization, it lacks a hub function and may end up with discussion of issues within each function but unable to achieve sufficient information sharing. In many companies in which such a situation has been successfully avoided, management supports cross-functional efforts at staff-level to ensure that different groups understand each other through activities such as joining sales branch meetings and accompanying MRs on sales calls to learn promotional activities in the real world.

**Conclusion**

As discussed, an optimal eMarketing model is characterized by information gathering on each stakeholder via e-channels and maximum leverage of the information within the company. In implementation of either of the two discussed types of organizational model, companies will be confronted by different difficulties that are unique to them.

However, for pharmaceutical companies, the world of e-channels is a gold mine of information. Until recently, pharmaceutical companies were only required to understand physicians' needs. Now they are required to understand the needs of all stakeholders (i.e. every type of HCP and patients), and this cannot be achieved without proper utilization of e-channels. It is crucial for pharmaceutical companies to overcome their own problems in order to realize an optimal eMarketing. We hope this paper will shed some light on this issue.

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