

Thrive or Die in the Omnichannel Era?

Foreword

The eye forpharma Philadelphia conference took place April 16-17, 2019. We were grateful to have an industry expert, Norm Phillips, EVP and Chief Marketing Officer with BioPharm Communications, chair a critical section of the conference called “Thrive or Die in the Omnichannel Era”.

BioPharm Communications are pioneers in omnichannel marketing campaigns for the pharma and biotech industry. Here, Norm offers some of his thoughts regarding our challenges and opportunities going forward. I am pleased to hear that we can indeed thrive, despite our slow start!

PAUL SIMMS

Chairman, eye forpharma



The Challenge

“Thrive or Die in the Omnichannel Era”.

That’s a very ominous title; are things really that dire?

Our environment has certainly evolved. As personal selling access has diminished in our industry, as traditional tactics such as dinner meetings have become more restricted, as technology has become ubiquitous, there has been a significant increase in the use of non-personal promotion (NPP), particularly digital. Successful use of digital is dependent on brands achieving competitive advantage by providing more effective NPP than their counterparts in that specific therapeutic category, often through personalization.

But other aspects have remained the same. We have a common, enduring goal: to serve the right message, at the right time, to the right target, to produce a desired outcome.

In preparation for this meeting, I looked into what the rest of the world thinks about our performance so far. What was being written about the use of omnichannel marketing in pharma and biotech? There was one comment stated many times over with little variation: “Isn’t it nice to see that the pharmaceutical industry is finally starting to catch up to where consumer marketing was about a decade ago?!”

One major reason for our tardiness is the requirement to adhere to government regulations and oversight, resulting in a very conservative industry, resistant to change. So when you compare us to the rest of the world, of course it looks like we’re doomed. We have a history of poor user experience with digital information, especially product websites. HCPs and patients often complain they’re unable to conveniently access the information they are looking for. As an industry, our website bounce rates are far higher than well-constructed consumer sites. Our apps are far less used.



The Solution

Yet despite our slow start, I am optimistic. It's not all doom and gloom. We have an opportunity to create a roadmap for the future that is not the same journey we've been on.

First, let's look at the "glass half full". We actually have significant advantages in pharma/biotech marketing relative to consumer marketing, for example:

- **Identifiable influencers** – in most consumer markets an individual target customer only controls brand selection of their own purchases. By contrast, in most therapeutic areas, a single HCP has significant control over product selection for dozens or even hundreds of relevant patients within their practice. This provides us with a concentrated group of targets that are very identifiable and have a significant influence.
- **Customer-level data** – what consumer product has access to reliable individual-target data we can obtain through leading analytics providers? We're able to monitor real-time changes in prescribing habits with our key HCP targets.
- **Access and reimbursement insight** – Drug access is becoming increasingly important to product selection and this is another area where pharma/biotech marketers are at a distinct advantage to our consumer product counterparts who are encumbered by privacy barriers. Companies like ours are now able to obtain access data right down to the zip code, and in many cases, to the individual group practice level. This allows us to segment HCP targets based on the access level they have for our sponsor's drugs versus their competition.

So, while there are both advantages and disadvantages to pharma/biotech marketing in comparison with consumer products, there are reasons to be cheerful. We have an opportunity to take advantage of several positive differences we have, in comparison with our colleagues in consumer marketing, and maximize our true potential.

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Of course, none of the benefits will be realized without a strong omnichannel component – ie. an integrated ecosystem that provides a positive user experience, allowing customers to access the information they want, when they want it, and in a way that they'd like to receive it. This approach presumes that information is designed to be user-centric and not product-centric: HCPs are consumers too. They won't tolerate a measurable negative difference in consumer experience and the professional experience.

But get it right, and you'll be at a huge competitive advantage in the marketplace of the future.

NORM PHILLIPS

Executive Vice President & Chief Marketing Officer,
BioPharm Communications

