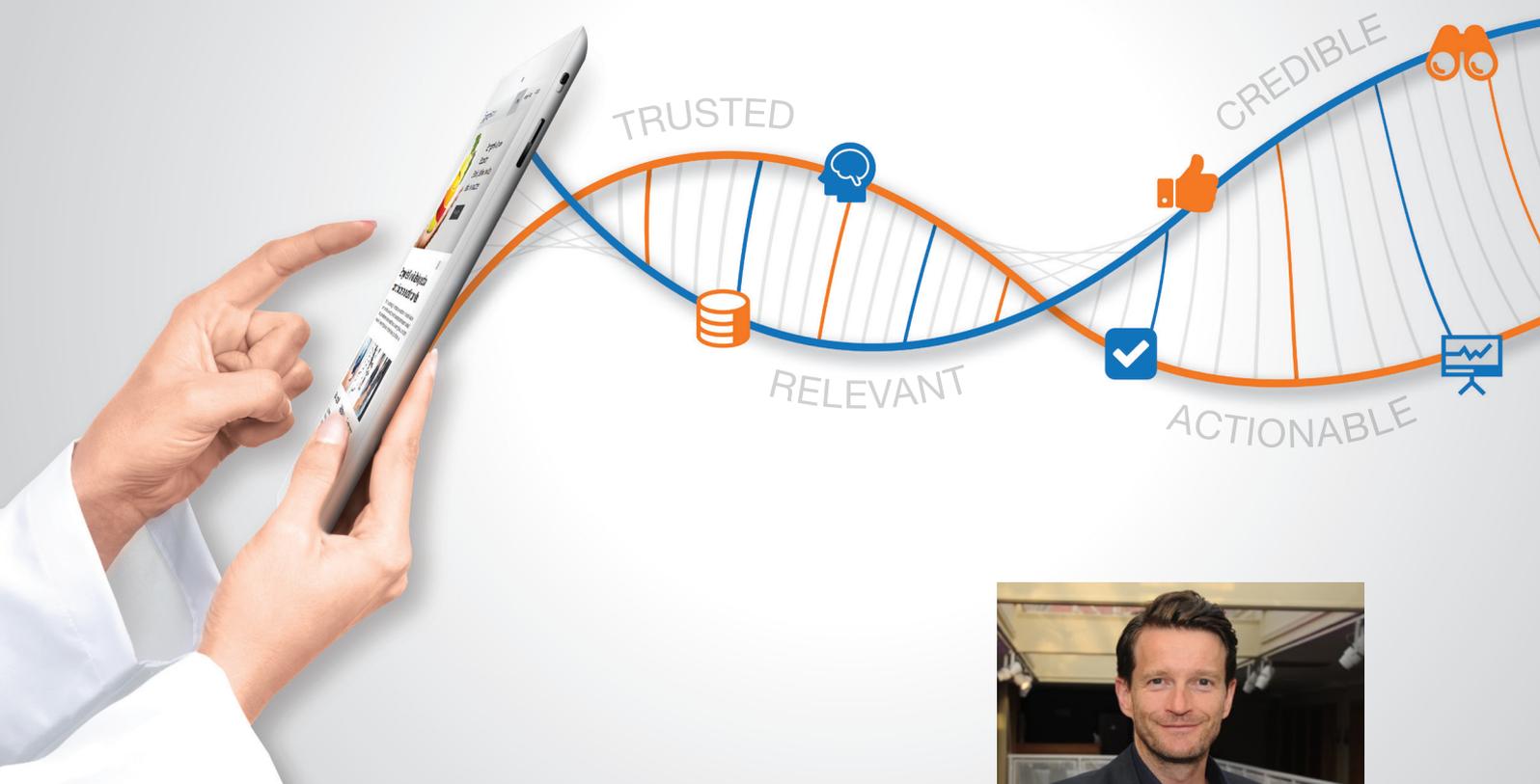


It's credible content that engages HCPs

Simon Fry, as interviewed by Nick de Cent from eyeforpharma

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Trusted, relevant, credible content – sometimes even co-created by the physicians themselves – is what really helps reps to engage, Simon Fry tells Nick de Cent.

Credible content rather than the platform used to deliver it is very much the differentiator when it comes to engaging healthcare professionals, according to Simon Fry, Digital Product Development Global Director at Springer Healthcare.

“You can have the latest and greatest gadgets but really it’s meaningless without an effective content strategy underpinning that level of engagement,” he tells eyeforpharma. Fry, who spoke in October at Australia Sales and Marketing 2014 on the subject of “Compliant Digital Content Reuse In The Commercial Setting – The How, Why And Wherefore of Digital Content Delivery,” argues that the limited number of platforms available and the rush to implement digital has led to material produced by pharma companies looking very similar.

