

6 tips for creating a strong digital strategy in pharmaceuticals.

Learn how online platforms can be your way of connecting with your key stakeholders.

August 2015

*a***PureBase**
We care for data!



6 tips for creating a strong digital strategy in pharmaceuticals.

“We need to start being visible on social media, but how do we do this?”

“Where do we post what, and how do we know if it’s working?”

“What is allowed to do and what will break the legislation?”

Sound familiar?

If you are working with marketing in the pharmaceutical industry, it is very likely that you will have asked yourself these questions at one point or the other. According to an online survey with 236 people working in or for pharmaceutical companies (Digital Future, 2014), the biggest challenge for pharma in 2014 was to create a clear digital strategy.

Given the rather strict regulations pertaining to the pharmaceutical industry, it is no wonder that the challenges of entering the social media arena can appear unmanageable.

However, in order to fully reap the benefits of social media, pharmaceutical organisations need to prioritize a serious digital strategy. This strategy will keep your company focused and enable you to apply your resources more wisely.

So how do you develop a serious strategy?

This paper will guide you through 6 steps that will enable you to initiate a new social media strategy or optimize your current strategy.

Step 1: Make clear what the goal of using social media is.

A strategy is a method with which you attempt to reach an overall goal. Prior to developing a social media strategy, you need to know what exactly you want to accomplish with it. What is your goal? Is it to create awareness or goodwill? Is it to spread knowledge about your medical products? Is the aim to generate leads or to engage in a dialogue with your stakeholders? Do you want to use social

media to recruit the best candidates? Or perhaps you need to use social media to do damage control after bad publicity?

The purpose of using social media is manifold, and each of the different purposes requires a different strategic approach. Therefore, step 1 must be to determine what your purpose and goal of using social media is.

Step 2: Ascertain your resources.

For any social media strategy to be successful, both within pharma and in other domains, a certain amount of resources (monetary, time, and human resources) are required. There is no point embarking on an ambitious social media programme if you are unable to realistically sustain it. Make sure you have someone who is responsible for your online platforms and that he or she has the required time and skillset to purposefully manage these. You also have to identify others who will be involved and define who does what and when. Consider that some of your staff may not have the required skills to begin with and thus may need additional training. Ergo, you need to make sure that you possess enough resources to fully enroll a social media programme rather than doing it half-heartedly due to lack of time, money, or suitable staff.

Step 3: Map your key stakeholders.

Different people with different interests and different backgrounds do not necessarily require different pieces of information. It is, however, very likely that they need to

have this information differently framed to fit their preferences. It may also be that one group of people are not interested in the same information as another group of people in your company's network. Adapting your communication to best suit your target audience is the key to success. Unfortunately you cannot appeal to all your stakeholders on the same social media platforms at the same time. You need to identify who you want to engage with and what platforms they are active on. Base your social media strategy on a map that outlines your key target stakeholders and get to know everything about these; what are their interests, what issues do they encounter, in what specialized field do they work, and when and how can you help them?

If your stakeholders are a collection of very diverse personalities, it may make sense to create a company profile on two or more platforms, each of which target one specific type of stakeholder. This could be one page for physicians with one specialty, another page for physicians with a second specialty and a third page for your patients. It may also make sense to target some groups on e.g. Facebook while targeting another group on LinkedIn. It all comes down to spending time on really getting to know your key stakeholders. There are several ways to do this, but obtaining accurate data about your clients is the first step to better decision making.

Step 4: Audit your competitors and market tendencies.

Do you know what everyone else is doing? Great. Do something else then, or do what they do, just better. It is paramount to identify gaps in the social media market. If everyone is targeting one type of client, then you may want to consider who has been left out. Or perhaps your target client is not reached on the platforms where they actually are. Thus knowing your competitors and the market actually ties back to knowing your target audience.

Step 5: Know the rules.

When you know who is important for your business and having identified how and where they want to receive information, it is now time to get familiar with the official guidelines regarding marketing procedures in the pharmaceutical industry. Although the European Union has an overall legal framework governing medicinal products for human use that all pharmaceutical organisations must comply by, each local country may also have their specific legislation, which only complicates matter even further. However, it is essential that you get to know these rules, as breaking them (intentionally or unintentionally) will have serious consequences.

The general procedures for marketing authorisation in the European Union can be downloaded on aPureBase's website, and further information can be found on the European Commission's website.

Step 6: Slowly develop your content-platform-audience matrix.

Once you know what people to target, what platforms they use, and what information they may be interested in receiving, you can slowly start to develop and amend your social media strategy. Better go slowly and start with only a few channels, than aim high and roll out on all platforms. Then you may just end up doing your work half-heartedly because you are in too deep.

Finally, it is important to remember that digital channels, and everything that happens on these, are dynamic. This means that continuous evaluation of your digital activities is crucial if you want to stay successful on online platforms. What you say online has to match your company's behaviour in real life and while one type of platform may be a great tool to reach your target audience when you initiate your online presence, your key stakeholders may prefer another channel after a year.