Earlier this year, a survey of UK marketers across all sectors found that while 73 per cent of them regularly used Facebook and almost 45 per cent tweeted on a weekly basis, 65 per cent did not know how to use social media to support the brands they worked on. If this survey had been researched exclusively within pharma, it is likely that this latter figure would have been even higher.

In the article ‘Seek First to Understand’ (Pharmaceutical Marketing, September 09) social media was described as ‘pharma’s elephant in the room’ and cited the lack of an ‘instruction manual’ as the reason for poor/nonexistent application of digital and social media activities! It is certainly true that for many pharma marketers, these are unfamiliar channels that can be intimidating and appear high risk. What is more, the time investment needed to become digitally capable is perceived as a massive task given other workload priorities. These 10 simple steps demonstrate the positive impact and opportunities that digital can bring.
1. SEE YOUR BRAND THROUGH THE DIGITAL EYES OF YOUR CONSUMERS

If, as Chris Anderson author of The Long Tail and Editor at Wired Magazine states: “Your brand isn’t what you say it is, it’s what Google says it is”, then the obvious place to start improving your digital understanding is by ‘googling’ your brand and therapeutic area. Then try spicing things up by adding words such as “problem” and “sucks” and see what appears (don’t forget your pharmacovigilence training, though).

Check out a dose of digital for a more comprehensive listing of pharma and patient sites at http://tiny.cc/ZPiM7

Explore the patient sites; read the blogs and forum posts; listen to the conversations; and see your brand as your customers see it - I bet they are talking about you. But be warned, it can be an eye-opening experience. A major brand we work with had a serious but historic safety warning. Much ‘traditional’ effort had been made to address the key opinion leaders (KOLs) and wider clinical audiences and the brand team felt that the issue had been managed. However, one quick look through the forums and blogs and they found that the issue was still very much alive. Surprise, surprise, rather than listen to the KOLs and clinicians, patients preferred to talk to each other!

When reviewing your search results, it is worth remembering that recent research has demonstrated that people searching for health information online do so in a very task focused fashion – 83 per cent entered keywords into a search engine and then rarely progressed beyond the first page and searches were limited to one or two terms (because of the lack of understanding of medical terms). Perhaps most importantly 75 per cent of searchers did not check the date or source of their search results. Despite the unsophisticated nature of their search, today’s digital healthcare consumers do act on the information they find, as recent data from Comscore demonstrates (see figure 1 above).

![Figure 1: Actions taken as a result of a health-related search online](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action taken</th>
<th>Action planned in future</th>
<th>No action planned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak to doctor about disease/condition</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak to doctor about options available</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak to doctor about a particular drug</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask doctor for a particular drug</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ComScore. 1/2008

2. ACCEPT THAT THINGS ARE DIFFERENT NOW

If you are going to embrace digital and all it offers then perhaps the first thing you need to do is accept things have changed and will continue to (see page 4, Moore’s Law). The traditional comfort blanket of logo, proposition and three / four key messages have become outdated tools. Brands are now shaped by the numerous conversations that take place every second of every day in the digital consumerscape, rather than by the conversations that happen in marketing departments.

Or as The Cluetrain Manifesto states: “A powerful global conversation has begun. Through the internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter – and faster – than most companies.” Although written as long ago as the year 2000 (before the social network boom) The Cluetrain Manifesto’s 95 thesis still acts as a thought-provoking starting point from which we can explore the potential of digital, see www.slideshare.net/tecorporation/cluetrain

3. YOUR BRAND IS HOW YOUTUBE BRINGS IT TO LIFE

To continue your digital consumer view, it is worth taking a look at YouTube. After all, it does have 71 million unique users each month - including many of your vocal prescribers and patients - and represents the sixth largest audience on the internet. Importantly, YouTube has recently become the second largest search engine. If it were a standalone site, it would be second after Google as more searches are now undertaken through YouTube than Yahoo.

