

Introduction

Having a strong digital presence for any successful business today is inevitable.

There are over 40,000 searches on Google per second. Of that, nearly 80% are using mobile to research and engage on digital platforms. Additionally, 79% of online users are on Facebook on a daily basis.

This is not a trend. It is an evolution. And it's already happened.

Contrary to the more tech savvy and fluid consumer-based brands, the pharmaceutical and life sciences industries have been slow to take a foothold in this rapidly growing frontier.

Risks often seem to outweigh rewards due to strict governing policies of the FDA, EMA and MHRA while there often is a lack of clarity for best practices and measures for each digital platform.

Problems

Pharmaceuticals and life sciences have been notorious for their slow adoption of fully embracing digital - especially on the marketing landscape.

Larger organisations are often too structured and archaic to effectively pivot and execute in real-time.

With our now mercurial and technological era, it is critical to be fluid and dynamic.

Holding onto the archaic methods of conventional marketing strategies will only last so long.

Studies show that health care marketers often lag, on average, 2-3 years behind in digital.¹

Furthermore, by 2020, 90.8% of adults aged 45-54 will be researching and engaging online - 70.8% for those over the age of 65.²

Professor Richard Foster from Yale University stated that the average lifespan of a company listed in the S&P 500 index of leading US companies has decreased from 67 years in the 1920's to just 15 years today.

The current rate of change 'is at a faster pace than ever' according to Professor Foster, and by 2020, more than three-quarters of the S&P 500 will be companies we've not yet heard of.

Compliance

The FDA requires full unbiased disclosure when it comes to promoting drugs and medical devices, which can be difficult from a marketing standpoint.

The EMA and MHRA have their own set of rules and regulations.

While these regulatory organisations are quick to hammer the gavel for violations, they are slow to outline clear policies for pharmaceutical and life sciences industries.³

“Unfortunately, there is little guidance from the FDA specifically about these... If a firm wanted to try this, it would need to act responsibly and have the best interest of patients in mind when hosting such events. In addition, during periods of recalls of devices, or negative press on a particular drug, these open forums may provide some legal issues - many times legal counsel will advise no comment during these periods.”

Dr. Kevin Campbell.⁴

For any business serious about marketing online, it is strongly suggested that you consult with appropriate legal counsel first.

Solution

We are now at the most exciting time in business history where big and small brands alike have immediate access to a targeted global audience.

The ability for companies to connect, collaborate and compete on a global playing field has never been more prevalent.

A strong digital presence has a huge impact on consumers.

Establishing a strong online presence while following compliancy is indeed possible.

For pharmaceutical and life sciences markets, it is now absolutely critical.

The benefits seem almost limitless and range from a variety of options in both B2B and B2C markets.

Businesses today, more than ever can:

- Enjoy more opportunities than ever to reach and research customers
- Secure an immediate global outlook
- Target demographics with valuable personalised content
- Create lasting customer relationships via the use of automation
- Collate more accurate customer behaviour data
- Streamline business processes
- Increase operational efficiency

Larger brands have an advantage that they have the appropriate resources to transition seamlessly.

With marketing departments on hand, some specialist advice and practical solutions can propel them into the right direction with pinpoint accuracy.

That said the digital front levels the playing field for ambitious small and medium sized brands that are willing to innovate.

Anyone with even a modest budget can create an effective aura of social proof and positive impact.

For Baby Boomers alone, over 55% of the generation discovers information from social sites, then research deeper by visiting the

company's website and utilising search engines, like Google, for more information.⁵

Yes, times have changed. Fortunately, there are pioneers who have already successfully blazed a trail for wary healthcare marketers to study - both from their successes and mistakes.

There are plenty of safe strategies and tools in place to help establish a strong and authoritative online presence which will result in increased brand awareness, better conversions and an improved ROI.

These strategies fall into seven core areas:

1. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
2. Website Optimisation
3. Effective Content
4. Social Media
5. Online Listening
6. Digital Advertising
7. Analytics and Data Analysis

1 - Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

“SEO is the process of affecting the visibility of a website or a web page in a web search engine's unpaid results - often referred to as ‘natural’, ‘organic’, or ‘earned’ results.”

