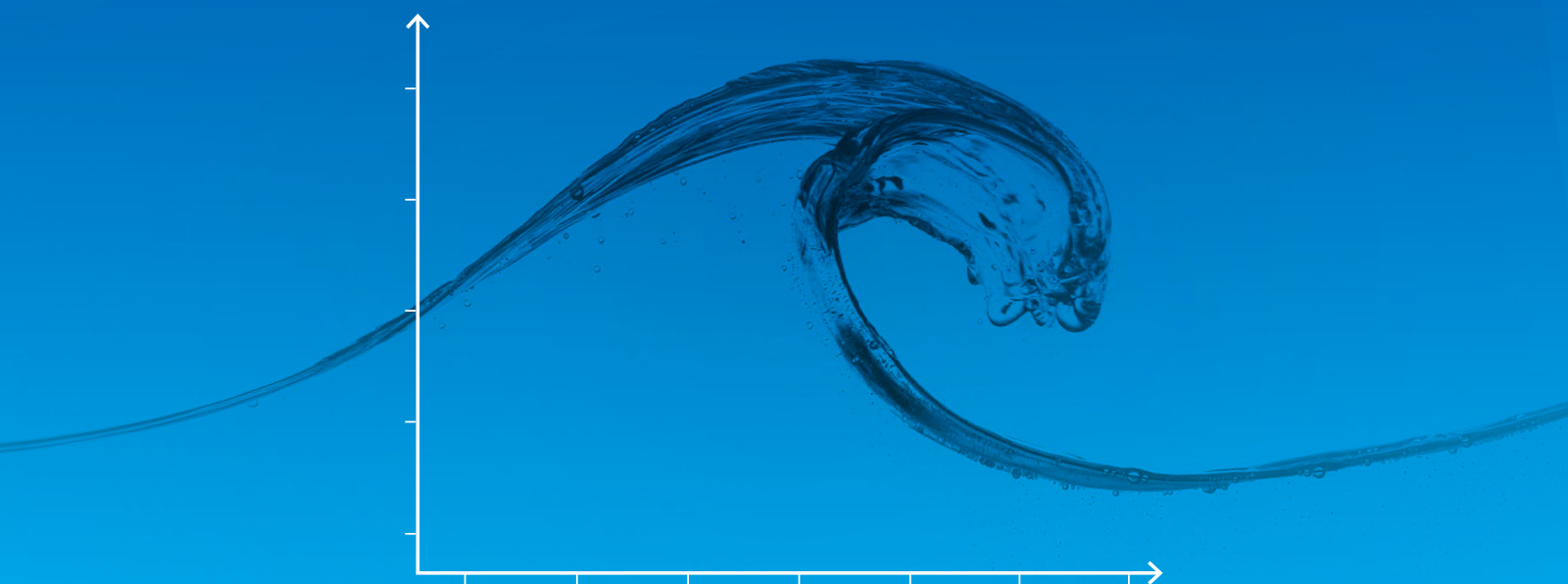


# #TRENDTALKS

3.23.2021



**Pharma execs discuss key insights from  
MM+M's 2021 Healthcare Marketers Survey that  
will shape marketing in a post-COVID era**

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# Marketing's new playbook

**In March**, MM+M held its first-ever online #TrendTalks event, gathering together a group of seasoned pharma marketers and other industry experts for a virtual roundtable led by MM+M's editor-at-large, Marc Iskowitz.

The discussion, largely driven by key data points garnered from MM+M's annual Healthcare Marketers Survey, asked participants to weigh in on what marketing will look like in a post-COVID era, how the pandemic has forced many companies to make drug launches more patient-centric and whether pharma's reputation for being late adaptors has been forever changed.

Read on for some of the incredible insights and takeaways shared by the group, and don't miss our upcoming Trend Talks: Continuing the Conversation webcast on Wednesday, May 12, at 1 p.m. ET.



