How to design patient services with social media within the ABPI code guidelines
By Craig Moore, Senior Consultant

In the UK, the marketing of prescription medicine to health professionals and patients is carried out under strict regulatory oversight to protect and support high quality patient care. The ABPI Code of Practice for the Pharmaceutical Industry is administered by the Prescription Medicines Code of Practice Authority, and is a self-regulatory code that applies to the marketing of prescription medicines both to health professionals and the public as a whole.

When designing digital services and informational materials for prescription drugs or services, there are unique considerations that must be taken around how that information is accessed and used. In this blog, Senior Consultant Craig Moore, from the Blue Latitude Strategy team, discusses the application of the ABPI Code, including incorporating social media into digital patient services.
Do some **market research** to understand the customer needs: would patients be interested in the social media functionality; would they use it? Rounds of user research and user testing would highlight if this was important or not.

At Blue Latitude, the aim is to solve problems for clients following a number of solution design methodologies.

Host a **PMCPA (Prescription Medicines Code of Practice Authority) training session** and take the opportunity to get feedback on early solution concepts. Understand where other companies have breached the code and where you may run the risk with your own solutions. The PMCPA’s view is absolute; any company working with or providing services for the Pharma Industry needs to know the code. (Blue Latitude’s staff have all completed the introductory PMCPA training session).

Get cross-functional teams around a meeting table to highlight social media in the organisation. The corporate communication team handles social throughout most organisations. Silos mean that the information is not always shared. The development of the website/app should not be the main focus; the main focus should be to capture any company-wide issues or concerns about using social, and highlight areas of the code that are designed to support this. Take any objections away and incorporate them into the business case for the solution.

Consider the level of patient access in the kind of website/app you want to develop. Patient access will raise some red flags, especially from the pharmacovigilance teams. The fear would be that an increased perception of patients discussing product-related issues would lead to an inundation of Adverse Events or Product Complaints (AE/PC).

Initiate some monitoring pilots related to the therapy area in general. This will help establish a reporting process; defining clear roles and responsibilities as well as outlining clear project plans, objectives, and exit strategies. Always follow the guidelines, and go beyond them.

For example, use what you report (or consider to be) an AE/PC as a metric to demonstrate that social listening will not create an undue burden on internal resources. Once the process is established, expand monitoring into competitor products – there is no need to report AE/PC for competitors – then, move on to company-owned products.
Look at the possibility of developing a solution for closed patient communities. The code explains how use of social media to discuss prescription medicines (for example, on Twitter) is seen as promotional. With closed patient communities, the challenge to the code/internal MLR compliance teams is to make sure to only allow access to prescribed patients. Canada, for example, uses product identification numbers and DIN to allow access to a patient programme or forum.

If you’d like to discuss digital solutions for patient communities or how the ABPI Code impacts digital services in more depth, we’d love to hear from you! You can leave us a comment below or send an email to Craig at craig.moore@bluelatitude.net.

To read more about regulations which impact marketing for Pharma, read the post from guest blogger Aurelie Pols on data security and privacy.

Craig Moore comes from a full service digital agency and media planning background. He works with Blue Latitude’s clients to help them understand and improve how their digital marketing can form a part of wider marketing activity and achieve their business objectives.

- Want to know more about how to change customer behaviour? [Download the presentation.]