

Why every pharma marketer should understand social media and use it

What should every pharma marketer do and not do when it comes to social media? Alexandra Fulford shares her answers in her article for our marketing excellence focus month.

Social media is still a very prickly subject in the pharmaceutical industry, with many companies and teams not sure how to handle it. There are still people within our industry who do not believe social media is a viable channel for the industry, or that it is not relevant or important. There are also many who are scared of using this channel, believing it to be full of Adverse Event (AE) reports and a crisis just waiting to happen if they join the foray into social media.

To all these people I say: you are wrong. Social media provides relevance and value, today, to a wide range of stakeholders, and the deluge of AE reports never materialised. Whilst the industry is hesitant, stakeholders have been starting to embrace social media as a core channel. The conversation is happening, whether the industry is present or not. Not being present, however, is a missed opportunity, not only to be part of the conversation, but also to be able to mitigate potential crisis that arise during these conversations.

Even with these fears allayed, why should every pharmaceutical marketer understand and use social media? The answer is simple. Social media provides a wealth of insights and understanding of key stakeholders; it has become an integral, if not key, information and communication channel for many stakeholders; and it is becoming central to Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

Any good marketer, whether from the pharmaceutical industry or any other industry, should be basing their marketing plans and strategies on customer insights. Marketing mix, budgeting, messaging, and all the other elements to selling your products should all be guided by a thorough understanding of what works and what does not work with your customers. Social media provides a great new way to gain some of the insights used in the past as well as new, and in some cases better, insights. Social media can enable a marketer to truly understand the behavioural aspects and the drivers behind customer decision making and in turn develop marketing strategies that should be far more impactful. Accessing these insights through social media is also cheaper and quicker than through traditional channels.

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Part of this impact of course should also be through a better understanding of how customers are using social media and in turn how this can be used by an organisation to help get messages across. Social media is no longer new and it has



become an integral part of life and this fact alone means that marketers and communicators also need to understand how this channel works. Whilst it is simply another channel it does have certain idiosyncrasies that need to be understood. Sharing a campaign that was developed for offline viewing will not work nor will using “push” language and tactics. Accepting that any external communication you develop may impact, and end up on, social media is also very important. The Motrin mum’s example shows what happens if you underestimate the power and influence of this channel and if you do not incorporate it into your marketing plan1.

It is also important to understand that there is now so much information out there, particularly on social media, that presuming any of your customers will find your digital assets simply because you develop them is foolish. SEO now has to also be an integral part of marketing in order to ensure digital spend is effective. SEO in turn is increasingly reliant on “social

influence” and having content shared via Twitter, for example, can be a better way to get your content seen than just focusing on your keywords. Therefore any marketer developing content that they would like stakeholders to find needs to understand how to optimise for social media.

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I am not saying that every marketer should be out there tweeting, and there are marketers who should definitely not be actively engaging on social media, but they should understand it and use it passively. They should be including social media in their planning and they definitely need to understand the impact it has. Every pharmaceutical marketer should be using social media as a source of insights, both to develop their plans and

strategies but also to understand the impact of their materials. Every pharmaceutical marketer should understand how their stakeholders are using social media and factor this into their plans – if only to ensure they are managing for potential crisis that may occur. This understanding should help mitigate risk if nothing else. Every pharmaceutical marketer should also start to plan how to optimise key content for social media so that they can improve their SEO. Most organisations now have corporate social media channels, and most of them are always happy to receive additional content pieces. Marketers can work with these corporate channels to share key information that is appropriate and optimised for this channel. They can only do this however if they understand the channel and have built and optimised their assets on the insights gained.

A final parting thought is that by understanding this “new” channel, and the changing dynamics it brings with it, marketers will be better suited for the reality of marketing today, and will be better prepared for tomorrow’s reality. We do not know what the next leap in technology will be or how it will impact the industry but when it

comes if marketers are still trying to come to grips with an established channel like social media how will they cope with something new?

References:

1. [http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/17/moms-and-motrin/? r=0](http://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/17/moms-and-motrin/?r=0)

Closing thought:
Why are some pharma companies still holding back when it comes to social media?

About the author:

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