

# From insight to action in Medical Affairs



**Medscape**  
Medical Affairs

*Physicians' increasingly digital-first consumption of disease state education offers pharma a way to understand their needs more deeply and so find better ways to serve them.*

**The context of most human engagement has been limited to the digital space thanks to the current pandemic. Around two thirds of physicians now seek information online, a dramatic increase from the pre-pandemic era.**

Clearly on-demand digital consumption of information is fast eclipsing the traditional approach of asking questions of sales reps or MSLs in person, says

Kumaran Krishnan, Director of Medical Excellence and Digital Transformation, Teva Pharmaceuticals. "Today, many physicians reach out to digital channels rather than waiting for human interactions to happen."

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And HCPs' expectations of the content they consume via digital channels are rising fast.

More than ever they want clear, credible and relevant information, says Christina Hoffman, Global Head of Medscape Medical Affairs. "If a clinician cannot imagine applying the information or education in their practice, they won't value, use or consume it."

There is now little patience among ever more time-pressed HCPs for blatantly promotional information, says Samuele Doratori, Global Head of Cardiovascular Medical Affairs, Servier. "HCPs are looking for information that adds value to their clinical practice, with a particular interest in new data or evidence from real-world settings."

But while trend to more digital consumption is clear, it is not the whole story. Not all digital formats are

equally valued. For example, interest among HCPs in webinars is waning after the initial boom last year. "The high volume of digital content has resulted in webinar fatigue amongst our customers," says Kumaran. Indeed, at least 75% of physicians report feeling overwhelmed by webinars offered during the pandemic.

And the physical is still valued over the digital in some contexts. HCPs arguably value in-person scientific society meetings and conferences even more now, says Dr. Eddie Guzdar, Medical Head of Immunology, Sanofi. "Ironically, the digitalisation of education has increased the desire for two-way engagement, as physicians miss the networking opportunities with their peers that traditionally came from face-to-face meetings."

Pharma has various ways to respond to these insights into HCPs' changing educational needs, which we explore below.

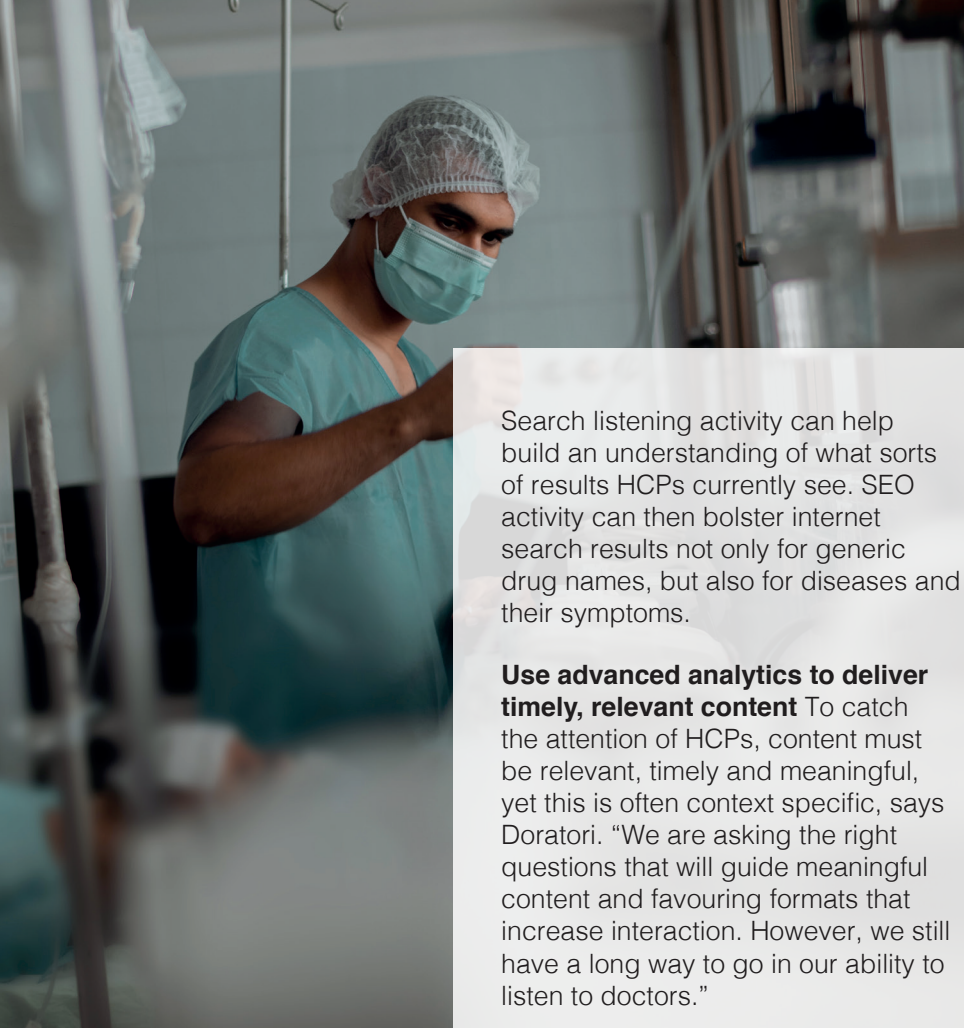
## **Develop high ranking digital content**

Search is often the first port of call for HCPs looking for education and insights, so merely making HCP-facing material available online is not enough. HCPs need to be able to find it, yet it is estimated that only 17% of HCP search terms bring up a pharmaceutical company's name or website.