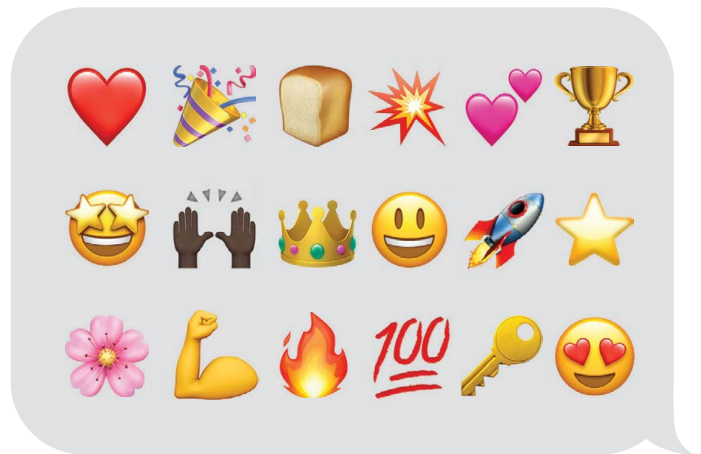
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# The Patient Priority

The #TrendTalks panel explored how pharma marketers can apply a more consumer-centric approach

BY BARBARA WHITE-SAX

● **In the first session, sponsored by Imre Health and moderated by Marc Iskowitz, MM+M's editor-at-large, the group discussed how pharma is increasing its focus on marketing to patients, from embracing an omnichannel marketing and measurement approach to leveraging patient-centric digital-first launches to evolve empathetic marketing strategies.**

Citing some of the key HCMS data, Iskowitz noted the consumer commanded a greater share of the industry's market budget last year, with 45% of survey respondents saying they increased their patient budgets last year. The allocation jumped from 18% in 2019 to 21% in 2020. Just over half of respondents cited delivery of innovative beyond-the-pill programs as a real opportunity looking forward.

The discussion kicked off as he probed panelists to think about brands they love and why they love them. "There's a good chance the reason you love them is that they elicit empathy," he said. Lindsay McGettigan, SVP and activation group director, Imre Health, suggested that beloved brands employ an "empathy design experience triangle" when creating their consumer interface.

"Great brands triangulate empathy, design and experience to place the customer in the center and anchor everything in who we are trying to reach," said McGettigan. "You start with empathy—what someone feels, what they need. Then you move

on to design, so that everything you create—every piece of content, email, experience and campaign hits on those empathetic triggers. That creates a total consumer-centric experience. It's something that our favorite consumer brands have become



**Great brands triangulate empathy, design and experience to place the customer in the center and anchor everything in who we are trying to reach. It's something that healthcare brands are trying to replicate."**

**LINDSAY McGETTIGAN**  
Imre Health



known for that healthcare brands are trying to replicate."

One participant relayed a recent experience with Merrithew, manufacturer of Pilates equipment. The brand's site was clear and easy to navigate but what sealed the deal for him was rigorous follow-up. After his wife put an expensive piece of equipment in the cart and failed to complete the sale, she received an email message from the company asking if they could help. Several emails later, the purchase was made. "This was a significant purchase and if the customer experience wasn't as good, she might have done more research about other brands or may have forgotten about the purchase, but she didn't because of the experience," he said.

There's a key learning for pharma in that example. "Healthcare brands have to be responsive in real time at the speed of need," added Iskowitz.

Nike got a nod from Al Altomari, chairman and CEO, Agile Therapeutics, for being an outspoken voice on issues that are important to its consumers. It's a strategy that Altomari, the head of a women's healthcare company, believes will become even more important as consumers and investors look more critically at a brand's social footprint.

"I'm just swept away by Nike. If they have something to say they say it and they are on top of the environment and social trends. The cycle time from issue to response is remarkable. They are respon-

sive, they have a loud voice and they are not afraid to lean in. It's compelling," he said.

When it comes to empathy, Amazon has been highlighting its programs that provide meals to people with nutritional vulnerability. "It makes me feel good knowing that when I buy something from Amazon, some of the profits will go to providing nutrition to families in need," said Mary Chi Michael, VP, Otsuka America Pharmaceutical.

"What all those brands have in common is customer centricity, but different elements of it. Some are high on empathy, some concentrate more on content messaging that resonates with their target customer. We want to think about how



**If we are going to be patient-focused, we need to start business planning from the perspective of the patient. We've made advancements, but there's so much more we can do."**

**MEGAN BENSETTE**  
AstraZeneca

we can apply those elements to pharma," said McGettigan.

