

MARKETING IN A CRISIS

MEDICAL MARKETERS RESPOND TO THE CORONAVIRUS

RISING TO THE TASK



JOANN WHITCHER

Senior producer,
Haymarket Studio

With apologies to Dr. Paul Wong, whose quote I am adapting, I think this is an apt sentiment during this time: “A company’s true character is often revealed in times of crisis.”

It was only a few short months ago that the pharmaceutical industry was being vilified as greedy and corrupt. But when the coronavirus began its insidious outreach, pharma as an industry rose to the task of finding a treatment protocol and/or a vaccine. Pharma is no longer healthcare’s villain, but is increasingly viewed as our sole hope for defeating this relentless scourge.

Pharma’s marketing partners’ response has been equally impressive. Not only have medical marketers quickly developed branded content for their clients, they have also made sure that accurate information is available to the healthcare ecosystem. Since mid-March, Intouch Group has published a dozen POVs on COVID-19, covering everything from how the virus has impacted HCPs to market access. HealthLink Dimensions built a free communication platform around the coronavirus (COVID-19) to assist in providing coordinated information from reliable sources, such as the CDC and Johns Hopkins.

“It’s a pretty epic time right now; everyone wants to make a difference,” affirms Scott Page of GSW. “We are in this business of healthcare because it is a higher calling. In moments like these, we are all looking at what we can do to make a difference.” For example, to address the anticipated ventilator shortage, Syneos created a program to raise awareness among HCPs about a bridging option.

In this eBook, we look at a small sampling of some of the programs healthcare and pharma marketers are implementing to help their clients navigate through this very difficult situation. Next month we will dive into HCP engagement, looking at the myriad of innovative programs being implemented.

Be safe, all!

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MARKETING IN A CRISIS

Medical marketers respond to the coronavirus

In late February–early March, as it became glaringly apparent that the coronavirus was not going gently into the night, medical marketers went into overdrive to provide accurate and timely information to their clients, along with the healthcare ecosystem at large.

But much like the rest of the general U.S. population, clients, pharma marketers report, are “in a bit of panic,” exacerbated by an uncertain future with no foreseeable end date to the pandemic and a situation that remains stubbornly fluid. While there have been some positive reports (in New York City, hospitalizations are on the downswing), there is still evidence that the virus is spreading. And the death count continues to rise in the U.S.

“Our clients really need guidance; we are trying to be a source of truth to provide that guidance,” says Linda Ruschau, chief client officer, PatientPoint.

As with most industries, the coronavirus has disrupted standard operating protocols in the medical marketing sector, accelerating emerging trends in the process.

“A lot of the disruptions should have happened a while ago, such as digitizing sales reps, and making greater use of non-personal promotion (NPP) and telemedicine,” notes Angela Tenuta, EVP, Intouch Group. “Those changes will stick; they already made sense.”

Firm regulations, now loosened due to the pandemic, held back pharma previously from using these programs in earnest. “It will be interesting to see with the loosening of regulations what can get done, and then down the road, how much the regulations will go back to what they were,” says Tenuta.

“A lot of the disruptions should have happened a while ago. Those changes will stick; they already made sense.”

Angela Tenuta, EVP, Intouch Group



For now, reality requires a reckoning. Nationwide shelter-in-place restrictions have eliminated all face-to-face interactions for life science field reps — already on the decline prior to COVID-19 — and larger-scale events such as global and regional medical congresses.

NPP, which has always played a huge part in the pharma marketer’s toolkit for patient engagement, is now also being used to a greater extent to market to HCPs, often displacing the sales rep, who was traditionally at the center of the pharma brand’s promotional efforts.

And telemedicine, while it’s on the upswing, is still only used by a small number of physicians. Its use is limited to certain disease states — it’s not a viable method for treating cancer patients, for example — and to the comfort level of the patient. Also, notes Tenuta, pharma needs to make sure that physicians have the proper support materials to ensure their telemedicine practice is effective. “We aren’t fully there yet,” she emphasizes.



“If you’re screening for COVID, it’s not the right moment to message the client about diabetes.”

David Linetsky, SVP life sciences, Phreesia

SEISMIC SHIFT IN THE PHYSICIAN OFFICE EXPERIENCE

In the current environment, understanding what is truly happening at the physician’s office is a challenge for pharma companies. Physician’s experiences differ dramatically based on region and area of specialty.

“What we are hearing from our life science clients is that they are desperate to understand what is happening on the ground, in physicians’ practices,” says David Linetsky, SVP life sciences, Phreesia.

