

Healthcare Information Center

The pharmaceutical industry is labeled as a 'sunrise' industry, considered 'recession proof' & is seen to be part of the 'knowledge' economy. Pharmaceutical companies' shareholders expect economic profits to continue growing significantly. The pressure to perform is high in a highly regulated global market that keeps getting more & more competitive.

Some 10 patent molecules, which have a sizeable market share, are to go off-patent two years from now thus pushing them into the generic segment. Government-led price controls, increasing R&D and launch costs for each new product & decreasing product life cycles puts pharma companies under pressure to reach peak sales faster.

Effective use of IT solutions including e-business tools is widely regarded today as increasing the competitiveness of a company. Two major areas where IT is being used are R&D & S&D. New drug discovery is a long process, taking almost 12 years on an average. IT is being used in a big way in R&D in the actual research process (AI softwares, modeling softwares) & in collaboration.

Sales & Distribution is where most IT implementations are taking place today. The results are quick & returns quantifiable. These include data analysis tools to optimise sales force effectiveness, electronic detailing to augment or replace the traditional face-to-face sales method, customer focused marketing, including e-reference material to doctors.

Many of the top pharmaceutical companies have their own physician portals to supplement e-detailing with additional value-added services (e.g. sample ordering and e-learning) and provide information for e-diagnosis and prescribing.

Aventis e-Detailing Sales Call Center is known as iPhysicianNet, which enables instant online access to Aventis sales representatives to conduct video e-Detailing sessions that conveniently deliver real-time answers to physicians' questions via their computers. It provides on-demand information about Aventis' products, including several mode-of-action videos. It "complements office visits from field representatives by improving the frequency and quality of interaction with physicians so they can ultimately make more informed decisions regarding patient care", according to an Aventis press release.

BabyCenter, L.L.C. is a J&J group company, serving the needs of parents and parents-to-be. The BabyCenter family of websites provide thousands of online articles and interactive tools, an online baby store featuring thousands of products for purchase, and the largest online community for parents and parents-to-be. The websites include www.babycenter.com, www.babycentre.co.uk & www.parentcenter.com. Johnson & Johnson Gateway, L.L.C.(www.jnjgateway.com), develops and manages the Web-based resource of information created for health care professionals by Johnson & Johnson medical devices and diagnostics companies. The information provided by J&J on its various websites include product information, clinical content, professional education, patient materials, and in many countries, e-commerce transaction and inquiry capabilities.

Merck & Co., Inc. operates Merckmedicus.com which provides physicians and other health care providers with access to complete texts of high-quality medical references, literature searches, clinical information, medical news, technology reviews and cutting-edge diagnostic tools and also features an independent site with Continuing Medical Education (CME) courses. This comprehensive website complements the image of Merck, which gave the pharmaceutical industry the Merck Manual.

These medical information portals are not the only initiatives. Merck Medco's other web-based innovations include merckmedco.com, the world's largest online drugstore; MMRxConsultant.com, a benefits consultant site used to benchmark performance; and the Pharmacy Resource Center, which provides information and tools to help pharmacists process their customers' claims.

Similarly, the Cross Functional Process Design (CFPD) group of the IT department, GSK, is leading the effort to achieve \$100 million in savings for GSK by improving process efficiency through web technology. An example in this direction is the B2B Web site (<http://www.gsk-ecs.com/>) for its U.S. pharmaceutical wholesale and retail trade customers. GSK's goal is to eventually eliminate all of the paper, fax and phone transactions that have historically been conducted between GSK and its corporate customers.

www.WeightRisks.com is an interactive web site by Pfizer Inc., designed to educate people about the short and long term health risks associated with gaining weight and being overweight, an issue relevant to 97 million Americans or 55% of the US adult population. Pfizer has other informative websites like pfizerforwomen.com.

These & many other companies have some or the other information based website. Many of them attract a good no. of targeted visitors. There is still scope for websites like these. A survey by Merck revealed that a majority of physicians still rate physician-focused Web sites as average or below in terms of ease of use and overall comprehensiveness. Physicians responding to the survey clearly indicated that they are not fully satisfied with medical information on the Internet, with only 12 percent stating that current offerings are "excellent" in terms of providing accurate and credible information that doctors can rely on.

The decision for advertising online is not a very straightforward one. Calculating ROI on such ventures is very difficult. Direct advertisement/selling from such informative sites is either unethical or prohibited by law. In fact the same survey by Merck points out that physicians judge the unbiased nature of information by the (absence of) advertisements on the website. Websites like <http://www.gsk-ecs.com/> which aim at eliminating paperwork are better candidates for ROI. However, a difficult ROI measurement should not be a criteria for stalling a project. Informative portals can be a powerful tool for gathering information on physician's needs & interests, usually not possible from any other source. Critical prescriber attributes like interest in side effects versus dosing, choice of formulations, etc. can be determined through data mining of server log files, path analysis, and attitudinal surveys. Information like these can be valuable in better aligning marketing strategies & achieving peak sales faster.

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