Pharma marketers are also concentrating more than ever on digital relevance and omni-channel applications.

Michael gave a shout out to Headspace, the meditation and mindfulness subscription service for its Netflix series *Headspace Guide to Meditation*. "It is reaching potential consumers and doing a public service. With people glued to on-demand programs for escape right now, bringing the brand into the leisure entertainment space is provocative," she said. Headspace is adept at placing its brand in unexpected places. Its podcast division produces Radio Headspace and the brand recently collaborated with Sesame Street, for a Monster Meditation initiative.

Pharma is beginning to navigate an omnichannel approach, but it will take time and effort to do it right. One participant points to a huge talent and understanding gap as a stumbling block. "People are talking about customer experience, patient experience, innovation and disruption but there are many people responsible for transformation, innovation, digital, customer experience, who don't really understand those things. They keep talking about artificial intelligence, machine learning, data mining, but they don't really know what they mean," he said.

It doesn't help that professionals who have deep knowledge in that field typically migrate to technology companies. "We can hire outside of the industry but you can't just get someone in from Facebook to transform everything," one participant noted.

Even though budgets are shifting, panelists agreed that to transform an industry as slow as pharma, huge shifts in budgeting need to occur. And once they do, it won't be enough to just connect multiple channels at the back end. To be meaningful, pharma needs to build the kind of personalized

experiences that the brands mentioned earlier have become expert at creating.

"When you log on to Amazon, you are greeted by name. With a highly accurate search function, you can find exactly what you need immediately, and Amazon will point out other things you need," noted Megan Bensette, consumer lead (CLL & MCL), AstraZeneca. "Within two clicks you'll have it ordered and within two days it will be at your door. If I can do that for \$10 toilet paper, how can I get that same seamless experience for my medication each month? There's an opportunity.

"COVID has expedited our investment in a digital-first approach," she said. "If we are going to be patient-focused, we need to start business planning from the perspective of the patient. We've made advancements, but there's so much more we can do."

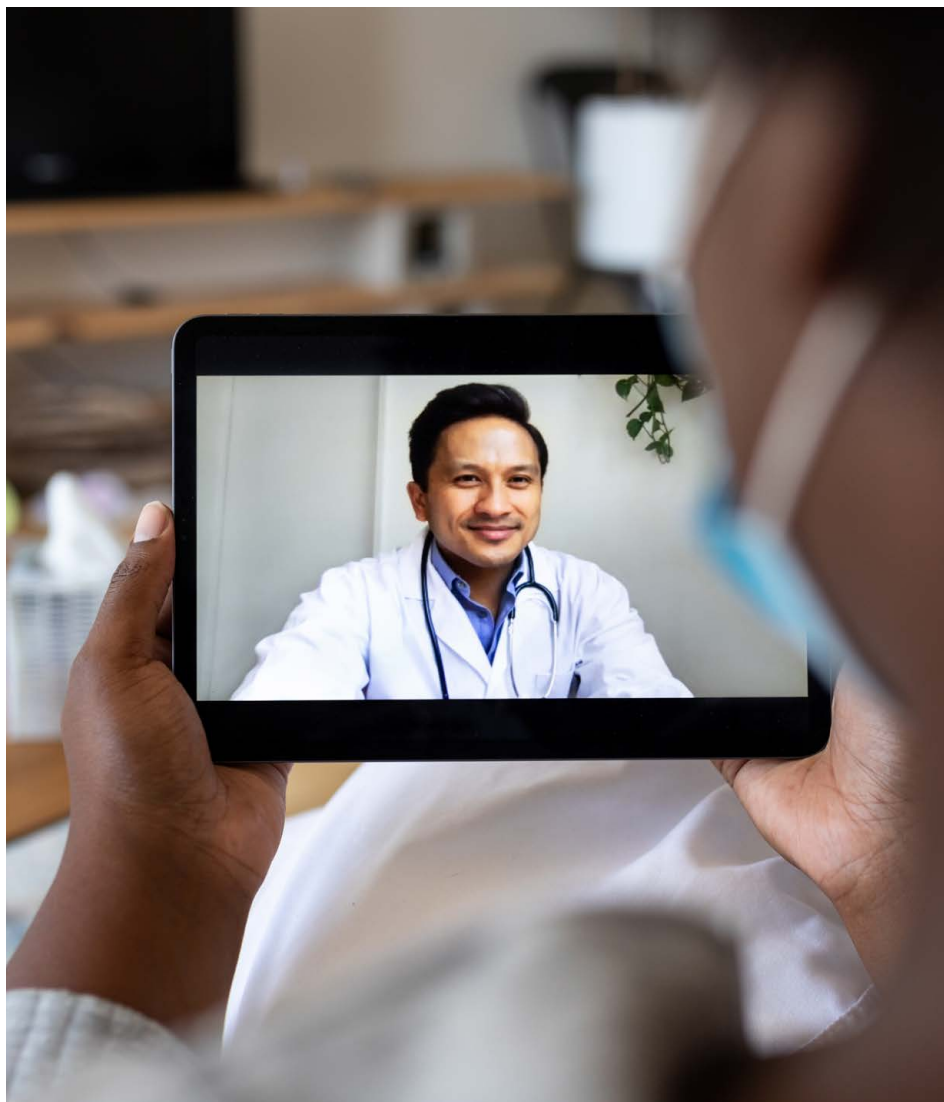
The pandemic compelled pharma manufacturers to "throw out the playbook" and take a digital-first approach to drugs launched in 2020. "Phexxi was just digital for a few months," said McGettigan. "It had a telemed integration, influencers on Instagram and an HCP podcast. It went beyond just a presence on Facebook."