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Service delivery is where, I think, pharma can really make a big difference.

Simon Fry

Digital Product Development,
Global Director, Springer Healthcare

Technical competence is not engagement

"Doctors and healthcare professionals (HCP) are a little bit bored with what was two years ago an exciting area," he says. "And that's certainly reflected in sales reps' attitudes towards how much meaningful engagement those platforms can actually deliver." On the one hand things may be working well technically, he suggests, but from a content perspective "maybe things are not working so well as they could."

Indeed, surveys and anecdotal evidence suggest that doctors are still looking for better online access to digital education and information. Fry highlights journal articles, guidelines, diagnostic tools, independent medical education and clinical trial information as areas that are in demand from clinicians. Accordingly, his own organization is looking at how it can help clients provide HCPs with "much more meaningful services" – such information is valued by HCPs as they're actively looking for this kind of material.

As an example, Fry cites recent involvement in a groundbreaking project to disseminate guidelines in a particular therapy area through the sales rep channel. Doctors indicate that guidelines are a "really effective educational resource", he claims. In general, pharma clients tend to be slightly wary of guidelines because of compliance issues, he acknowledges. However, one particular client "wanted to engage in that space because they wanted to give their reps something meaningful they could talk around."

In what Fry describes as an "ambitious undertaking", they created digital, interactive versions of key guidelines and made them available for sales reps to discuss in a detailing session, but also to provide in a post-call setting so doctors could use them in their own time.

Sales reps are still relevant

"Of course, great content alone – without effective distribution – is unlikely to succeed, which is where the field force comes in. We still see the sales rep channel as being a really relevant channel," Fry declares. "We've got to be able to give the reps the right tools, the right content, to be able to stimulate those conversations." This is particularly important in terms of providing "meaning and value" to HCPs, and not wasting their time.

Salespeople tend to be closest to the customers, and this initiative actually came out of the sales rep channel itself, Fry acknowledges. The company had received feedback from doctors, via the reps, that they were confused about the appropriate prescribing behavior in the context of this particular disease area. This provided the stimulus for the company to ask what kind of tools it could make available to introduce clarity around prescriber activity.

Furthermore, the objectivity required by the prescribing guidelines meant that, in certain circumstances, the company was suggesting that competitive products would be relevant. Fry emphasizes that this approach provided clarity around the company's product so that doctors could be confident about prescribing it under the appropriate circumstances. Prior to that, in the face of uncertainty, doctors were falling back on older, tried-and-tested options.

As a result, this was a "really great example of using your sales force to engage with clinicians to discover what the need is and then use digital and technology to help fill the communications gaps". At the same time, this approach ensured that the company was delivering value to the clinician.

Challenges

The quality of the content is paramount in this context, according to Fry. It needs to be built around evidence-based, peer-reviewed papers and content from medical societies and other similar stakeholders. "We're really interested in how we can leverage that content portfolio; that's what the doctors are interested in."

“There's too much reliance on internally created content.”

There are challenges, nevertheless, particularly because medical societies and publishers may not have the resources to make such content available in an appropriate format. However, this also provides opportunities for pharma to step in and help them. This, in turn, will help doctors provide patients with better quality of information in the context of rapidly increasing patient empowerment.

"That service delivery is where, I think, pharma can really make a big difference."

Asked where pharma companies are going wrong with content, Fry responds by suggesting that there is not enough focus on the provenance of the content: this needs to be trusted, relevant and credible. "There's too much reliance on internally created content."

He gives the example of eDetailing ("which is facing challenges"): doctors aren't tending to find time for it because it's perceived as essentially having come straight from a promotional channel. He suggests that pharma should instead focus on third-party-generated, credible content.

Fry raises the issue of copyright and intellectual property rights in the context of third-party content. Pharma companies often tend to outsource to agencies the management of copyright and compliance issues related to third-party content, he says. However, some agencies may pay even less attention to their responsibilities in this area than their clients. His own organization can help pharma acquire content for use in accordance with publishers' terms of reuse, he adds.

Co-creation

Fry also draws attention to the importance of co-created content. For instance, one of Springer Healthcare's clients is currently engaged in the co-creation of a book about rare tumors in cancer with the help of physicians who have been contacted by the sales force. Such initiatives, preferably backed by a learned society, not only help to provide valuable content but also engage practitioners to a much higher degree because they are instrumental in helping to create the content.

Fry concludes by offering three tips for pharma companies seeking to use content:

1. Pharma needs to source relevant, credible content that is going to engage the audience;
2. Procure content and re-use it in a way that's compliant with the content owners' terms of re-use; and
3. Such content needs to be put into context for the sales force, so that reps can have meaningful discussions with physicians that involve more than just handing over a promotional message.

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