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**Physician Frustration:
A Trigger for Change in
Pharmaceutical Marketing
and Sales**

Reader ROI

- Physicians are frustrated with frequent, low-value interactions with company sales representatives.
- Customer centricity can drive improvements in sales and marketing effectiveness.
- Sharing information across marketing, sales, and medical liaison functions can improve the company's position in the market.
- New selling models can leverage the wealth of available data.

Physician Frustration: A Trigger for Change in Pharmaceutical Marketing and Sales

Overview

Pharmaceutical company sales models have changed over the years as the industry expanded, products matured, and companies broadened their product lines. Early models relied heavily on the sales representative as educator, bringing clinical expertise to sales calls.

Over time, managed care increased physician patient loads, leaving physicians with less time to spend with sales representatives. During the same period, shareholder expectations increased pressure on companies to deliver higher revenue and profit despite price competition from generic drugs and out-of-country suppliers. In this highly competitive environment, pharmaceutical companies adopted a product-centric sales approach. The new model placed more emphasis on product promotion and less on sharing scientific information. Sales representative training focused more on generic selling skills (e.g., gaining access, delivering focused product messages) and less on clinical information.

As the pharmaceutical sales force expanded, there were more sales calls, but less focus on building strong relationships with physicians. The sales model favored multiple sales visits and emphasized the quick close or "trial close." This resulted in low-impact sales calls which delivered little substantive information about medications, did very little to influence physician prescribing patterns, and frustrated physicians. This physician dissatisfaction has sparked a re-evaluation of sales models.

Some companies are piloting new programs to better align marketing and sales strategies with customer value and customer needs. A comprehensive approach should:

- Leverage customer information to inform decisions
- Promote collaboration to improve customer service
- Align selling models and customer value
- Address sales recruitment and training

Only by focusing customer-facing operations on factors valued by the customer can companies address the problem.

Leveraging physician information to inform sales and marketing efforts

Client centricity can contribute significantly to the success of any company. Customer data can be captured, integrated, and analyzed to form the basis of sales and marketing decisions. By focusing on customer information and available market intelligence, companies can target the information needs of individual physicians.

For example:

- **Product information:** Physician need for product information (e.g., efficacy, side effects, patient compliance) varies based on the needs of their patients and their experience with the drug. Knowing a doctor's preferences and experiential history helps sales representatives personalize messages to meet the individual physician's requirements.
- **Marketing promotions:** Physicians will respond differently to marketing promotions such as samples, promotional dinners, and seminars. Understanding these differences helps sales allocate marketing dollars to maximize impact on individual physician customers and/or group practices.

More effective communication of key product messages supports the sales cycle over the life of the product and improves the relationship with the customer. Integrated customer data can inform selling strategies so that sales representative behavior can become a competitive differentiator.

Close analysis of company data also yields information about the allocation of sales resources to individual accounts. Tracking data, such as company/partner contacts with each physician or practice, can help determine better allocation of sales resources and prevent busy physicians from being overwhelmed with too many visits from one company. Additionally, coordinating activities should allow representatives to reinforce each other with complementary messages that support the interests of the company and its customers.

Improve customer service

Physicians receive information from the sales representative, medical science liaison, or contact center. Collaboration among marketing, clinical teams, and sales can enable the organization to improve sales effectiveness and achieve revenue targets.

Collaboration enables marketing to stay informed about direct customer responses and generate new approaches. Focusing on key issues that enable teams to test and refine sales models can improve sales effectiveness and best practices.

Marketing information also can influence the value of the medical liaison. Marketing can present customer and sales force needs to medical affairs not only in terms of what studies might be of interest to the customer, but also in terms of how customer service can be improved. Marketing can incorporate newer forms of e-promotion since the information they present faces ongoing competition from web-based sources such as Med Line.

Marketing plays a key role in providing representatives the resources and instruction they need to better serve physicians. Information should address specific issues or questions rather than overwhelm the physician and cause information overload.

A knowledgeable sales representative can serve as information steward, providing guidance regarding source and credibility of information resources. By helping to screen information, the sales representative alleviates the information overload which the physician often feels.

Sales alignment

Since different physicians/practices have different needs for information, many companies are developing pilots which realign sales resources to reflect these variations. Many companies will adopt an experimental approach, implementing new sales model pilots which focus on a particular geography, physician specialty, or physician organization model.

The success of new approaches will depend on delivering value and unbiased, timely, and relevant clinical information. Sales representatives can add considerable value by delivering services that:

- support directives for patient compliance
- assist with disease management by advising the physician on a continuum of care
- cultivate access to managed care networks
- create partnerships that help develop innovative cost containment strategies and effectively execute contract strategies
- develop pull-through capabilities by coordinating selling among colleagues

At the end of the day, physicians need to serve their patients and improve health outcomes. Relevance and value will win out over frequency of contact. This will benefit pharmaceutical company productivity and revenues while satisfying the needs of the physicians and their patients.

Some new models respond directly to physician complaints of sales calls from too many representatives selling the same products. These approaches reduce the number of physicians assigned to a single representative and increase the number of products the sales representative presents. The result is that the physician sees fewer sales representatives.

Some companies are realigning their sales forces to foster better team coordination and target high-value physicians. They assign seasoned senior representatives to the most important prescribing clients.

Aligning specific content and materials with the appropriate sales representatives/teams helps ensure that information satisfies individual customer needs. For example:

- Transactional sales teams that handle primary care physician customers must exhibit a broad knowledge of the company's product portfolio. They represent the company's mature products and can better serve the physician customers who value samples over clinical information and services.
- The consultative representative handles the specialized selling of more complex drugs (e.g., auto-immune, virology, new oncology, and CV/metabolic drugs). These representatives deliver more in-depth information about the drug and support the products from launch to in-line. These representatives better serve those customers who value clinical information over services and samples.

The wealth of data available on disease state management, compliance, prescribing data, demographics, behavioral and attitudes, and competitor products can enable brand and marketing managers to tailor messages that effectively equip the revamped sales force. A smart organization will take advantage of this business intelligence.

Metrics that benchmark operational requirements and measure the execution of pilot programs will enable marketing to develop strategies with meaningful, pull-through activities—collateral, educational meetings, and targeted e-mails—to reach individual physician customers. Focusing on pilots with scalable solutions that enhance field sales will help companies make better informed, data-driven decisions to improve sales productivity.

These new approaches will impact the skills required of sales representatives. In many cases, sales management is changing hiring criteria and implementing training to ensure a sales force with more scientific knowledge.

Sales training

As selling models evolve to a more consultative model, companies must recruit sales representatives who can thrive in the new environment. At the same time, sales training needs to provide clinical expertise and enhanced selling skills to meet marketplace demands. The marketing/brand teams must play a greater role in developing the sales training curriculum to more effectively leverage new sales approaches.

Ongoing curriculum development is crucial in keeping the field force knowledge and skill level up to date to meet changing needs. In addition, sales training departments need to recruit additional talent in the areas of science and medical training to properly deliver knowledge-based content to the new breed of sales representative.

Summary

Physician frustration is driving pharmaceutical companies to rethink their sales and marketing operations. A customer-centric approach focused on how best to deliver value to the physician will guide these efforts.

Sales models can be adjusted to take into consideration the needs of individual physicians/practices. Marketing messages and medical liaison roles can be refined accordingly.

By experimenting with different approaches and carefully measuring the impact of each, a company can achieve success as the market continues to evolve.



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