



Successful KOL management

Marketers recognize that key opinion leader (KOL) management is a critical component of their professional marketing strategies. But how can you make the most of those relationships? NGP asked Eric Johnson, SVP of InsiteResearch, and Eric Ratinetz, SVP, Managed Market Strategies for M4 Bimark.

NGP. What are the toughest challenges pharmaceutical marketing executives face and how are they addressing them?

ER. Branded products are being challenged by increasing patent expirations, generic launches and FDA resistance on approving new products. This demands a realistic focus on the needs of patients, providers and payers in proving the right product to the right patient at the right time. Also, real advances in pharmaceutical therapy have been overshadowed by high prices and highly publicized examples of inappropriate professional marketing. Trust must return, with pharmaceutical marketing executives needing to be the leaders in developing initiatives that effectively bring together these key stakeholders. As pharmaceutical companies touch all of these stakeholders, they can play an important role in facilitating dialog between these groups, with the goal of disseminating best practices and implementing them on the local level.

Also, the increasing size and responsibility of Account Manager positions as primary care sales forces are being reduced and poses unique training challenges. These important conduits to organized customer groups need to be comfortable with both the clinical and business side of medicine. As a consequence, the commitment to Account Management training needs to be significant.

EJ. The volume of information available, as well as compliance and regulatory issues create significant challenges to marketing executives. Clients I work with are leveraging technology and automated processes to manage an ever increasing complex environment of approvals, regulations inundated with data. Company compliance groups know the state and federal regulations relating to activities with physicians. Institutionalizing these regulations through a structured technological process that enforces compliance will limit exposure in the end. I don't know if anyone who prefers logging data into systems as opposed to an environment which does not require approvals. However, smart streamlined technology can make the process much less painful.

Investments of time defining what qualifies a thought leader for an engagement and automated processes for approval routing to assure compliance will harvest significant long-term benefit. Inserting a layer in your technological approach that suggests or qualifies a thought leader truly enables quick and effective decisions. Once you have institutionalized your guidelines for compliance, defined your business processes with automated routing and prequalified your thought leaders for each engagement, you will find operating in today's environment much more manageable.

NGP. With the ever-growing regulations that are required to show return on investment with marketing operations, what strategies can be used to determine the effectiveness of the marketing programs?

EJ. Clients have shared with me multiple times investments in influence mapping show an ROI through time savings, quality and quantity. Executing influence mapping identifies local through global KOLs. The very nature of influence mapping is that practicing physicians will provide you with your thought leaders leading to a higher quality.

Traditionally, companies have identified thought leaders through various means, i.e. industry data sources and medical science liaisons. Clearly, MSLs can in fact identify thought leaders. Where challenges ensue is when MSLs are asked to uncover thought leaders in new therapeutic areas as well as support existing products. The aforementioned activity takes time. In addition, MSLs do not have the bandwidth to uncover thought leaders at a local level providing you with the quantity of KOLs needed. Depending upon the size of the MSL organization, uncovering and qualifying thought leaders through this approach can take 90 to 180 days. On average we have found that clients will garner 70 percent of their influence mapping data in 30 days or less.

ER. ROI is the new language of success within today's managed care world. Yet measures of reach and frequency, such as share of voice, do not directly address the desired outcomes. The increasing need for credibility, insuring a sense of engagement with the customer and access to products for both patients and providers, calls for a different approach to measuring effectiveness.

While all agree that technology will continue to alter the current marketing landscape, 'clicks' and 'stickiness' do not always translate to the effectiveness of a marketing campaign. Favorable formulary status, otherwise known as not being 'disadvantaged' is the important measure for managed markets marketers. Avoiding barriers to access that may include third tier status, step edits and NDC blocks are an important factor in a product's marketing success. Pull-through using traditional methods cannot succeed unless the overall marketing campaign is successful in achieving favorable formulary access. The opportunity for marketers within this space is to develop initiatives that not only address a product's efficacy and safety, but also allow Account Managers and opportunity to present this information using an approach that is perceived as unbiased, patient-centric, addressing the needs of the health plan to provide cost-effective care.

NGP. What changes do you currently see taking place in the pharmaceutical industry in relation to KOL?

EJ. During the past few years, the evolution of KOL Relationship Management has accelerated, and companies' perspectives are maturing. The focus has shifted from knowing who the KOLs are to what are the optimized activities with KOLs. Five years ago, I would need to convince my customers of the value of influence mapping. It has become a standard activity for market research, and this increased investment has helped to drive this shift in focus from WHO to WHAT. Smart companies recognize that KOL Management is more than a database and hot functionality. It is truly a thinking man's game. It requires resources, strategy, planning and tactics, and a discipline with measurable objectives to demonstrate success. It's about a process to ensure you always select the best qualified KOL for the type of engagement.

ER. A component of the ongoing scrutiny of pharmaceutical marketing has been on how KOLs are engaged. Increasingly within managed markets, health plans are developing policies that restrict medical and pharmacy directors from participating in activities such as market research, advisory boards and promotional medical education. M4 has seen its large, multidisciplinary, multi-specialty

panel of medical, pharmacy and allied health KOLs impacted by new regulations. This creates challenges for marketers as information predicting payer response to new products, marketing initiatives, and formulary restrictions becomes harder to ascertain. Understanding the impact of contracting and medical management restrictions on physician utilization of pharma and biotech products also demands use of physician advisors.

NGP. What are the necessary components of a successful KOL Management program?

ER. Key opinion leaders need to be engaged on an ongoing basis to derive their full value, whether it is their input through advisory boards or having them as a part of a speakers bureau. While providing insights or making clinical presentations as part of dinner programs, it is important to continue to engage these individuals regarding their insights about your products and initiatives. Training updates, product communications and regularly scheduled 'touch base' meetings are an important component of keeping KOLs current and motivated. At M4, we work to include this ongoing loop within all of our initiatives to ensure that these advisors continue to advise and disseminate knowledge way after the immediate event.

EJ. We look at two overarching principles of successful KOL Relationship Management programs: maintaining comprehensive institutional knowledge about the KOLs, and utilizing that knowledge in cultivating mutually beneficial relationships and engagements with KOLs. There is a quote I like from Professor Don Schultz of Northwestern University that really drives this point home. He says, 'Just because I know who you are, your address, what you do, when you do it, and how many times you have done it doesn't make it a relationship.' Relationships, he says, occur with the balance of give and take. It is important to know you are working with the best qualified individuals across various segments of expertise and influence that are aligned with the key calibrated needs of the business. It is also critical that mutual interests and needs are discussed with KOLs and incorporated into planning and engagements.

About the contributors

Eric Johnson joined Advanced Health Media in September 2003 as SVP of the KOL research division, bringing with him over 14 years experience in healthcare technology and business solutions. His current responsibilities include oversight, direction and delivery of all InsiteResearch products and services for both US and global life sciences customers.

Eric Ratinetz is joining M4 as the SVP for Managed Market Strategies. He brings an insider's view of managed care as well as extensive agency experience. His last position was leading the managed care practice at echo Torre Lazur as well as providing strategic direction to clients at Torre Lazur Managed Markets.