



Online Impressions

Platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have revolutionised how we consume content, but how do pharmaceutical companies fit in? Used properly, social media is a boon for all brands

By Samuel Beavan at One Vision Health

Social media has, undoubtedly, transformed how industries approach public relations and marketing. For countless thriving brands, platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are the bedrock of their success and how they function, given their influence and reach (not to mention their relatively low cost compared to traditional advertising).

However, for some industries, knowing where one 'fits' in or whether to partake at all is not always obvious, which is probably something many pharmaceutical companies have grappled with. After all, social media can seem so fast paced and open. A controversial tweet or 'bad news' story can go viral, reaching a global audience of millions within hours. For pharma, an industry so woven with rules and regulations, sensitive subject matter, and, frankly, not always the best of reputations within the public sphere, this all sounds just a tad too vulnerable a position to be in. Too out of control? These are all valid and important points. A business would not be running well if these issues were not acknowledged and given serious thought. However, approached expertly, social media is actually about gaining control

and shaping how a brand is perceived both online and offline.

Firstly, one must understand why

it is relevant. The days of social media being centred on gossip and sharing funny animal videos are long gone (okay, those things still exist), and, instead, it is now a key source of news, information, and knowledge and plays a big role in how people make decisions.

74% of people are reported to rely on social media when making purchasing decisions, while 53% recommend companies and products on Twitter and 56% check Facebook daily. YouTube has over 800 million active users who spend an average of 15 minutes daily on the platform. This provides huge marketing potential for businesses and an invaluable resource for sharing key messages and information with existing and potential customers.

Building Trust

Another key reason why pharma companies should be on social media is to shape their branding. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, help to 'humanise' businesses because they enable them to share professional opinions in a more personal capacity. This, in turn, encourages people to be more trusting of brands that are active on social media. Prime examples of this are pharma brands such as Johnson & Johnson and GlaxoSmithKline. Johnson & Johnson are especially skilled at using patient stories and transforming them into engaging series tied together

under one catchy hashtag, for example: #ChangingHumanHealth. Similarly, GlaxoSmithKline use a good combination of images and videos on social media to share valuable information, answering questions that their audience genuinely want answers to, for example, 'how can robots help in vaccines research?'

Pharma companies can leverage these platforms to facilitate better, more interactive relationships with audiences and encourage transparency. Plenty of evidence suggests that, generally, the web has become an important source of healthcare information. Too often, social media is considered as an indirect marketing channel, when it would be of optimum use to the pharma industry as an educational tool.

According to a study, of the 74% of internet users active on social media, 80% are searching for healthcare information (1). A large majority of people even cited that they rely on the healthcare information they find on the internet.

Of course, there is a negative side to this: masses of online 'health information' derives from unqualified and unreliable sources. There is an argument here that reliable, qualified health information sources perhaps have a duty to be providing reliable, qualified health information online. However, simply placing information on a website

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might not be enough; capturing attention and creating visually stimulating content consumers actually want to look at may well be the measure of success.

Platform Decisions

LinkedIn has the highest visitor-to-lead conversion rate of any social network. At 2.74%, it is over three times higher than Twitter (0.69%) and Facebook (0.77%). However, LinkedIn is almost exclusively B2B communication. Therefore, if using social media to speak to doctors, pharmacists, and so on, LinkedIn is definitely a viable option for pharma companies. However, the 'influencers' that speak to the younger audience are not necessarily on LinkedIn exclusively or even on LinkedIn at all. What is more likely is that they are on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. All four of these social media platforms are heavily driven by visual or conversation-starting content, the most engaging of these being video content.

With the prevalence of YouTube and similar platforms, 40% of all web content is now video. Studies have shown that the Facebook generation responds best to videos, yet videos account for just 16% of all the content posted by pharma companies on Facebook. Hence, pharma has a big opportunity to leverage video on social media to facilitate educational conversations while raising their brand awareness here.

The Power of Video Content

Video works because it is a form of face-to-face interaction (even if it is only a recording), and face-to-face is always more effective. In a written piece, people can be told the facts, whereas, in a video, personal touches, human faces, and personalities can be added. The message in videos should be kept

simple, coherent, and unambiguous to hold the audience's attention span.

Still not convinced about video? The facts cannot be argued with:

- Reaching page one of Google with a video is 50 times easier than it is with a web page (2)
- YouTube is now the second most used search engine
- Video is the most shared form of web content
- Video is far more suited to a mobile audience, and mobile devices accounted for 49.7% of web page views worldwide (3)
- About 73% of UK internet users post videos regularly on social media platforms
- Video leads to 50% more conversion to enquiry
- Compared to text, video increases social engagement by 350%

Furthermore, video is particularly good for dealing with FAQs as a pharma company. Having a real person delivering a pre-recorded response to questions asked by the public is a major step forward. It could be argued that answers delivered by a real person appear more trustworthy, even if the content is the same as a written version. These videos can then be sent by text or email in response to queries, as well as shared on company websites or social media as resources, saving time for the admin and support staff answering those FAQs.

Now that the purpose and potential platforms that pharma companies should be on has been established, what type of content should they be sharing? The good news is, although this is a regulated industry, a lot of scope is available to share interesting and genuinely valuable content online. Examples that are particularly suitable for video content include:

- Educational campaigns: These are always a positive thing, both for the customers as well as the companies. They can also be a less obvious

form of brand promotion, especially for over-the-counter drugs. These could be in the form of, for example, answering FAQs in short videos as aforementioned, sharing visually attractive infographics, or writing succinct blog posts

- Unbranded campaigns: Getting involved in causes around health conditions allows pharma companies to get closer to consumers without advertising to them. This includes awareness events, such as World Aids Day, World Cancer Day, and Movember

Overall, pharma companies should not get carried away with creating a blitz of social media output. It is more worthwhile to concentrate on creating less generic content, but, rather, create more engaging content that your audience will genuinely benefit from. When creating content, always try to think about how to directly address patients' problems and meet their needs. Pharma companies should embrace social media, in particular, the growing opportunities within video.

References

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