Top 7 Trends in Pharma Marketing for 2015

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Toward the end of 2014 the Blue Latitude team gathered together for breakfast in the boardroom to discuss how pharma marketing will change in the year ahead and what trends will be big in pharma marketing during 2015.

In 2013 we expected to see pharma companies shift their focus from just product and service marketing and concentrate on the medical story. Their business goals needed to be realigned so they met the customer need, as well as ‘going beyond the pill’ and enhancing the service offering around the product offered.

Two years ago, pharma companies were relatively disorganised when it came to multichannel, therefore it was inevitable to expect a continued and improved effort to integrate online and offline marketing.

Wearables have been gracing the ‘trends’ lists consistently for the last few years. In 2012 e-skin showed great promise, however there doesn’t appear to have been any further developments since the pressure triggered LED 2013.

Then there was Google Glass, and we all know what happened there…
In 2014 we were talking about the need for simpler messaging when marketing to customers. Content Marketing was huge last year, with the onus being on the storytelling aspect rather than just churning out content. Memes took a backseat, and we predicted there would be a rise in content curation and sharing, bite-size videos, and personalisation. Many pharma companies were utilising their social media accounts, but we anticipated that this would cease to be a separate entity within the marketing plan, instead becoming fully embraced as standard channels to communicate through.

“There’s an app for that!” Instead of creating an app for the sake of it, companies were cottoning on that mobile web is the way forward. We also expected to see a rise in virtual medical conferencing, enabling pharma companies to reach a global audience. Invites to on-demand content, as well as live events, via Google Hang-out and YouTube were expected to be on the rise.

Predictions for 2015

Here are our top 7:

1. Patient Empowerment
2. Wearable Technology
3. Virtual Reality
4. Storytelling
5. Using biomarkers
6. Marketing and Medical Automation
7. Data, Security, and Privacy

They are by no means exhaustive and we will continue to share our views on what is having an impact and transforming the wider healthcare sector throughout the year. Let us know whether you agree and your predictions for the year ahead.
Patient Empowerment

Pharma companies continue to evolve beyond the pill and improve the services around their products, but the next step is to look at how to influence the behaviour of patients.

For patient empowerment, the technological capability of a solution doesn’t determine adoption, engagement and retention, the patient has control over that, which is why they need to be motivated to change.

Behaviour change through patient empowerment is no mean feat. It will require a patient centric, multi-channel approach that brings healthcare professionals, patients, carers, relatives and payers all together.

Going into 2015 multi-channel approaches will continue to be the most effective option and provided that they are determined through assessment of patient preferences, motivations and beliefs and not driven by technological innovation, they will become essential in sustaining the provision of healthcare.

We expect the next wave of digital health tools developed in 2015, and beyond, will rectify the current unmet patient needs and focus on the content to be received and the context in which it is to be provided to ensure that the need is met.

Wearable Technology

Back in April last year we reported on the revolution in wearable technology and the impact on mainstream healthcare. Approximately 80% of wearables available to consumer fall within the lifestyle, medical and fitness categories. Tech giants Apple, Google, Microsoft and Samsung are actively moving into this arena, these numbers certainly seem to validate the billion dollar growth projections.

The wearables market is saturated with devices that measure, but how will the need of the patient continue to be met? Patients are no longer content to merely have information about their health, they also want to be told what it means and any next steps they should be taking. Medical devices that are serious about changing people’s behaviours and thus making a significant impact on the industry should have a clear strategy about what call-to-actions their devices create for their users, and provide any necessary supporting information as well.

Wearable tech will play an even more integral role in the collection of aggregated patient data to help identify disease trends, predict treatment outcomes and improve future diagnoses. What we anticipate seeing more of in 2015 is a closer integration between the wearable device and how it feeds information to various sources.
Virtual Reality

With the introduction of Google Cardboard, and the release of the Samsung Gear VR, we expect to see the introduction of many more VR apps linked to healthcare.

Read our blog post from December 2014 where we stepped into virtual reality and explored how it is being used by medical and pharma companies. VR is already in use for some treatments, however if we can educate patients in the same way, (for a fraction of the cost) then we may just improve adherence. By creating VR apps that explain the mode of action for a therapy area, patients may better understand the treatment journey and improve their compliance.

We expect to see many more apps, especially around fitness and lifestyle to emerge on the market this year.

Storytelling

With so much content available on a variety of platforms almost any content is just a click away. The scarce commodity in this world of massive choice and infinite distraction is attention.