McGettigan said she sees opportunity in leveraging digital tactics beyond promoting an actual medication to helping patients coordinate their care, transferring their medical records or supporting insurance challenges.

"Implementation of those things are nothing without ingredients, like a personalized content matrix and an ideal future state experience map," she said. "All these things are necessary to keep the person and their particular human behaviors at the center of what you are trying to accomplish and then building around that."

"We're putting more resources there but we're not building out comprehensive journey plans," said Claire Phillips, marketing director, global specialty and primary





care, GSK, who noted that when companies increase their spend, they need to keep the focus on investing in the patient rather than being merely channel-focused. “We have to not just spend our money there, but imbed and live there,” she added.

Michael reminded participants that COVID exposed a digital divide the industry must keep in mind as it rushes to utilize new digital platforms. “We can take some learnings from COVID vaccination sign-up challenges,” she said. “We

have a responsibility to the communities we serve and we can’t unintentionally leave some segments behind. From an omnichannel standpoint, it has to be intentional to lean into some of those communities that are disparate.”

The industry faces significant barriers to achieving that level of patient interface. “Talking directly to patients is difficult in a highly regulated industry, especially in the injectable space,” said Jeanie Smith, senior director, marketing, Viatrix.

Bensette said AstraZeneca is exploring ways to leverage external partnerships to ensure that “we close the loop and make sure the patient has a seamless experience.”

It’s a strategy Smith supports. “Established third-party organizations in chronic disease areas clearly have an interest in making sure their members have info about your product and the disease state and they depend on companies like us to provide that information,” she said.

One of the most meaningful things marketers can do is segment and target their efforts, said Todd Smith, cofounder, Novos Growth Partners, who noted it’s important to understand who you are serving and why, as well as what you need them to do and what they need access to. It’s also useful to ask “what’s holding you back to being more responsive to the customer?” he noted.

Agile Therapeutics is purposefully choosing to micro-market. “We can’t win everywhere so we follow the patient’s journey in certain segments and decide to win with her there and abandon other channels. We try to have the discipline to pick our battles. We can geotarget. We don’t go wide, we go deep. We’re building partnerships, we’re picking our battles to work smart,” he said.

Phillips echoed his sentiments citing that to create a successful omnichannel strategy, marketers need to identify where they want to play and what they really want to do, rather than trying to be all things to all people.