An increasing number of pharma companies have dedicated YouTube channels, mostly focusing on corporate messaging but there are a growing number of examples of branded and unbranded activities. When executed well - for example, sanofi-aventis’ GoInsulin channel that supports the brand Lantus - they are integrated into other digital assets such as website and patient support programmes.

Watch the GoInsulin Channel YouTube at www.youtube.com/user/goinsulin#p/a

Explore patient sites; read the blogs and forum posts; listen to the conversations - see your brand as your customers see it

Brands are shaped by digital conversations that take place every second, every day - not by conversations in marketing departments

An increasing number of pharma companies have dedicated YouTube channels, mostly focusing on corporate messaging
4. WATCH AND UNDERSTAND ONLINE USERS BEHAVIOUR AS IT HAPPENS

Got a breaking healthcare story that impacts on your brand? Then see some instant reaction by looking at the Twitter StreamGraph at http://tiny.cc/3fKMc

For long-term trends, you can learn so much from Google with https://adwords.google.co.uk/select/ and http://google.com/insights/search/#

Plus, the keywords tool is useful to find out the number of searches in your therapeutic area and the variety of search terms being used. You can also learn some fascinating information by using the volume trends filter. For example if you type in ‘cervical cancer’ you can find out the impact the deaths of Jade Goody and Natalie Morton had on the volume and type of information being searched.

Want a snapshot of recent activity about your brand across the social web? Addictomatic provides some highlights http://addictomatic.com/

Worried all your Google findings are UK biased (even when using Google.com)? Try searching for your brand from different geographical locations, see http://oyoy.eu/google/world/

5. IDENTIFYING THE INFLUENCERS

Patient bloggers are nothing new; we all know that patients value the opinions of other patients – you only have to look at the success of www.patientslikeme.com Finding active patient bloggers is just half the task; you have to understand how respected and influential they are among their peers. A useful search and analysis tool can be found at Social Mention www.socialmention.com/ This not only identifies bloggers but provides a snapshot of the extent of brand mentions and how many express positive or negative sentiments. It helps you to identify the most influential individuals.

Finding active patient bloggers is just half the task; how respected and influential are they among their peers?

Patient and brand programmes can be made more engaging and relevant by adding some appropriate innovation

6. DISCOVER INNOVATION TO ADD TO YOUR BRAND/PATIENT PROGRAMME

Currently many pharma digital experiences are very vanilla, with little to engage many consumers. Adding some appropriate innovation to your brand or patient programme can really make a difference. The recent launch of Didgit by Bayer Diabetes is a great example of what is possible. By creating a blood glucose meter that plugs directly into a Nintendo DS™ and creating a unique game – that rewards children who test regularly by unlocking game levels – they have created a truly contemporary offering, which helps them position themselves as leaders in this area.

Patient programmes can also be made more engaging and relevant by the addition of tools such as Google maps mashups. These can be used to provide information on how to access local resources relevant to your brand or disease area and techniques such as data visualisation, which can help encourage patients to monitor important health parameters.

One recent innovation that will make an excellent addition to many patient support programmes is the Philips Direct Life Activity Monitor. The device is a clever way of incorporating exercise into everyday life and can be an excellent accompaniment to a diabetes or cardiovascular drug for example.

Find some innovation inspiration here:
• Some non-healthcare Google maps mash ups: http://tiny.cc/U239X
• The best healthcare iphone apps – http://tiny.cc/xdxBY
• Philips Direct Life – http://tiny.cc/OdjBH
• Bayer Didgit - http://www.bayerdidgit.co.uk/Home

7. TAKE A LOOK AT CONSUMER BEST PRACTICE

Whatever your comfort zone, it is worth venturing outside to see what other sectors are doing. By finding out what represents best practice when it comes to consumer brands’ digital communication you can be inspired to push your projects further. Obviously, the consumer examples are free from the regulatory constrains that frame our world, but regulation should not be used as an excuse for not doing something well.