Search engine queries too often yield wildly uneven results. "No one is better placed than us, (pharma companies) in offering credible, unbiased information about our products and services," says Kumaran "[yet] the reliability factor of information available online is truly questionable."

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### Medical Affairs

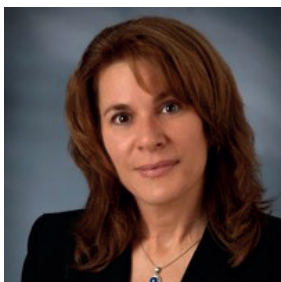


Search listening activity can help build an understanding of what sorts of results HCPs currently see. SEO activity can then bolster internet search results not only for generic drug names, but also for diseases and their symptoms.

**Use advanced analytics to deliver timely, relevant content** To catch the attention of HCPs, content must be relevant, timely and meaningful, yet this is often context specific, says Doratori. “We are asking the right questions that will guide meaningful content and favouring formats that increase interaction. However, we still have a long way to go in our ability to listen to doctors.”

Advanced analytics can be a formidable tool for building an understanding of an individual physician’s interest in specific disease state content, says Doratori. Physician behaviour, such as online discussions, search patterns, and prescribing patterns, can be captured and analytics software used to predict the content that physicians would find most useful and engaging.

**Combine disease education with insight generation** Medical Affairs teams tend to separate knowledge transfer and insight generation activities, but they could achieve both aims together. “Medscape, for instance, has vast amounts of site-related information that is tracked through ‘lead concepts,’” says Hoffman.



Christina Hoffman

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This information can inform pharma on ‘trending’ content, she adds. “Pharma can develop a data-driven story about who does what, when and why, and glean patterns from how different data points link with each other.”

### **Develop innovative, flexible and automated methods of engagement**

There is scope to streamline and automate much activity when it comes to answering HCP queries, speeding response times and so improving their service experience.

The ‘frequently asked questions’ section of a website, for example, could be re-imagined and repurposed to offer much more dynamic responses. “Approximately 80% of the queries we get from healthcare professionals are simple, straightforward and can be answered from standard response letters,” says Kumaran. Most HCPs, however, do not have the time to search through these questions. Chatbots are an obvious way to provide automated answers to commonly asked queries on demand.

### **Deliver information in concise chunks**

The utility of webinars for Medical Affairs to communicate with physicians is evident but their waning popularity reflects the time they take up as well as their limited scope for interaction. There are ways to address these shortcomings, however.

“Content needs to be digestible and in ‘bites,’ especially when being delivered digitally on a one-to-many level,” stresses Hoffman. “When a webinar is conducted, the information must be easy to take home and use, as opposed to running through mountains of studies to show why a class of drug is ‘the best’.”

Both Guzdar and Doratori emphasise the need for crisp and on point information. “Physicians find short clips of relevant information communicated in a timely manner more impactful than long lectures,” says Guzdar. Doratori adds that ‘incremental value communication’ – focusing on one element of value at a time – may help foster HCP engagement.

**Don't underestimate the value of interaction** Companies should think in terms of organising small workshops as these enable more interaction than a webinar, according to Guzdar.

Convening a forum in which Medical Affairs answers questions gathered from a group of HCPs (rather than simply broadcasting information via a webinar) can be an effective way to deliver information, says Hoffman. "In general, dialogue versus monologue makes concepts stick."

**Upskill Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs)** Physicians have placed ever increasing value on MSL engagements during the pandemic compared with interactions with sales reps.

This suggests there is much to be gained by providing additional training to help them cope with their expanding, and increasingly digital,

role. "Today's MSL's need to build more effective communication skills that enables impactful data dissemination in both a physical and digital format," says Guzdar.

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Dr. Eddie Guzdar,

**Blend the digital and the physical** As the world emerges from the pandemic, there is scope to blend the best of digital and the physical. Re-imagining face-to-face peer interactions by layering digital elements over them has great promise, says Doratori. "Congresses and conferences are and will always be unique moments of networking. For that reason, scientific societies have developed their own platforms to ensure that content from these meetings is not limited to the actual event. HCPs can receive information directly from these official platforms, or through dissemination of content by private editors or pharmaceutical companies."

**The bottom line**

Understanding physician needs and meeting them is becoming an endeavour that will yield competitive advantage. "The medical environment will be increasingly selective in favouring those who have the ability to establish a real partnership with doctors, as opposed to those who will continue to talk only about themselves and their products," says Doratori.

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Modernising pharma's engagement strategies today to capture the benefits of digital - the ability to gather insights, to automate as well as to tailor insights - while focusing on the uniquely important elements of the physical, will lay the foundation for long-term brand loyalty in the post-pandemic era.

