

E-Detailing: Stimulating Food For Thought

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Detailing is a long-standing way of pharmaceutical companies telling doctors about their drugs in a one-to-one sales call. Everyone in the pharmaceutical industry knows the process. A medical representative (MR) calls a doctor to make an appointment for a sales call, or will visit and try to corner a doctor between appointments to recite the merits of their company's drugs. Pharmaceutical companies generally believe that bigger is better in this activity as the large number of sales reps employed by each company attests to.

The number of MRs per company is also constantly increasing. It is estimated that in the US alone there were approximately 30,000 MRs around ten years ago and now estimates are more than double that at around 71,000. This is not counting the additional contract sales forces of at least another 9,000, provided by companies such as Innovex, whose numbers can be added on to make the total around 80,000. At an average cost of \$63,000 per year (plus sales training and detail aid material costs), and with total annual sales & marketing expenses of around \$17.2 billion, total expenditure on sales forces comes to about \$7 billion which clearly makes it the largest expenditure in the sales and marketing mix. This means that pharmaceutical companies must really believe in this approach as it currently stands. Interestingly many pharmaceutical marketers started their career as an MR prior to becoming marketers so naturally the belief in this approach as it currently stands is unsurprising.

However, if one takes into account that 43% of the time MRs will not actually speak with the doctor (due to the appointments being cancelled by the clinic or the doctor being too busy to see the MR etc.) and if they do, of that, 87% of conversations are less than two minutes in length (with mental contact often being 10-15 seconds), it is crystal clear that this very significant expenditure is not operating as effectively as one may have hoped. There is no doubt that detailing directly to the doctor serves an important purpose, but the question remains - is there a more effective way to do this than the current short slotted-in monologues from MR to physician?

Physicians rely on pharmaceutical companies for drug information but time is the key factor - and time is something that doctors are pressed for. There is no doubt physicians want and need information from the MRs - but on their terms. eDetailing in its many forms is emerging as a means for pharmaceutical companies to reduce their sales force expenses - without losing sales - and interact with the physicians in a more value-added way.

For the pharmaceutical company eDetailing allows the MR to be more productive and make more effective sales calls each day (virtually and face-to-face) while building up stronger and even more trusting relationships with the physicians - by handing them control. This interactive exchange meets the physicians' needs in terms of content and time - and is extremely value-added. Of course, it is expected that it will complement traditional detailing rather than replace it.

Some of the current eDetailing activities being initiated by some pharmaceutical companies utilize integrated video-conferencing capabilities, Internet access, and high-speed telecommunications lines that allow physicians to interact with distant sales representatives at any time. This will all be available from the physician's Palm Pilot rather than the PC - although PC access is also possible.

It is expected that the MR will become more of a relationship manager than a sales man - and physicians report preferring this scenario as they can see the MR when THEY want to, and get all the information THEY need, so the exchange is more interactive without having to hear the continual dreaded monologue about the drug. eDetailing gives the physician back flexibility and control.

Market research conducted about this topic in the US with physicians who have experienced both eDetailing and traditional detailing found that physicians found eDetailing:

- more convenient than other media for obtaining information
- a better way to obtain needed drug information from pharmaceutical companies
- a way to establish a stronger relationship between them and the eMRs. They feel that this relationship is equal to, or better than, the one they currently enjoy with their existing non 'e' MRs.

Summary

eDetailing provides a means to improve the interactivity and quality of the relationship between pharmaceutical companies and physicians, but is only part of a larger picture that allows physicians better quality health information at their convenience. However, it is imperative that all eDetailing utilizes value-added information and is not simply an electronic version of sales data. Although many traditional details end with 'I will get that information to you', with eDetailing they can end with 'the information is printing out on your printer now'. So much more powerful!

For assistance with eDetailing, please contact Mednet Media <http://www.mednetmedia.com> in any of our offices:

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