Wikipedia.⁶

Search engine optimisation is one of the most powerful strategies to have a dominant online presence.

Google is the largest search engine in the world with over 2 trillion searches annually.

With over 100 billion monthly searches it has 67.7% of the worldwide desktop search engine market.

Around a quarter of search results (23.99% on desktops and 25.25% on Smartphones) now include one video, with 9 out of 10 videos hosted on YouTube.

On Smartphones 72% of videos are integrated from YouTube with others from Dailymotion, Vimeo and Vevo.

Following the best practices of Google and utilising current 2017 ‘white hat’ techniques will serve your business with great value for the long-term.

Understanding the importance of long tail keywords and weaving them in with your content, your social pages, and your website will build a bigger online footprint to help improve your topical authority and elevate your website to the top.

In addition to executing effective content strategies, how well you rank on search engines also comes down to how user-friendly your site is.

A site with great usability makes people want to remain there; helping it climb up the results pages.

An important component is how easy it is for customers to find what they’re looking for on a website.

Google is now already rolling out its Mobile-First index, which ranks its search index based on the mobile version of your website, those already deploying a mobile-first, website experience strategy, stand to reap the rewards.

2 – Website Optimisation

Everybody has a website, or at least a set of landing pages. Sites are critical as they are often the store front and image of who and what your brand represents.

Websites are effective tools to provide valuable data and resources for people researching you. They also act as a housing platform for content which can be managed effectively to maximize your online presence outside of your site.

80% of users use mobile.⁷ A mobile optimised website is absolutely critical for any industry.

Load time also is an important factor as users are accustomed to instant gratification on digital while Google also takes into account page load time for SEO ranking status.

Here are some best practices for an effective website:

- **Make header tags work hard:** A well-formatted site can lead to a well-visited site. Knowing how to use header tags properly helps break up your content into easily assimilated sections (again improving the UX). Plus, by including relevant terms in header tags, you also

help boost SEO rankings against those keywords.

- **Get speedy:** People are impatient – they don't like to wait too long for pages to load. Bing and Google know this, and take this into account as part of their algorithms. And if people click away, that affects your bounce rate. So make sure your code is clean and super streamlined, stay away from 'off-the-shelf' free Content Management Systems (CMS) and optimise image sizing to speed up loading time.
- **Social sharing:** Tweets, Facebook shares and Pinterest pins can all help rankings. Plus, 4 in 10 Facebook users say they go from sharing/liking an item to buying it – so social sharing buttons on your website can improve sales too.
- **Navigation:** If visitors can't find what they want, they leave. Flat site architecture not only helps navigation but can also help improve SEO ranking as it links critical pages. Make your site slick, navigable and interesting, and you'll soon find it climbing the search engine results pages.

3 – Effective Content

An effective content strategy really is the backbone of the digital infrastructure, while the social channels are outlets for distribution, and websites are inlets for traffic and enquires.

Without effective content, your business will be nothing online.

Content is king. Useful, high-quality content is what will keep visitors engaged and on your site and returning for more. According to SerpIQ, research showed that websites ranking in the top 10 results for any Google Keyword had at least 2,000 words worth of content on the page. The more valuable content on a web page then the higher the rankings.

Of course, what you write has to be interesting and relevant – but more words equal more value for visitors.

The more you provide digestible and informative content, consumers will continue returning. This also allows you to improve topical authority. Increased brand recognition and “top of mind” awareness is a very strong ancillary benefit to these practices.

But as a business you still need to ask for the sale. Often this can be done with an up

sell, onetime offer, or embedding call-to-actions within your content for people to submit their contact details for more information, to be supported by an effective follow-up campaign.

Effective content will aid in long-term branding while building credibility and measuring direct ROI, if the right systems are in place.

A primary strategy for all businesses should be to ultimately build an email list. Emails have the overall highest engagement of any online channel and are an intimate way to directly connect with customers. Simpler platforms like Aweber provide analytics, segmentation and split testing whereas more in-depth systems like Infusionsoft can help businesses and brands fully automate email marketing strategies.

Video

We have already entered the video era, with YouTube taking nearly half of all these social engagements and Facebook’s algorithm favouring video above all other media.

