A recent survey found that only 16% of pharma execs are satisfied with their companies’ current digital activities, and 84% consider it crucial to have a digital health strategy in place by 2020. Only 13% believe it is crucial to have such a strategy today. These numbers represent a stark reality: pharma execs are “behind the curve” in exploiting digital marketing, not surprising given the key bottlenecks facing the industry including regulatory and legal issues, ROI questions, insufficient internal knowledge and lack of clear vision.

The paradigm shift to digital requires a serious rethinking of the marketing function and organizational design, and must involve all relevant internal stakeholders (marketing, medical affairs, legal, regulatory, corporate communications, etc.). Cross-functional teams must review, update and improve the broader customer relationship strategy while simultaneously refining tactics that target specific segments within patient and practitioner communities.

Each company must decide on the appropriate design that best fits its structure and available resources. These choices can be based on both the size and needs of the company, together with the degree of internal digital expertise available in the organization or the willingness to invest in external expert resources.

A successful digital strategy must provide true business innovation that addresses the four key bottlenecks. A design that breaks down organizational silos – a huge challenge to most global pharma companies – is vital to achieving optimal success in the digital realm.

Reinventing the marketing function for a digital environment
To address top four bottlenecks and go beyond “incremental thinking” to deliver true business innovation

Source: 57

“The worst mistake you could make is to take your existing analog interaction patterns with customers and transfer them to the web. While existing channels need to be enriched with digital, this is just an "incremental" step. The real opportunities lie elsewhere... Don’t transfer, but re-think. On the positive side, companies are starting to think beyond the “digital brand / TA” strategy and are starting to realize that the customer should be put at the heart of their business... necessitating a company-wide / cross-functional, integrated strategy and approach.”

Beverly Smet, VP Across Health

Digital strategies are on the rise.

56% consider it crucial to have a digital health strategy in 2020, compared to 13% who believe it is already crucial today.

56% are unsatisfied with their companies’ current level of digital technology implementation. Only 16% are satisfied with current digital activities.

84% consider it crucial to have a digital health strategy in 2020, compared to 13% who believe it is already crucial today.

Pharma needs to catch up on strategies to recover

Source: 55, 57, 58
To build and nurture digital relationships with customers, pharmaceutical companies should create a cross-functional team responsible for reviewing, updating, and improving their customer-relationship strategy, one that is at once holistic and yet still targeted to specific segments within patient and practitioner communities.

The strategy should enable a better understanding of customer interactions; identifying questions to be answered to develop a holistic view of the customer and identifying how different techniques can support their digital efforts.

The idea that a single subgroup – for instance sales or marketing – is responsible for the entire “digital” channel and the relationships it supports does not make sense anymore.

Digital monitoring and risk mitigation is a 24x7 job: As regulatory guidelines continue to evolve, clear politics and procedures are needed that will help staff understand the importance of digital use – and share accountability for avoiding risk. Companies must ensure that they have enough human capital to respond online at any moment, in any time zone, on any channel.