



POINT OF VIEW

Sustaining your social community in pharma



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Healthcare has exploded onto mainstream social media this year and since social distancing began in March, 51% of adults in the United States have reported higher social media usage¹. While the COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt spearheaded many of these conversations, it's important to note that patients, caregivers, and healthcare professionals facing other conditions also began leveraging these digital platforms to connect with one another, provide and gain insight, and feel supported while newly remote. There has never been a better time for pharma brands to start a community or engage on social, but to make the most of the opportunity, it's important that brands don't lose sight of what patients and caregivers need from these community experiences. To better understand how to build and sustain a meaningful space, let's explore 6 best practices for pharma brands engaging in this channel.

1. Provide clear added value to distinguish your community

There's no doubt that social media is saturated with communities—branded and unbranded—with similar goals of connecting to specific audiences. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly identify what makes your community unique. In addition to conducting a competitive analysis, we recommend reflecting on what you are providing your community.

By going through this exercise, you may realize that your offering is not aligned with a shared purpose that is also valued by your community. Focus your efforts on defining your community values and how you want to inspire your audience. Your mission should be patient-centric, an essential element in sustaining a social community. By discovering and defining your value-add, you can build a sustainable community organically that provides meaningful messaging and cuts through the noise.

A good place to start adding value to your community is by creating actionable steps around your community mission. For example, encourage open discussions by engaging in difficult conversations, maintaining transparency, and addressing the less-answered questions your audience puts forth.

2. Build experiences toward overcoming barriers in the patient journey

It's important to align your social media content and messaging with the impact you hope to have on your target audience. How are you aiming to serve your target audiences? Step into your audience's shoes and explore what they might be looking for in your community or what topic areas may be most important to them.

For example, if you're hoping to promote earlier diagnosis of a condition and closer communication with care teams, consider providing content that identifies early symptoms to facilitate conversations between patients or caregivers and their healthcare professionals. Alternatively, if you hope to reduce stigma around a condition and encourage open conversations, consider utilizing an influencer database to find and leverage key influential voices in the disease category.

You should also consider weaving in audience-fueled insights. For example, focused webinars could act as a catalyst to encourage community members to open up about their personal experiences with a condition. By using this feedback, you can better serve your community by sharing actionable tips, more diverse perspectives, or conversation cues.



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3. Allow people to honestly share their emotions, experiences, and hardships

It can be difficult to facilitate honest conversations on such a public platform, especially in healthcare. Create a community culture that encourages honest discussion, take steps to nurture an open forum community, and embrace the uncomfortable side of the conversations. Use your brand voice accordingly to help guide conversations and stimulate discussion, while still allowing your audience to be the loudest voice in the room.

Reluctancy to communicate transparently on social media is often a major roadblock for pharma-based communities, whether branded or unbranded. Serve as a guide and encourage community managers to contribute and communicate honestly to ultimately build a safe space for your audience.

4. Drive patient empowerment through shared experience

Peer support is a huge driver for patients to join a social community. Leverage your community and let your audience know they are not alone.

Keeping patients in mind when creating content helps make sure they are able to see their own experiences in your community. Set up your community as a safe haven meant to provide them with guidance, tips, and resources for managing their condition, and empower them to continue to return for more. Propose interactive content based on insights to spark conversations and help community members learn from one another's experiences. This way, patients can derive value from other community members and learn from one another.

5. Engage with caregivers differently

Caregivers are often deeply intertwined in the patient journey and play a large role in timely diagnosis, treatment choice, and lifestyle for their patient. Because of this, many caregivers rely on social communities for support.

It is crucial to balance the vastly different needs of patients and caregivers in order to ensure caregivers also feel valued and heard through messaging. Depending on how influential your caregiver audience is, consider creating a unique space for them, or at least gearing specific content toward caregiving as they often find their way into patient communities.

6. Represent all types of patients in messaging and content

Representation is critical to patient identity, yet racial inequalities frequently prevail in representation within the healthcare system. Minorities are often disproportionately affected by certain conditions, and by encouraging diverse social communities, there is a key opportunity for brands to better understand minority experiences, and ultimately, provide content that better resonates and meets their needs using social media.

Patients want to see other patients who look like them and reflect their experiences. Create visuals that depict people of all races, ethnicities, sexes, ages, and disabilities. Help community members see themselves within your messaging, and as a result, build your community to be an encouraging space for diverse patient and/or caregiver populations to share their experiences.

Allowing patients and caregivers to feel heard, acknowledged, and taken care of helps build trust between minority communities and the healthcare system that has historically underserved them.

The Evoke Social Media Center of Excellence brings cross-disciplinary experience building sustainable social healthcare communities, establishing relationships with relevant influencers, and developing experiences that enhance social conversations. If you need assistance implementing social strategy for your brand, or would like more information, contact business@evokegroup.com.

1. Samet, Alexandra. 2020 US SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE: How the Coronavirus is Changing Consumer Behavior. Business Insider. June 2020.