Four times as many people would prefer watching a video on a subject rather than reading about it. In 2017 video will represent 74% of all online traffic, which will increase to 80% by 2019.⁸

Articles & Blogs

The Hummingbird algorithm takes traditional search marketing and turns it on its head, shifting the emphasis back onto producing deep, high quality and authoritative content and reducing the importance of links alone.

With the Hummingbird update, Google wants to provide searchers with answers to their questions, rather than just send them to pages that contain the keywords used in their searches.

This new search paradigm is a boon for brands that have a strong content policy. If you regularly publish reviews, news, opinion pieces and how-to's, then you will be much better off thanks to Hummingbird.

“Blogs by senior staff about commitment to patients, research, if done in a sincere way, can be very effective. In addition, blogs allow for comments by readers to facilitate a dialog. But again, firms need to define their processes around how public comments are handled in advance.”

Dr. Kevin Campbell.⁹

Images & Infographics

Studies show that internet readers pay close attention to information-carrying images. Readers are more likely to spend more time looking at an image over reading the actual text - when the image is relevant to the subject.¹⁰

Having the right image can drastically increase the click through rate for your articles and blogs. Tweets with images receive 18% more clicks than tweets without images. And on LinkedIn, 98% of posts with images receive more comments, and posts with links have a 200% higher engagement rate.¹¹

Infographics are also liked and shared three times more on social media than traditional content.¹²

58% of b2b marketers find them to be effective in their efforts.¹³

Research the kind of infographics that other people in your niche are engaging with to help formulate a strategy for your brands visual content and use them as a way to reach a wider audience.

4 - Social Media

Content is King, but Marketing is Queen.
And she runs the household.

Leveraging social media platforms is one of the most effective methods to get your brand noticed online.

Utilising the best practices for each platform will help you distribute your content to new audiences while engaging directly with customers and clients.

Here are some best practices for using social media effectively:

Do not use social as a display case for promotions. Use it as a place to provide value and distribute high-quality and informative content to the right audiences.

Engage directly with consumers, customers and clients:

Facebook is the largest social network and Instagram comes second.

But YouTube accounts for 50% of all social engagements and will also help you rank in searches as it is owned by Google.

Be careful with your videos - there are compliancy issues to consider.

Support groups and communities:

“Some of the most engaged and active audiences on social media are individuals coping with a disability or chronic condition, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes and people who have recently experienced a medical emergency.”

GetReferralMD.com.¹⁴

Here are some social media statistics:

- Facebook remains at the top of the most widely used social platforms, with 79% of adult internet users and 68% of ALL American adults.¹⁵
- 80% of time engaged on social media is via mobile.¹⁶
- 88.9% of US businesses with over 100 employees use social media for marketing purposes.¹⁷
- 94% of B2B marketers use LinkedIn for content distribution.¹⁸
- Over 56% of online adults use more than one social media platform.¹⁹
- 88% of physicians use both the Internet and social media to research medical devices, biotechnology and

pharmaceuticals.²⁰

- Businesses that invest at least 6 hours to social media per week see:
 - 64% increased in lead generation
 - 78% increase in website traffic
 - 60% increase in search engine rankings.²¹

Facebook

According to Interbrand's Top 100 Growing Brands, Facebook is at number 1 in terms of revenue percentage growth.

It has the largest reach for any social platform in the world, with 1.86 billion monthly active users as of February 2017.

Being able to target users by a vast range of criteria - including age, gender, location, job title, net worth, interests and many more makes the platform an invaluable launching pad for advertisers.

And Facebook isn't limited to teens and millennials. Baby boomers spend an average of 11 hours per week on the social platform.²²

Facebook is an excellent source for traffic especially when using paid ads. But their

algorithm favours videos and images post, allowing those mediums the most potential reach.

YouTube

There are over 4 billion video views per day on YouTube. As the world's second largest Search Engine after Google, and third most visited site after Google and Facebook, it boasts over 6 billion hours of videos watched per month.

6 out of 10 people prefer online video platforms to live TV. On mobile alone, YouTube reaches more 18-49 year olds than any broadcast or cable TV network.

Viewers who watched TrueView ads (YouTube's advertising platform) at least 30 seconds—were 23 times more likely to visit or subscribe to a brand channel, watch more by that brand, or share the brand video.