Office closures are having a tremendous impact on the industry and their providers. It’s a challenging environment to communicate with patients, who need to remain compliant on their treatment protocol. “We want our clients to be able to deliver targeted content about their drugs, but if you are screening for COVID, it’s not the right moment to message the client about their diabetes,” Linetsky notes.

In February 2020, Phreesia pivoted all of its efforts to helping clients respond to COVID-19, making sure it could continue managing intake while keeping its staff and patients safe.

Phreesia’s technology separates patients that are coming in for COVID screening from those being treated for chronic conditions. “So, if you’re coming in for diabetes, you’ll get different content,” says Linetsky. “One of the first things we instituted is the practice of delivering relevant content to the patient.”

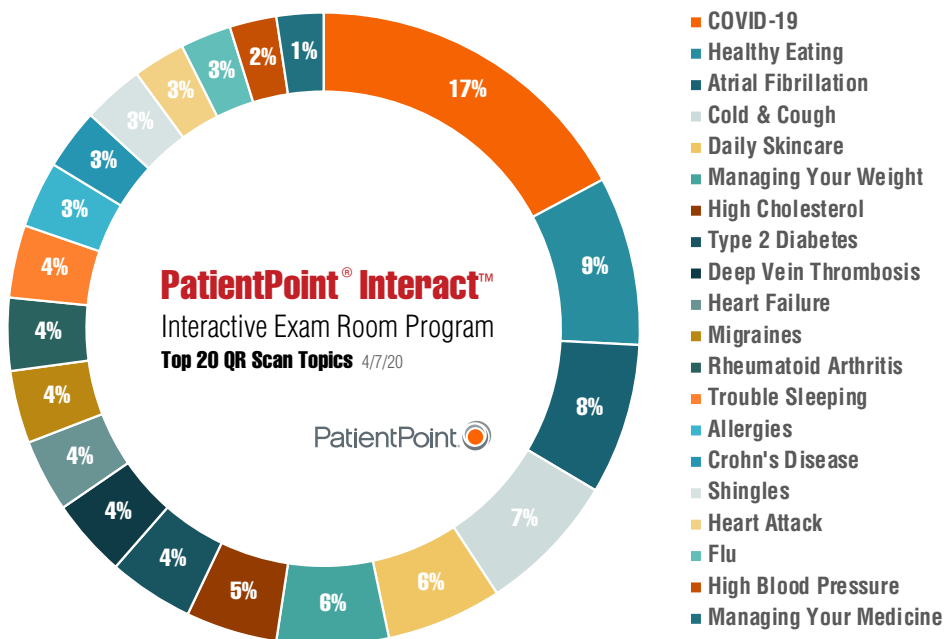
HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE

It's not only patients that require the delicate touch. "Messaging to HCPs is super crucial right now," says Scott Page, EVP and general manager at GSW. "We need to be much more sensitive to what is happening at the local level. We may have physicians in some markets where the virus hasn't hit yet, but are preparing, getting ready; while in other markets it's out in full force."

As a discipline, in marketing and advertising the ideal practice is to market to the individual. "What we are realizing is one-size-fits-all marketing doesn't work," says Page. "We are experiencing this pandemic in different ways, depending on where you live. We have to plan for multiple scenarios, and target messaging depending on the situation that physician is experiencing. It's a new shift; this is how we need to operate today."

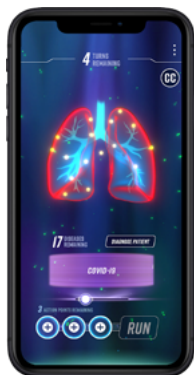


PatientPoint responded to the "no-contact" doctrine with a pivot to QR code technology for its interactive exam room devices.



AIRWAY EX

Level Ex's game is designed for anesthesiologists, CRNAs and airway specialists to hone their skills.



PULM EX

Level Ex's game for pulmonologists allows them practice at performing difficult broncoscopies.

TECHNOLOGY WINS THE DAY

Medical marketers are adapting quickly to the new realities, ramping up their use of technology to ensure their pharma clients are able to maintain engagement with providers and patients. "While field reps can't be physically present in the HCP's office, they can be virtually present," says Page. "We are arming reps with the tools to maintain a presence with the providers; and continue to be a resource to them, a source of education and information."

Indeed, leveraging various technology platforms has been a key step for many companies.