“We should make choices so we can excel in the areas where we can really push the boundaries, rather than become discouraged by the constraints of a highly regulated industry,” she said, and urged her fellow marketers to identify “those places that we can meet patients where they are, whether it’s location-wise or along their journey, and make that the focus,” as a way of practicing true patient-centricity. ●

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# Pharma's Pinpoint Marketing

The ways engagement with HCPs has  
shapeshifted due to COVID

BY BARBARA WHITE-SAX

● **The second session of #TrendTalks**, sponsored by Everyday Health Professional powered by MedPage Today, explored how the industry is shifting tactics to a micro-marketing approach. Panelists discussed how they are adopting more agile marketing strategies, using geotargeting techniques and exploring new platforms such as social media and podcasts to drive deliberate engagement of specific HCP segments.

In 2020, marketers shifted to lower-cost engagement tactics such as Zoom and text-approved sales aids, and reported spending a smaller percentage of their budget to reach HCPs. As in-person meetings proved challenging, virtual reps became a bigger part of the

marketing equation, said moderator Marc Iskowitz, MM+M's editor-at-large. In fact, nearly 30% of pharmaceutical companies said they increased virtual reps, which accounted for 4.1% of budgets in 2020, according to the 2021 Healthcare Marketers Survey.

"That represents a key shift to how pharma companies are reaching HCPs, and is posing new challenges," said Tony Dale, SVP of sales, Everyday Health Professional, chief revenue officer, MedPage Today. "You need more frequency to move the needle, especially in a pandemic," he noted. These pharma companies are doing just that; following up on sales calls with highly customized emails

and letters, focusing more on geo-targeting tactics, and creating surround sound non-personal promotion to target HCPs wherever they are online.

In 2020, Agile Therapeutics launched a new drug with a combination of traditional reps trained to do digital and tele-detail, and reps deployed at a regional level. "The good news is we're doing a ton of physician calls, the bad news is they're not as effective as pre-COVID calls," said Al Altomari, chairman and CEO, Agile Therapeutics. Its marketing staff focused not only on increasing the frequency of calls, but improving the quality of calls. "We are doing more micro-targeting and a lot more digital promotion to HCPs than we would have traditionally used, including more rep-controlled messaging. And we're giving them more digital tactics," he said.

Jeanie Smith, senior director, generics marketing, Viatris, noted her company's telesales group really stepped up to the plate this past year.

"It made us realize how critically important telesales can be," she said. "With effective communications, you can have some meaningful engagements and drive through that channel."

Part of Viatris' success can be credited to geotargeting. "It's critical to go deep in areas where you know you can win," Smith said. "It will be more difficult to give them the depth of information they really need."

Depth of information is also a challenge when marketers turn to social media channels — a platform that cannot be ignored,



**Given the clear focus on data-driven activities and measurements, how do you find the balance between unique engagements and frequency needed to move the needle?"**

**TONY DALE**  
Everyday Health Professional,  
MedPage Today





but can be tricky to navigate for regulation-bound pharma companies. “If your product requires instructions for use, how can you leverage these channels to get that information out to patients or physicians there while acknowledging [industry] requirements?” asked Claire Phillips, marketing director, global specialty and primary care, GSK.

These channels can no longer be ignored. “Social platforms became conduits to public health information this past year,” said Iskowitz. “We saw a lot of physicians active on these channels, whether it was Twitter, Facebook or TikTok.”

One participant said his company is partnering with platforms such as Facebook on targeted messaging to HCPs. “The type of content that works on social media is different than on other platforms. It has to be impactful in less than 60 seconds and that creates limitations on the kind of content we can create,” he said.

He continued, noting that more effective and focused targeting is increasingly becoming the goal. “Ten years ago, we created one print piece and distributed it through five different channels. That doesn’t work anymore. Now we determine which channels we want to use, then create the content. It’s a completely different content creation process,” he said.

As the industry shifts from what Iskowitz called a “one-to-many” toward a “one-to-one model,” it will find new ways to assess the effectiveness of those strategies. “Given the clear focus on data-driven activities and measurements, how do you find the balance between unique engagements and frequency needed to move the needle?” asked Dale.