Viewers who are exposed to TrueView ads but who don't watch to completion are still 10 times more likely to take one of those actions. When brands use TrueView, they see views of previously existing content increase by up to 500% after posting new videos.

The most viewed brand videos are on average 31–60 seconds long (32% of all views).

Instagram

Instagram is essentially an online photo album app. Through innovation they now incorporate videos and video stories into the platform.

Instagram has over 500 million monthly active users, up from 400 million just 10 months ago.

Acquired by Facebook in 2012 for \$1 billion, this 13-employee company grew to 30 million iOS users in its first 18 months.

Users have shared over 40 billion photos to-date, averaging 95 million photos and videos per day.

80% of users are from countries outside the United States, with 59% of all users using it every day, 35% of which visit several times a day.

In the U.S 55% of all online 18-29 year olds use Instagram, with 28% of all 30 to 49 year olds representing the second-largest user group. 4.2 billion posts are liked daily.

It is currently used by 48.8% of brands in the U.S expected to rise to 70.7% in 2017.

Twitter

Twitter is a micro blogging platform which limits “tweets” to 140 characters. Though there is a lot of digital banter about the demise and stagnation of the platform, dedicated users are extremely active and

engaging. There are over 313 million active monthly visitors with 500 million tweets per day.²³

Twitter is particularly excellent for social listening, customer service, engaging with clients and colleagues, and others interested in your industry and business. (Read more in the Social Listening section.)

Dr. Kevin Campbell, a widely recognized cardiologist and social media savant, outlines:

“One of the best ways to interact with an audience is through the use of Twitter chats. If done properly and monitored by those expert in social media, Twitter chats could be an opportunity to allow for two-way communication between patients and pharma, physicians and pharma, researchers and pharma.”

Forbes.com.²⁴

Like Facebook, Twitter is also an excellent platform for distributing content and driving website traffic. Using mentions (@name) and appropriate hashtags can help you reach a greater potential audience.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn, owned by Microsoft, is a “place for professionals”.

Ideal for B2B and professional networking, LinkedIn has over 106 million unique monthly visitors with 467 million registered members.²⁵

40% of users check daily and it is used in 200 countries and territories with 41% of millionaires using LinkedIn.

25 million profiles are viewed each day.

It is available in 20 different languages.

The average CEO has 930 connections.

Like Twitter and Facebook, LinkedIn is another great platform for distributing and sharing content.

It also has its own publishing platform with 130,000 long-form posts being generated every week.

There 9 billion content impressions in LinkedIn feed every week.

Studies show that 80% of B2B leads come from LinkedIn.

46% of social media traffic coming to B2B company sites is from LinkedIn.

Snapchat

Snapchat has 301 million active monthly users. With over 20,000 photos being shared every second.

There are more than 10 billion daily video views and it reaches 41% of all 18 to 34 year-olds in the United States.

It has a 300% increase in usage in the last 3 years.

Snapchat ads are seen between 500,000 and 1 million times per day.

There are 16 heads of state of governments which use Snapchat.

Geofilters are viewed over 1 billion times per day.

5 – Online Listening

With content as the backbone of digital, “listening” would be the central nervous system for any organisation’s digital efforts.

Here, you can receive messages and engagements telling you whether something is wrong or right.

59% of Americans with social media accounts think that customer service through social media has made it easier to get questions answered and issues resolved while 1/3 of UK customers prefer to engage directly online with a brand than visit their location.²⁶

Online listening is both an active and passive way to gather data and understand your audiences and potential customers.

What is social listening?

“Social listening is the process of tracking conversations around specific phrases, words or brands, and then leveraging them to discover opportunities or create content for those audiences.”

Sprout Social.²⁷

By identifying keywords and key phrases while closely monitoring your own and your competitors’ social mentions you will

empower your brand with a first line of digital customer service.

Digital savvy people know that a tweet towards a brand can often elicit a much faster response than going the conventional route of calling the company and getting passed over to reps before the inevitable and accidental disconnect.

7 out of 8 messages to brands go unanswered within the first three days.²⁸ By being the listener and thought leader, just think about the impact your business could make by being the one to answer and address concerns of your competitors’ customers while maintaining engaging relationships and loyalty with your own.