Along with updating its digital signage network with CDC- and WHO-sourced content (see "POC Networks Add Coronavirus Info from CDC, WHO to Content Mix", page 8), PatientPoint responded quickly to the "no-contact" doctrine with a pivot to QR code technology for its interactive exam room devices. Instead of touching a screen — such as a tablet — clinicians, patients and caregivers are able to scan QR codes embedded on PatientPoint exam room screens to access the same branded and educational information on their mobile phones. A special app isn't required — the user just points the phone's camera at the screen.

"Interestingly, not all the information patients are accessing are related to COVID-19," notes Ruschau. "They are also seeking out info on healthy eating and daily skin care."

As of the first week of April, PatientPoint had generated more than 3,500 QR code scans.

THE VIRTUAL MEET

With in-person sales reps visits banned, and medical congresses either canceled or postponed, pharma is turning to technology to reach both patients and providers.

OptimizeRx has launched a new telehealth feature, similar to a “FaceTime for physicians,” which allows physicians to securely speak with medical science liaisons (MSLs). The MSLs help providers create the right treatment regimen for patients who need specialty drugs right now. This helps engage the HCP right through the electronic health record (EHR) workflow with on-demand video consults.

PlatformQ, a digital- and video-only education and healthcare marketing company, didn’t need to retool its platforms in response to the coronavirus, but it did need to ramp up production. “Our virtual and online events support a variety of constituencies, from large pharma com-



“Doctors congregate on our video game platforms to interact in a more fun and engaging format.”

Genevieve Paquette, chief business officer, Level Ex

“Our virtual and online events support a variety of constituencies, from large pharma companies engaging in product launches to associations, advocacy partners and patient communities.”

Robert Rosenbloom, president and CEO, PlatformQ

panies engaging in product launches to associations, advocacy partners and patient communities,” says Robert Rosenbloom, president and CEO, PlatformQ.

“For patient-focused events, speakers will talk about disease symptoms as well as resources for patients, not just treatment options but also support options for patients and caregivers,” explains Dave Murphy, EVP, PlatformQ. “On the provider side, the focus will be on recognizing the symptoms, and treatment options in the marketplace.”

For patients who are immune comprised, access to online and digital education is an imperative. “They can stay at home and continue to pay attention to their health,” adds Murphy. “This is where we see so much need for digital ed and the need to leverage all the digital tools to reach patients and clinicians.”

But virtual events are not without their challenges, especially if the program features KOLs from large medical groups. “The KOL doesn’t know what his or her schedule will be day to day; what the needs are going to be because they are on the frontline,” says Murphy.

“There is a tremendous need for education,” says

Rosenbloom. “In the virtual and digital world, we can execute these programs if we can’t get everyone together. But we can’t take it for granted that everyone will be able to participate because they are under tremendous strain.”

Level Ex, which develops video games for doctors that also serve as educational vehicles, is also gearing

up production. “One of the big things we are hearing is that with recommendations for COVID-19 changing day to day, there are few ways that clinicians can learn in real time,” says Genevieve Paquette, chief business officer, Level Ex.



In April, Level Ex released COVID-19 cases into its video games to help HCPs mitigate this issue. The games employ technology and address a variety of topics to help healthcare providers navigate challenging COVID-19 patient scenarios and make better emergency decisions. Level Ex also offers an alternative to traditional peer-to-peer events. “Doctors congregate on our video game platforms to interact in a more fun and engaging format,” says Paquette, noting there has been an uptick in demand for these types of programs.

“We are telling clients to keep focusing on the big picture. Keeping that 100,000-ft. perspective is extremely important when the world is imploding.”

Michael Collette, founder and CEO, PatientPoint

LOOKING AHEAD

Marketers are working tirelessly to help their clients plan for the near term, with recommendations and scenarios changing on a dime, and the long term, when there is a reversion back to “normal.”

One of the hardest things to determine is what the PTSD effect will be moving forward, says Michael Collette, founder and CEO, PatientPoint. “How do behaviors change once the crisis is substantially over, the curve is flattened?” he poses.

“We are telling clients to keep focusing on the big picture,” says Collette, “Keeping that 100,000-ft. perspective is extremely important when the world is imploding.”



Dave Murphy,
EVP, PlatformQ



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POC NETWORKS ADD CORONAVIRUS INFO FROM CDC, WHO TO CONTENT MIX

Immediacy isn't generally considered one of the major selling points of the point-of-care channel. Marketers and POC networks themselves more often tend to highlight patient/caregiver mindset (e.g., that such audiences tend to be more receptive to new information in the presence of a physician or pharmacist) and depth and variety of content (printed materials/video/interactivity) as the channel's chief virtues.

