

DTC 21st Century

Navigating the Uncertainties of Social Media



As social media overhauls the consumer mindset, it's important to keep in mind that the principles of sound marketing still apply. Any forays into social media must fit with overall brand strategy, leverage consumer insights, and be executed with consistent creativity and authenticity.

BY ELLEN HOENIG-CARLSON

In a time of great uncertainty, how can pharma marketers be smart about social media platforms that wield even more uncertainty?

Given regulatory challenges – of which there are many – it's understandable that few pharma companies have embraced social media as key elements in their marketing mix. Forays are limited and predominantly still one way – which belies the power of social media and the modern consumer. This raises an important, though perhaps unsavory question: Is that a good bet? Are pharma brands damned if they do and damned if they don't?

Exploring what it will take for social media to serve both pharma marketers and their segments, this article includes a few examples of industry pioneers, briefly reviews five phases of sound social media planning, and ends with some key implications and questions.

Context

Recent economic change is bolstering generic sales vs. branded prescriptions, increasing pressure for healthcare reform,

decreasing non-essential purchasing, and increasing time at home and on the Internet. Other trends also continue to impact healthcare marketers: extremely busy, attention-deficit consumers with many media and mobile choices and little time, many of whom want to actively participate and shape their health choices, largely via the Web.

These trends are fueled by extraordinary growth in social and mobile media: Facebook is now up to **200 million** users. In March, YouTube reached **100 million** monthly viewers in the United States. Estimates predict YouTube will serve **75 billion video streams to 375 million** unique visitors in 2009. Nielsen reports Twitter currently has **7 million** unique monthly visitors (and this is before the Oprah effect). Current growth rates would yield nearly **100 million** visitors by April 2010.¹

Even as social media platforms are continually in a state of invention, *social media have changed the game of marketing – permanently*. The way consumers seek information and make decisions has changed. Expectations and standards have shifted. Customers now demand corporate and brand transparency,

nearly-instant access to any information that is personally relevant, nearly-all-encompassing opportunity to participate in two-way dialogue, and greater experience of community. Today's demands are well evident in PhRMA's recent declaration that it will push for "comparative clinical studies" to help doctors and consumers choose the most effective treatment – and this doesn't just mean cost effective.²

In addition, each social media platform has its own standards. Consumers understand the different rules of engagement – that's how they choose where to engage. Brands that use a social medium are likely to find that if expectations are not met, consumers will not only disengage, they will comment. Sales and perceptions may suffer. An acronym for this dilemma is E.V.E., which stands for Expected Visitor Experience. Coined by Jonathan Richman, E.V.E. is the set of activities and functions that an average user would expect from a specific digital platform.³

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Finally, all pharma brands and companies are operating in a business and regulatory environment where trust and uncertainty is an issue. Marketers can expect no slack.

Pharma social media pioneers

Community site: myalli.com clearly lays out expectations in its comment policy for "my alli circles" community, enabling consumers to ask questions and comment – thus fulfilling a key expectation for any community site. Its latest count is 292,093 members and 317,711 message board posts. Alli also hosts a blog (alli connect) though its posts are sporadic in year two.

Facebook: Gardasil's "Take a step against cervical cancer" and McNeil's ADHD for Moms are two pioneers on Facebook. While some have said the Gardasil Facebook page is little more than a glorified Gardasil Web site, they've taken the plunge. By entering Facebook, Gardasil is where its young audience is and as a result it has 105,000 fans. While the site offers opportunities for the target to get involved in the cause, submit testimonials, vote on certain elements, or to become an "ambassador," there is little for members to engage with on a day-to-day basis and certainly no ability to comment.

McNeil's ADHD for Moms, with 8,200 fans, allows for opportunities to learn from experts and to provide personal stories and tips – even to become a Mom-bassador™. ADHD for Moms is an unbranded site with links back to the McNeil Pediatric Web site – but with a few clicks, consumers can read

about Concerta. While neither Facebook sites allows product-related comments, the assumption is that there is value beyond just talking about and comparing product use.

YouTube: J&J leads the way with the J&J Health Channel, where it has the most pharma videos posted. One video, "Teenage Obesity and Weight Loss Treatments," has garnered 107,000 views. Unlike other pharma YouTube sites, J&J allows consumers to rate the video and make comments though all videos are unbranded. Symbicort's "tell us your asthma story" (the first branded video) and Sanofi's goinsulin videos both use engaging testimonial formats but ratings and comments have been disabled. [For a more complete compilation of pharma YouTube videos, visit Mark Senak's "eye on fda" blog.]

Twitter: While many pharma companies are beginning to actively use Twitter, Boehringer Ingelheim, JNJ and Roche seem to be furthest along currently: well past just pushing out press releases. They're "following others," allowing at least some two-way dialogue or passing along useful information. In my view, AstraZeneca is by far the worst offender of one-way PR pushes right now – it pushes out so many PR tweets that I stopped following the company. A fellow twitter from April 17 noted: "@ can you try tweeting each story ONCE only? You're just flooding the stream with repeats!"

Bloggng: JNJ is still the only pharma company to have an active blog (now that Centocor's has been stopped). JNJ earns kudos for pioneering a blog, a sizeable YouTube effort, and Twittering. We're all looking forward to what it will do with the recent diabetes purchase moving forward.

For each effort, there is room to grow, and continue to add E.V.E.'s wherever possible. To follow what pharma and health-care companies are doing in social media, visit Dose of Digital's wiki; to follow SM efforts across all consumer businesses, visit Peter Kim's wiki.

