Who is the marketer of the future?

Preparing for biopharma marketing in 2020 and beyond

Our industry operates in a constantly evolving landscape yet many companies persist with skills/competency surveys of their people and processes which define their capability level in terms of the last 12 months to today. This provides a healthy baseline, but does little to prepare for the future. Looking retrospectively over the past 12 months performance means the data is already out of date. Companies should be establishing a future marketing framework of role profiles, skills and competencies to address future talent gaps, not past performance. This can then drive internal professional development, training needs and recruitment strategies, helping to identify where companies need to invest in order to prepare ahead and ensure marketing teams are fit for purpose in the future.

So, what are the big issues that marketers need to address for the future?

1. Broaden your scope of thinking beyond today’s Insights to the future’s Foresights

Firstly pharma needs to take a step back. Clearly, it is essential to invest in research or competitive intelligence to assess the current landscape. While useful and necessary, just looking in the rear view mirror at where you have been doesn’t get you very far at looking into the future. Some companies use a corporate PEST analysis but don’t link it to anything, so it becomes purely a ‘tick-box’ exercise. Applying SCEPTIC in combination with your patient journey, patient flow or treatment pathway allows you to gather the foresight needed:

- What are the SOCIAL trends and counter-trends that are beginning and will affect your market? For example, individuals and businesses proactively joining together to pursue the practice of ‘Betterness’, a new openness and social responsibility that drives positive impact for the greater good of all. Will the pharmaceutical industry capitalise on something like this?
- How are CUSTOMERS evolving? We have already seen the significant shift where prescribers have less authority and payers much more impact - now it is time to explore the patient voice, as well as those of their carers and other social influencers who will also carry enormous power in the future.
- What ECONOMIC changes impact the market? We all know that there is an ageing population globally, but we have to investigate and understand the drivers of innovation and reform that will make healthcare spending more efficient. What are the implications for your brand?
- What is happening in POLITICS that could change the landscape? Are we going to be constantly locked in the ideology battles of Europe with austerity and cost savings versus driving growth and investment? And how will this play out in your market?
- What role will TECHNOLOGY have? The changing landscape of the digital environment - not just in terms of tracking but mobile technology - where patients now have the ability to analyse their own healthcare metrics. Think of how the launch of Smart Watches will affect the future, where software will allow people to volunteer to join medical research studies.
- What is happening INTERNALLY and beyond your control in your own organisation? How can you plan for it?
- Which COMPETITORS are changing the game in the future? We will need to understand new non-traditional pharma companies entering the biosimilar space who bring a completely new way of thinking. Furthermore, we must understand the business principles of the small, start-up Biotech companies and the innovation they will bring to the market. What shake-up to the market will this bring?

2. Understand which patient populations are most meaningful to payers

Think about payers, their financial considerations and their needs. Marketing can no longer default to other functions such as ‘managed...
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The reality is that not all drugs can be covered within constrained budgets and payers have to choose between therapies and patient populations. Payers already have the future thoroughly mapped out, know what is coming up on the horizon and have made assumptions about where your brand fits within their system. Although you may think your brand is the best and most effective treatment option, you need to ensure that you are aligned with payers. It is essential that meaningful discussions are held very early to ensure that your drugs fit into their future budget plans. Discover what is of value to them. What are their pressure points and where are they likely to be able to cover the patient populations we are talking about - demonstrating how your drug fits with clearly defined, identified patient populations or segments.

3. Be able to move away from a one-size-fits-all global or national marketing approach towards more localised segments and sub groups of customers

Intellectually, marketers recognise that all customers are not the same, but often they don’t act on it and create ‘one-size-fits-all’ marketing solutions.

The future requires a deeper understanding of customer segmentation, beyond just behaviour, to fit with the complex and diverse needs of different segments. Identify those customers who are trending towards or away from you and link marketing solutions that truly resonate with them. It is no longer good enough for companies to segment the market in the way they have traditionally done (eg high, medium, low prescribers or early adopters, fast followers, laggards etc). Companies will need to segment by patient population in line with payer expectations, ie companies need to view the disease in the way the payer views the disease (who they can or cannot justify funding for).

4. Understand how to gain traction and become a leading voice among multiple channels of communication

We need to catch up with the pace at which information is now expected. Outside the constraints of our industry, other people can write what they want about our brands, so how are we going to drag ourselves forward and get involved in the multiple communication channels available to us? It is not about digital, it is about being present! It is not simply about digital promotion, it is about the different ways of communication people have. How will you plan for and work with the constant presence of social media? Look at your smart phone now - you probably have 100+ apps that allow you to connect with a range of people; friends, people you know, people you don’t know and all in an immediate way - so do your customers.

Our industry works totally differently from these new ways of communication. Traditionally, we pursue the time-consuming method of getting our data written up, internally approved and then published and/or presented via the usual peer review process. In the past getting 1-5 articles a year published and obtaining good congress coverage in Europe and US was considered successful. However, with the immediacy and pervasiveness of social media, we now MUST have 100-200 articles, statements and opinions ready to go every month in a variety of different lengths and formats. From 140 words via Twitter to blogs, online features, print articles and manuscripts.

It is therefore essential for us to have resources and people dedicated to developing content constantly and who are able to think ahead of the game. We need to have the capacity internally to approve and get the information out - otherwise bloggers and social media opinion leaders will control the information. They are a new breed of non-medical KOLs we need to interact with - those with thousands of followers whose opinion is listened to, quoted and acted upon. This represents a substantial change in the current mind-set but equally, an exciting opportunity to engage with the voice of the customer.

So, who will be the successful biopharma marketers of the future? Perhaps those who:

- Think towards the future, applying the foresight of how the future changes insights of today
- Segment the market by patient population in line with payer expectations and financial viability
- Prepare to act at a much faster pace and are willing to engage with non-medical KOLs
- Shift from a ‘one-size fits all’ marketing approach towards a more segmented market beyond prescribing behaviour.

For the marketers of today, we need to remember some key points.

Every marketer in our industry today was a ‘marketer of the future’ 1 or 5 or even 10 years ago.

The marketer of the future will have the same core toolkit as those of the past. The challenge will be to apply those tools to make sense of more complex customer and competitive environments.

As a rookie marketer in the early 90s I had my sales audit books, limited market research and a traditional marketing mix to juggle and implement. Today/tomorrow I believe that the skills and instincts required of the marketer of the future will not be any different, but there will be much more information to digest alongside a vastly more complex compliance and marketing mix.

Isaac Batley, joint founder and CEO, iS Health Group (a Cello Health business)

Marketer of the future

‘Be prepared to act at a much faster pace and engage with non-medical KOLs’

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