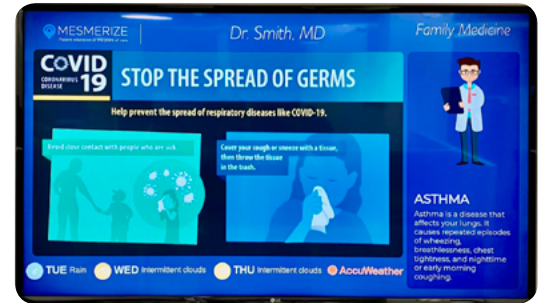
But as the coronavirus crisis continues to intensify, POC network providers have reprogrammed their content offerings to convey messages specific to the current scourge. Mesmerize, Outcome Health and PatientPoint have all, to some degree, interrupted their usual rotations of health and marketing content with well-sourced information about coronavirus, its symptoms and the steps individuals should take to keep themselves healthy.

Mesmerize president and chief revenue officer Craig Mait noted that point-of-care networks delivering content digitally can quickly reorient their content mix in the face of emerging health crises. "It feels like there's almost an obligation for us to raise awareness of what's going on, especially since there's been some mixed messages," he says.

To combat such messaging, Mesmerize has fed its network information from the Centers For Disease Control and the World Health Organization mostly slides and short videos that are updated or replaced as events warrant. "Content systems like ours allow us to weight the media and balance the number of plays. COVID-19 information is given a higher weight than the standard health and wellness content that plays regularly, so we get it out there more often," Mait explained.

Mesmerize isn't alone. PatientPoint has been [running educational messages](#) within its programming and sharing assets for providers to share via their own social and online channels. "With coronavirus (COVID-19), like any outbreak that could potentially affect so many across the country, PatientPoint quickly developed educational content and is continuing to develop content for all of our programs to help patients and providers to help them get the information they need to remain safe and healthy," said chief client officer Linda Ruschau.

As for Outcome Health, CEO Matt McNally noted the company has created content he describes as "headline-type information specifically supported with visuals... it's facts and figures from the CDC, but wrapped in emotional and empathetic support." The content has been pushed out to Outcome's network of devices to "combat the heightened sense of anxiety within those four walls."



Mesmerize has fed its network updated slides and short videos from the CDC and the WHO.

That sense of anxiety remains at a fever pitch as physicians attempt to manage the coronavirus crisis, but each of the network execs believe their efforts are helping to mitigate the fear and confusion many patients are feeling — whether they find themselves at the point of care to be treated for a potential coronavirus infection or for another malady. "Nobody really knows what's going to happen next," Mait acknowledged. "But we want to be a part of the solution and help with this situation as things keep changing, whether for better or worse. Our screens are powerful tools. It's real estate well spent."



"Like with any outbreak, PatientPoint quickly developed educational content."

Linda Ruschau, chief client officer, Patientpoint

STUDY: PHYSICIANS CHANGING PRESCRIBING HABITS, EMBRACING TELEMEDICINE DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

To better understand how physicians are responding to the tectonic changes prompted by the coronavirus crisis — the virtualization of routine visits, the longer hours and the threats to their physical and mental well-being, among others — AbelsonTaylor surveyed 500 physicians with an average practice tenure of 17 years. The survey results, compiled in “Understanding Physician Engagements in a COVID-19 Impacted World,” revealed an equally tectonic shift in both their behaviors and practices.

Nearly 40% of respondents have changed their prescribing habits, including writing longer supplies or prescribing treatments without an in-person consultation. Three out of four doctors have increased their use of alternative methods to communicate with patients, with telemedicine services (106%) and video chat (159%) experiencing the biggest jumps in usage.

AbelsonTaylor’s senior director of marketing intelligence Amanda Hartzmark said the study shines a light on opportunities and responsibilities for physicians amid the crisis. “If, for example, patients are going from a 30-day to a 90-day supply, they may not be checking in with their HCP or speaking to a pharmacist as often as they previously would,” she explained. “There are touchpoints that some pharma partners could put in to ensure patients are adhering to and following through on treatments to manage their own health.”

When it comes to hearing from pharma, respondents reported that they’re receiving fewer patient support materials than usual. More than 80% said they did not receive any new materials during the past week. They added that visits from sales reps — not just in-person, but in the form of tele-details and e-details — dropped 63%.