“Some brands need a lot of frequency (banner ads, emails) while other brands already have awareness but need engagement (video, in-depth article),” said one



marketer. “There’s been a trend toward engagement in the last couple of years, but both are being scrutinized by senior leadership more than they were three years ago.” They shared that their team is now expected to provide information on how the company is performing from a digital marketing perspective and is making more informed decisions on where they invest their dollars.

“We’re measuring ROI off every single platform and channel every three months. Decisions about efficiency, efficacy and increase in investment are all driven by data. Engagement and ROI levels are directing those discussions,” he said.

As analytics become increasingly important to pharma marketing, those marketers who understand how to extract data and leverage it to make key budgeting decisions will have a distinct advantage. “We’ve moved to a place where results

matter, activity doesn’t,” said Todd Smith, cofounder, Novos Growth Partners. “As an industry, we need more analytics and people who know how to use them.”

Amid the seismic shifts seen in consumer behavior and the media mix last year, it’s clear that client-side marketers have accelerated their transformation, and that their commercial partners are pivoting right alongside them.

As for what comes next, participants expect the “pandemic effect” to continue to speed up the industry’s evolution in marketing and content. Websites, video and other digital assets will do a lot of the heavy lifting of campaigns, but AI will automate and personalize the experience to a greater extent. Even as the challenge of compliantly engaging with patients and HCPs remains, the roundtable consensus was that the crisis emboldened marketers to think and act more innovatively. ●

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# A Ripe Time for Engagement

## Leveraging new tools for patient communications

BY BARBARA WHITE-SAX

● **The last session of the #TrendTalks** event, sponsored by ConnectiveRx, focused on patient-centric messaging and featured a discussion on pharma's reputation and how the industry can raise its game when it comes to patient communications.

Chris Dowd, SVP, market development, ConnectiveRx, urged panelists to embrace the challenges they face as an industry, and as they navigate new platforms. "The pandemic put pharma to the test and we performed well," he said, noting the industry's reputation with the public was also boosted. "We adapted quickly and deployed more effective digital ways to reach patients: mobile applications/platforms, social media, patient portals, EMRs, etc. and leveraged the power of data to help target which channels/mediums are most valuable/used by patients."

The industry is likely spending more to reach patients. Iskowitz said MM+M's 2021 Healthcare Marketers Survey data indicated the industry shifted to lower-cost engagement tactics on the HCP side in 2020. "Marketers likely moved some of that savings into their incremental marketing budgets to reach patients," he said. "One of the recipients may have been social media, whose use in 2020 rose to 71.3% from 62.0% in 2019."

Regardless of which platform pharma marketers use, Claire Phillips, marketing director, global specialty and primary care, GSK, noted it is critical to stay authentic while still trying to be at the forefront of these trends.

"Nurtec's ads didn't get the positive

reactions it was hoping for," she said. "Our burden of responsibility is a bit greater." Phillips said the industry needs to better partner with third-party platforms to create more meaningful communications.

"We work hard to find trusted content," said Al Altomari, chairman and CEO, Agile Therapeutics. "Two things we can do better on are pivot time and analytics."

Pharma has traditionally lagged when it comes to analytics, but that is evolving. "Analytics play a huge role externally and internally," said Jeanie Smith, senior director, marketing, Viartis. She said the company utilizes analytics to segment communications in the field before launch.

Panelists also mentioned other consumer-facing tech applications, such as digital efforts, EMR and health portals.

"Digital efforts apps can be a challenge," she said. "The aim is to provide value to patients, but you have to understand the value of the tactic you are offering to that patient or segment. If it's not truly valuable, maybe it's not the right tactic."

Some panelists are stepping up their use of health portals. Others have explored the use of Electronic Medical Records in marketing strategies. "It is so tough and so fragmented, we moved on to other things that gave us more value," said one participant. "I was hearing a lot about EMR two years ago, now I don't hear about it."

"You have to decide what you want to do, identify what you want to deliver for your brand and what trade-offs you are willing to make," said Phillips. ●



**We adapted quickly and deployed more effective digital ways to reach patients: mobile applications/platforms, social media, patient portals, EMRs, etc. and leveraged the power of data."**

**CHRIS DOWD**  
ConnectiveRx

