



Opening Digital Doors: The New Normal of HCP Engagement

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If you're in pharmaceutical and device marketing, it's time to reinvent yourself. And your strategy.

COVID-19 has slammed the door on most in-person rep meetings more decisively than any previous regulation, legislation or ACA-driven hospital policy change. For years, direct sales teams have been one of the most effective promotional channels in the Life Sciences industry. But if you think rep access is coming back anytime soon—it's not.

As society struggles through waves of shut-downs and re-openings, it would be irresponsible for hospitals and medical offices to admit reps who could spread the coronavirus from location to location. Not to mention that most facilities want their clinicians' time focused on patient care and COVID-19 precautions.

The truth is this: the pandemic has radically and permanently altered the business landscape. Gone are the days when sales professionals could simply park their car at a hospital and “walk the halls” looking for new business.



We must also recognize that familiar hurdles haven't gone away just because COVID-19 has appeared on the scene. In some cases, the pandemic has quietly magnified already existing challenges:

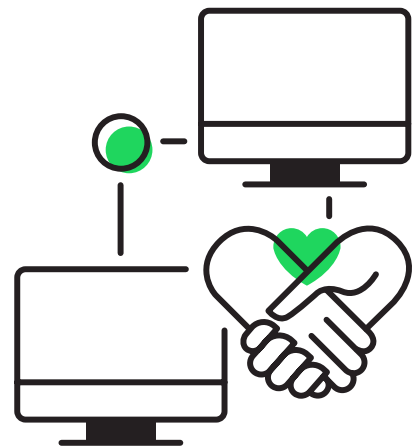
- **Everyone's still trying to do more with less.**

Some staff hours are getting cut even as other staff members are working non-stop. Clinicians' and buyers' increasing administrative burdens haven't disappeared, either. They hardly have time to see their families, never mind meet with a sales rep.

- **Sales professionals have less access to healthcare professionals, clinicians and buyers.**

Continued advancement of GPO contracting, Value Analysis Committee Purchasing, the Sunshine Act and increased adoption of programs like Vendormate dramatically restricted access to clinicians before the pandemic. They promise to remain in force.

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NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In no uncertain terms, the productivity of the sales executive has been negatively impacted by COVID-19, layered on top of already existing regulations and procedural barriers intended to constrain sales executives' access to and influence on clinicians. But these market obstacles also present new opportunities.

We must move forward into a new normal that requires life science sales and marketing executives to rethink how they sell. It's time to ask, "How can we thrive in an environment dominated by virtual interactions?"

Fortunately, in addition to all the access and time constraints, the way physicians prefer to acquire new information is changing as well. Recent research suggests that "two-thirds of physicians prefer to get information on specific therapies through digital channels...and a higher percentage (80%) of younger doctors held that view."

Creative marketing approaches, when used correctly, can complement a direct sales organization by increasing close rates and overall sales productivity. Targeted messaging delivered through a combination of e-detailing, lead nurturing and video communicates a more thorough understanding of your customer. The result? Relevant information gets delivered when, where and how your customers want it.

Since market factors have negatively impacted the sales executive's access to clinicians, a concurrent digital strategy is a must for two reasons:

- **Digital increases touchpoints with existing prospects.**

By complementing any current field sales efforts with digital touchpoints, companies can increase the visibility of their products, better control their message and buffer the long spells that increasingly will occur between face-to-face visits.

- **Digital incites market response from new prospects.**

A strong digital approach broadens the audience of qualified targets to which reps currently have access. By building brand credibility through a smart digital strategy, companies can create "hand-raiser" opportunities that lead to more meaningful conversations once a rep gains access to the clinician.

It's time for companies selling within the healthcare space to change. It's time to adopt digital strategies to increase the reach and frequency of their messages to drive product adoption.

Think of digital as air cover for the ground troops. The ground troops are the feet-on-the-street sales reps and the air support comes in the form of a smart digital strategy assisting those reps.

A digital marketing strategy is no longer a nice-to-have, but a "must have." It's not something you can put off to the future. Because like it or not, the future is now.

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If you need help adapting your marketing plan to the new normal, we're ready to talk.



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