AbelsonTaylor also supplemented the survey with real-world data from Veeva. That data showed that face-to-face meetings fell more than 50% while emails jumped 263% between January 2020 and March 2020, following similar trends found in AbelsonTaylor’s survey. Both findings stress the importance of digital sales and marketing material for HCPs.

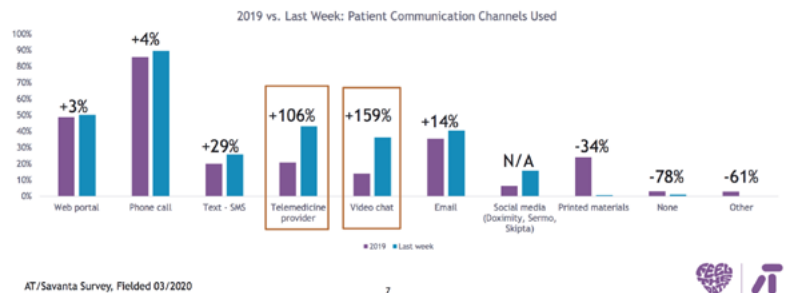
The respondents were clear about the type of information they want from pharma: treatment protocols for COVID-19 patients, with 42% of doctors asking for such materials.

“We were surprised that most physicians have

VIDEO CHATTING WITH PATIENTS HAS SEEN THE LARGEST UPTICK IN ADOPTION OVER THE PAST WEEK

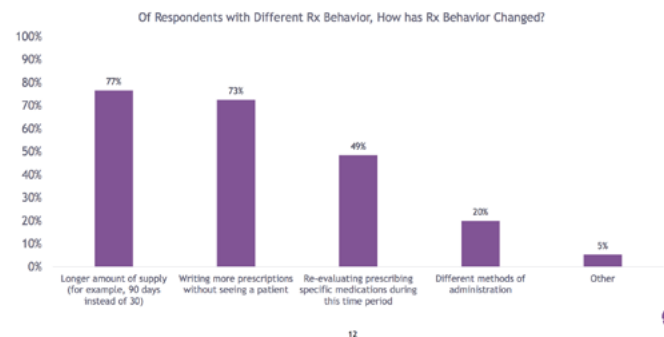
Q8. During an average week in 2019, which of the following channels did you rely on to communicate with your patients?

Q10. Within the last week, which of the following channels have you used to communicate with your patients?



MOST COMMON CHANGES IN PRESCRIBING BEHAVIOR ARE PROVIDING PATIENTS WITH A LONGER SUPPLY OR WRITING WITHOUT AN IN-PERSON CONSULT

Q17. [IF YES TO Q16] My prescribing habits have changes in the following ways:



not received new material from pharma partners to help them through this current moment,” Hartzmark said. “They want to hear from their partners on that and are interested in finding out what the treatment protocol would be for someone on a certain product and diagnosed with COVID-19....It’s a digital touchpoint that they want.”

Hartzmark said that physicians want “that quick hit of information” and that they remain extremely open to communicating with peers and pharma alike. “For people who are caught up in this crisis, like general practitioners, being able to share tips and best practices with peers, or even just venting about the situation they’re facing, is important. Many thought [virtual events] would be the next step and that everything would go online, but pharma partners have to create opportunities to build camaraderie.”

LiveWorld

THRIVE IN TIMES OF UNEXPECTED CHANGE BY RECALIBRATING YOUR MARKETING MIX

Pharmaceutical marketers have been late adopters of digital and social media. But overnight, the need to explore the best digital channels for reaching HCPs has become the new priority.

As a pure-play digital and social agency named by MM&M as one of 2019's "Ones to Watch," we have a unique lens on helping healthcare brands navigate the demands of this unique time. Here are three thought-starters to help you reimagine the role of digital in your marketing mix.

Reinvent the conference experience with conference in a box. Combine classic NPP with digital tools to be creative, targeted and physically present with HCPs, media and partners. In the absence of conferences, invite HCPs to curated experiences offline with a physical manifestation of your content or online using a private microsite, mirroring the experience they might have at your booth, while offering a deeper level of HCP and patient education and promotional. Consider bringing a flavor of the planned conference city — such as Barcelona, Glasgow, Austin or Boston — to your creative materials.

Stay relevant with social media: Even before orders to stay at home, almost half of HCPs were using social media for professional purposes, according to Healthlink Dimensions' 2020 HCP Communications Survey — up significantly from just one year before. More recently, Kantar found social media activity up 60% over normal usage rates. And CMI/Compas reports significant spikes in traffic for Doximity, Sermo and Figure1, the leading private professional medical social networks, with fluctuations in engagement that break along specialty lines.

