

THE IMPACT OF INCREASED DIGITISATION ON COMMERCIAL TEAMS, CUSTOMERS, AND PATIENTS

Digitisation has already impacted, and will continue to transform, how pharma's commercial teams interact with healthcare professionals, engage with patients, and evolve their salesforce. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the previously incremental steps of digitisation for commercial teams.

During lockdown, it became much more difficult for salespeople to access physicians in person – this has given rise to different tools and virtual channels that allow meeting physicians digitally. While sending salespeople into the field will continue to be a component of an effective salesforce, it is now recognised that it will no longer be the most important component. The pandemic has helped the industry realise it must be clear on the value it provides to healthcare professionals. Digitisation permits new opportunities to provide different types of value, and the volume and quality of content has changed and can be personalised to customers. This is enabled by data-driven ways of working that are leveraged to better understand customer behaviour.

The pandemic has also induced new and important ways of getting closer to patients, offering the opportunity to provide improved education of, impact for, and connection with patients. Satisfaction levels for both patients and healthcare professionals are improving in some disease areas, such as in severe childhood epilepsy where tele-medicine is now used.

Across therapeutic areas, pharma is starting to ask patients, rather than only healthcare

professionals, about their expectations. Patient expectations have significantly changed, which can be heard in the frustrations about the difficulty of accessing useful, timely information. Pharma needs to focus on the broader healthcare ecosystem and how this can be co-created with patients who understand the patient journey and patient needs better than the pharma company. This will be enabled by technological advances to improve patient outcomes.

The role of the salesforce is also evolving, requiring different skillsets and capabilities. The skills that are involved in face-to-face interactions compared to engaging customers via virtual channels are different, and different people will be motivated by different types of work. With increased sophistication required to understand the requirements of customers and to deliver on these requirements, there will no longer be a one-size-fits-all salesperson. Investment in digitisation requires a different way of measuring success, compared to previous salesforce requirements of making a certain number of calls or meeting a certain number of customers.

An improved understanding of the value and impact that the salesforce has will improve engagement with healthcare professionals, connect more deeply with patients, and empower salespeople to improve the quality of their value proposition. Those who can best understand and leverage the opportunities of digitisation will be most successful; they will bring more value to customers and the entire healthcare ecosystem.