Check out the winners at the Webby Awards, www.webbyawards.com And see the Facebook application ‘Kidnap’ for the Travel Channel at www.rapp-health.com/tenways
8. BECOME A DIGITAL ADVOCATE – KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Digital projects in general and social media projects in particular can still be seen as unconventional and avant garde, and they often come under more scrutiny than traditional activities. You can be sure that questions will be asked about your target audience, broadband penetration, participation in social media activities, ownership and usage of mobile devices, etc.

While you don’t need to be an expert, is possible to be a digital advocate within your organisation, having some key pieces of information means you can quickly correct any doubts and smooth the progress of your digital project. After all, the numbers are eye opening - 6.4 million new internet users going online every month and if MySpace was a country it would be the fifth largest in the world.

For more useful UK stats, including: How many people actually use iPhone apps? Who really uses Twitter? Whatever happened to MySpace? Does your therapeutic area penetration, participation in social media activities, ownership and usage of mobile devices, etc.

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9. WHAT YOU ARE YOU DOING ABOUT YOUR SIDEWIKI?

Google Sidewiki is turning brand.com into a new place for consumers to assert their voice.

If you’ve not got your Sidewiki installed, we would recommend you download it today and have a look at your own company’s websites. See http://www.google.com/sidewiki/intl/en/install.html Google Sidewiki is basically a plugin that allows a sidebar to appear on your browser. It enables any user to freely add helpful information alongside any website or content on your web pages... or in some cases, less than helpful information.

There is no moderation and only the author, and potentially Google, can currently change or remove an entry. The Sidewiki opens up the proverbial walls of your sites and enables social interaction and dialogue to take place. Patients in particular may be excited by the opportunity to share medical information, next to your website assets, with users who are also seeking health information. This throws open the big question on what the adverse event implications will be of these conversations taking place in your space. The FDA is currently reviewing whether the Sidewiki should be considered as part of your branded space and it will be interesting to see how different brands deal with this. One thing is apparent and that is that some consumers are starting to use this tool.

What should you do as a pharma brand to participate in or try to control this new social network? RAPP has a lot of experience working within pharma and online and we have been discussing this with a range of clients as well as Google and have come up with some initial options:

1. Claim ownership now and proactively participate. Google will allow you to own the first listing, providing you sign up to various Google tools. You can use this space to acknowledge the fact that you do not have control over this space and that comments are user opinion only and have nothing to do with your brand. You also have the option to provide links to more information and helpful points of contact and of course you can monitor for adverse events.

2. You may choose to block Sidewiki by using a change to your website code to detect and disable the tool. This however may draw more attention and would give consumers a poor user experience that will ultimately reflect on your brand.

3. Finally you could wait to see if Google will allow sites to opt-out from Sidewiki... this is currently a “can of worms” for Google so anything is possible.

Sitting on the fence will probably work as a short-term option but mid to long term you will probably have to take some action and get involved. If you plan this now you can make sure that this ties in to your other communications, take advantage of the interest being generated and be part of the discussion rather than the subject of it.

10. REMEMBER MOORE’S LAW – KNOW TOMORROW TODAY

If you have completed steps one to nine then you should be feeling a bit more digitally aware, great news, but do not get too comfortable. Knowing what is going on today is just part of the challenge. Moore’s law states that the number of transistors that can be placed inexpensively on an integrated circuit board will double approximately every two years. It is perhaps not the most inspiring ‘law’ but it does result in a doubling of computing power and has been used by futurologists to create The Law of Accelerating Returns. To keep things simple this means that technological advance is always going to happen and happen quickly. Knowing the future direction of change is vital to keep your brand one step ahead. Find out the RAPP view on upcoming trends that will shape the digital world at www.rapp-health.com/tenways

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It seems everyone is looking for new marketing strategies, new media channels and new audiences.

RAPP is delivering all of this right now for companies like Pfizer, GSK, Bayer and Novartis. Uniquely, we combine fresh ideas from brands outside the pharma world with a deep understanding of healthcare marketing. It is this breadth and depth of thinking that keeps our clients ahead of the game.

Don’t wait until tomorrow. Call John Perkins today on +44 (0)20 8735 8846 to arrange a meeting, or visit www.rapp-health.com to find out more.