The pandemic has changed patterns of HCP use of social media in ways that are unlikely to revert to pre-pandemic



Thrive in times of unexpected change by combining the best of offline and online channels.

levels. Engaging with HCPs on social media means understanding the most effective ways to leverage each platform's strengths, and to develop targeted content strategies that maximize HCP preferences for messages that are focused, short, factual, clinical, concise, mobile friendly, on-demand and relevant.

Turn your field force into a value-added remote resource: Reps have spent their careers honing their skills in personal interaction. Now is the time to migrate those successful personal approaches online, amplifying the power of the rep's personality and ability to forge personal connections. Bringing value to HCPs is how brands position themselves for success when crises have passed. For instance, curating and sharing bite-size pieces of relevant

scientific information from recent conferences; hosting or connecting HCPs to relevant CMEs; providing brief updates on clinical or epidemiological news; sharing patient experiences and education; and sharing clinical trial information and facilitating patient participation can all provide a welcome service, enhancing the role your rep — and your company — play in the physician's practice management and decisions.

Navigating in times of change requires investments in both thought and action. Your investment in powering up your digital presence can help you maintain a strong, relevant and engaging brand presence in a time of less in-person interaction, and continue to be a platform in the days and months ahead — well into what we hope will be a healthy future.

PARTNER PERSPECTIVES

JESSICA CINI

SVP of client services and business development, Health & Wellness Partners



During the COVID-19 crisis, “virtual” emerged as the sole channel to market a product. Virtual also became the only option to execute a face-to-face interaction. In less than two weeks, our agency converted an in-person training meeting to completely virtual. Even with this major change in format, we executed on the same date, trained 100% of the confirmed in-person attendees, and exceeded our client’s expectations.

As a medical communication agency, a core competency is training healthcare professionals to serve as promotional speakers. Training is typically done in-person with plenary sessions and breakouts. Countless hours are spent developing agendas, presentations and workshops in order to train in an effective and compliant manner.

With one of our largest clients, we were at the execution phase in the beginning of March and successfully conducted our first meeting. COVID was a concern but not a meeting-stopper at the time. Our second meeting was scheduled for two weeks later and COVID concerns were increasing. As partners, we met with our client to review our options. Cancel or postpone were the consensus options initially. We then said: Why not pivot — convert to virtual training? We just needed everyone on board from compliance, legal, medical, marketing and, of course, the attendees. We gained agreement on virtual training 10 days prior to the second meeting. We sourced multiple vendors to demo virtual training platforms, revised the full-day agenda to a half day, completed rehearsals and technology checks, and crushed it the day of the training. Huge success!

Our client repeatedly thanked HWP for the seamless pivot. They never felt stressed with the transition as it was managed flawlessly. As the future remains unknown, we are now planning to build upon this experience and offer virtual training options to our clients that will rival the in-person training meeting.

For more information, contact : Jessica Cini at JCini@hwpmj.com, or visit the company’s website at <https://www.hwpmj.com/>

**DANNY FLAMBERG**

VP, strategy - HCP LiveWorld



COVID-19, more than any executive decision or consultant’s recommendation, is driving digital transformation in pharmaceutical marketing. It’s ironic that an industry that relies on the most high-tech science available to create lifesaving and life-altering medications is comfortable with tired, safe tactics that don’t meet the needs of the moment.

Digital transformation means more than having a website and buying some banner ads. It’s even more than a channel strategy. Digital is a new way of thinking for most pharma marketers. It means thinking dynamically, not statically. It’s about two-way dialogue to reach and engage with HCPs in a personal, meaningful way that actively adds value. Access and interactions are guided by insights based on real-time behavioral data, creative content management and an individual’s preferred channel, form, frequency and tone. The conversation becomes useful and meaningful with the ability to track ideas and opinions, factor in expressed and implicit needs and adapt or respond to customer choices.

There’s no time to wait. HCPs and their patients are moving deeper into the digital world day by day. They are jumping into telemedicine, video office visits, professional and personal social communities, and podcasts. Patients and clinicians are fluent in chatbots, voice-activated assistants and click-to-talk. And whether they know it or not, HCPs need the resources, the compassion, the credible clinical data, KOL insights and case studies that pharma is uniquely equipped to provide.

Every one of us is changing and adapting to new challenges. Pharma marketers need to seize the day with courage, creativity, intelligence and inspiration — and a new digital mindset.

For more information, contact Jason Liebowitz at jliebowitz@liveworld.com