Building a strong foundation

Though social media power a lot of change, it hasn't changed everything. *The principles of sound marketing still apply.* Any forays into social media must fit with overall brand strategy, leverage consumer insights, and be executed with consistent creativity and authenticity. Marketers are called to ensure their brands are distinguished with meaningful, clear benefits and to provide the experiences and results that customers desire – not what the manufacturer may value and can easily deliver.

New tactics may beg for new metrics; strong measures of effectiveness are certainly needed. Like any marketing decision, social media requires discipline in analysis, planning, and execution that makes a brand investment successful – or not.

Effective social media marketing requires its own rigor. It's not a quickie. It's not free. It's not easy. It doesn't just happen;

it's earned. Below are some key steps to plan and execute well based on Janet Johnson's five phases in social media.⁴

Phase 1 – Discovery...

- What are your competitors doing online? What is their reputation?
- What are customer segments saying about your brand, services and company? What are customers talking about?
- How easy is it for you to be found by an average searcher?
- How might social media marketing fit into the company's regulatory / medical / legal view and risk profile? How do DDMAC considerations fit in? (Remember: "It's not the media, but the message," according to DDMAC officials⁵.)

Phase 2 – Objectives and Strategy...

- What customer experience do you want to generate, once you've begun your dialogue?
- How is this different from their current perception?

- How might you further pay off your brand promise, and distinguish your customer experience from competitors?
- Which social media platforms make the most sense; which ones can your brand provide the necessary E.V.E.'s?
- How will you measure success?
- How do various social media platforms complement current marketing programs and brand objectives?
- Many more...

This phase is usually highly collaborative, involving partners and key players across the organization.

Phase 3 – Skills Internal Assessment...

Ensure there are skilled resources and processes in place to consistently drive the effort, produce interesting content and support real-time listening and learning.

- What are your organization's internal resources? Identify gaps.

DTC in the 21st Century (DTC 21) – Real time brand engagement

Consumer demands can be summarized in a new set of six C's: Content, Conversation, Customization, Community, Confidence/Trust, and Consistent Commitment.

How will pharma brands satisfy today's customers? Which pharma brands will satisfy them?

Social media are here to stay. Sitting on the sidelines may not be a viable strategy. Consumers are demanding that brands and companies step up, share the risk. Pharma can't be happy about that – but just as Realtors must remember "location, location, location," and retailers must remember "the customer is always right," healthcare consumer marketers must remember "from the customers' point of view." *Pharma marketers are challenged to meet the E.V.E.'s for each social media platform considered.* It's an enormous demand.

Some brands and companies will invest in the thinking required to navigate this maze. Thoughtful 24/7 responsiveness is likely to be a cost of entry. A lot of effort and learning is required; smart marketers will consider that a permanent state of affairs.

Social media are likely to have an important role as the economy continues to morph and re-invent, and purchasing choices change. Will pharma lead or remain lagging behind? Will that vary by brand or company? Herein may lie a competitive advantage.

6 C's For Brand Engagement

1. Content
2. Conversation
3. Customization
4. Community
5. Confidence
6. Commitment



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- Whose skills need building? Which processes need revamping?
- How might you train?

This includes working through ongoing medical/legal/regulatory process and education.

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Phase 4 – Execution...

Determine which tools to use, how they interface with your existing infrastructure, and that processes and platforms are properly integrated.

- Are your systems operating together as desired? Will CRM systems interface with social media tools?
- Do you have crisis communication plans?
- Are company policies updated for blogging, Twitter and other social media tools?
- Are on-going processes designed for planning and reviewing social media programs, and for responding in a timely fashion to the blogosphere?
- Are employees aware of policies?

Phase 5 – Continuous Learning & Improvement...

After launching, maintenance is key. Oversight is necessary to ensure the organization thrives online.

- Review metrics and learning
- Listen to customers and prospects
- Identify improvements

Exploring the opportunity

For those who are willing to invest in the rigor and carefully navigate DDMAC considerations, social media can afford numerous benefits:

- **A unique chance to listen real time as consumers talk to each other:** gauge what they are interested in, and how they speak about their experiences with your products and other products. All in their natural environment. SM provides a robust feedback loop.
- **A way of providing real time access to customer service and expert medical support that fits the customer's world of rapid, easy Web 2.0 access.** Might SM also be useful accelerating clinical trial recruitment?
- **New ways to engage and provide information and education that fit consumers precisely and in which consumers can participate and co-create...** for

example, healthgaming, interactive Web sites that let consumers customize information, or provide their stories for other consumers.

- **Patients can enjoy a greater sense of community and connection** with others who share similar experiences or with healthcare experts to secure added support and camaraderie. Some may go on to become ‘ambassadors’ online and off...
- **Easier, faster ways to create dialog, enabling consumers to spread the word** about your product, the condition, their stories, etc. Those brands with the greatest differentiating claims, benefits and distinctiveness are likely to get the best play. *The power of social media is in consumers helping brands do that.*
- **Build transparency and trust if done well and with a “human voice.”** Can also provide an ongoing forum to answer outbound questions quickly and efficiently.
- **Help surround the consumer**, engaging customers where they are as they move through their day. If SM are well integrated with other marketing elements, more value and synergy will occur at every touchpoint. For example, increasingly “tweetups” are occurring – using Twitter to bring together in-person events. **DTC**

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