Storytelling in content marketing is important, as telling a good story can mean getting the attention of your targeted customers. In this way pharma and healthcare is no different to any other sector.

What the healthcare stakeholders – physicians, patients, pharmacists, nurses demand in return for their attention is relevance to them and their practice or – in the case of patients – them and their health.

Most exchanges of value in digital healthcare marketing and communications succeed by recognising and leveraging this exchange.

In essence, the exchange is very simple. You – Pharma – provide the audience with something that is relevant to them. In return, they give you their attention for a period of time. Even if this is only enough time to deliver a brand reminder, then value will have been exchanged both ways.

In 2015 we expect to see a huge increase in personalised storytelling. Rather than vying for the attention of customers among thousands of images, adverts, content and graphics, we expect for the content displayed to each user to be relevant to them, based on their needs, behaviours and interests.

- Know your audience (right place, right time, and right audience.)
• Communicate real life and real desires – mirroring the potential decision making process.

• Capturing data and using insights to make stories even better.

By creating this experience with patients and doctors, we may see a change in their behaviour. This requires research and insight, of course. The advantage of conducting research; you will really know your audience. This designed product/experience can then offer meaning and emotion for its users.

Ultimately your goal is to provide quality and relevant content to secure your audience’s attention.

**Use of predictive biomarkers**

There is a huge need to personalise medicine for the individual; ensuring maximum efficacy, reduce the cost of switching, and differentiate and position products within the treatment pathway. Predictive biomarkers are being used to determine a person’s genetic predisposition to respond well to certain treatments.

By segmenting patients in this way, pharma companies can:

• Identify patients suitable for 1st line treatment

• Guarantee X% market share (dependant on biomarker prevalence within the population)

• Differentiate themselves from competitors

• Offer a genuine service ‘around the pill’ with clear patient benefits

Investment and utilisation of this tool is a trend that we expect to grow even more during 2015. Indeed, early Jan 2015 news that Genentech, a member of the Roche Group, are collaborating with 23andMe to analyse genomic data for Parkinson’s disease is proof of this.

Biomarkers do have their limitations, of course their success and approval is hugely dependant on the evidence gathered and some marketers will fear removing potential customers by segmenting the market in this way.

Despite this, pharma is becoming less reserved and beginning to see the true potential of this powerful scientific marketing tool. As knowledge in this area grows and certain pharma companies lead by example, we anticipate greater investment in this field and a trend towards the utilisation of biomarkers in brand strategies.
Marketing and Medical Automation

To be able to implement successful Marketing Automation, healthcare companies need to have a good background and combination of Content Marketing, Closed Loop Marketing and Email, SMS and Online Marketing.

In the last couple of years, most healthcare companies have been taking their first steps in these areas but haven’t been able to take the next step to Marketing Automation.

In 2015 however, we believe some of these companies will be ready to take this step. In addition, the increasing number of interactions and touch points, the extensive power of social media, the large amounts of data available to understand customers’ preferences and needs will definitely scream for this change.

It is not an easy path but it is one that definitely needs to be considered by companies who already have solid foundations in data capture, permissions, content strategy and a clear understanding of the journey that prospective customers take from awareness to conversion. By embracing marketing automation, it will be possible to generate better quality leads and a stronger ROI.

Data, Security, and Privacy

Traditionally, pharma has been viewed upon suspiciously from other stakeholders in healthcare. However, in an era of greater visibility and accountability different parties are willing to share data. The most influential trend in the near future will not be a data driven technological development, it will be patient data sharing along the patient pathway, it’s wholly intuitive that these will be of increased worth with regularly received, accurate data.

Data driven diagnostics will lead to better, more effective prescriptions and the feedback received, and shared between HCPs, pharma and regulators, will bring the patient back to the centre of the discussion, as well as having practical benefits of ensuring patients remain compliant on treatment and are suitably cared for should their symptoms worsen.

Although the question surrounding security and who is responsible for its privacy, still remains. Much will depend on how the data is sourced, patients undergoing treatment for a debilitating chronic disease will, in general, be more willing to offer up their disease and treatment specifics in the hope it will provide them with better outcomes. This can be compiled in real world evidence registries, to be accessed and used by pharma companies for promotional uses.
For 2015, as digital patient data available increases we expect to see pharma companies, third party privacy and security companies rise to prominence in tandem. In many ways it may be worth aligning/ partnering with them and presenting this as an add-on to achieving even greater patient outcomes.

Do you agree with our predictions for 2015? Let us know how you think pharma marketing will change in 2015.