You can also use listening to understand common concerns and questions among certain demographics.

And leverage trending topics and hashtags to increase your reach on social posts while keeping up with current best practices.

Furthermore, these FAQ’s can be leveraged to create content (blogs, videos, infographics etc.) that you know will solve a problem for your potential and current

consumers - which is the best kind of content to provide.

Mentions: Often preceded with a "@" symbol. These are direct tags to people and brands for Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and other social platforms.

Mentions are critical in social listening as they can make or break a relationship (both personal and in business).

Mentions are opportunities to publically address concerns or issues (showing other people that you care and are on top of things), and also great for eliciting praise and excitement from people.

Often, when working with influencers, mentions are the ideal way to "shout out" a brand.

Sentiment Analysis: Also known as opinion mining. There is a myriad of software available for measuring sentiments. Communication can be difficult.

Especially with the nuances of the English language while more and more people around the globe engage online.

Although there are 'bots and programs available, adept humans still definitely add more value and quality here - especially

when it comes to identifying sarcasm and distinguishing grammatical errors.

Engagement: Digital engagements are measured in Likes, Mentions, Comments, Shares, Subscribes, etc. Though likes don't carry the weight that they used to, a share on Facebook can go a long way, as will a retweet on Twitter and a Tag in Instagram.

Registering for Google Alerts or on Feedly.com will help your brand listen to trends online.

These sites will send notifications of mentions of the topics you choose to follow.

6 – Digital Advertising

Digital advertising is capable of producing immediately measurable results within the same day of a campaign going live.

Unlike television, radio or printed press adverts, the success of which is almost always estimated, paid search campaigns provide marketers with definitive results.

Advertising on digital can be though tricky, especially for pharmaceutical companies. Facebook has the best ads platform for targeting specific audiences while Google (including YouTube) is ideal for consumers who are already researching.

Google and Facebook combined hold 103% of the digital advertising space. Facebook at 43% and Google at 60%. This is possible because other digital advertising platforms are at a 3% decline.

Content still is absolutely critical while reaching the right audience. The wrong headline or the wrong image can increase your cost per conversion significantly.

Videos are an increasing trend and are very effective on Facebook, YouTube and on landing pages.

We recommend again that you consult legal advice before any advertising is executed as the pharmaceutical industry is closely

monitored by the FDA and EMA, especially if you are advertising to US and UK audiences. Full disclosure of the benefits and risks is often required.

Retargeting: Cookies and pixels embedded on your website for retargeting purposes can help increase your conversions, on average by up to 60%.²⁹

Even modest brands will benefit from this because it gives them omnipresence online, making them command more of their target audiences attention.

7 - Analytics & Data Analysis

Analytics are the measuring tools which help businesses understand their campaigns effects, view traffic sources and user behaviour. Coupled with split testing strategies this can help insight and significantly improve conversions.

By using analytics to apply Pareto's 80/20 principle, businesses can target the valuable 20% of consumers who are likely to buy. These clients should be cherished with special attention.

A percentage improvement of just 1%, by monitoring bounce rates and click through rates, analysing and split testing - can significantly improve gross profit margins.

SearchDigital Solution

Digital strategies and execution require the business as a whole to think like marketers.

Large businesses have segmented departments where employees are assigned to specific duties.

Being that the majority of all people are on social media and engaging on a daily basis, anybody within any department can provide value.

From the mailroom staff to the CEO.

A combination of internal efforts coupled with outside experts can provide maximum results.

It is important to have your employees maintain a level of awareness, this is critical because at the end of the day, pay cheques are ultimately thanks to customers and clients.

By having your employees maintain a level of vigilance on social and digital infrastructures, fewer business opportunities will slip through the cracks. And more will be uncovered.

It is equally important that the business engaging on digital platforms utilise the appropriate experts to make sure they maximise their efforts and ROI.

"Because many clinical teams do not have that type of expertise on staff, it is important for clinical teams to contract with a vendor that can manage this steady stream of metrics."

MarketWired.³⁰

Where We Come In

Our senior team have over 30 years experience working directly with pharmaceutical brands and life sciences businesses in similar vertical channels; we understand the nuances, procedures, best practices, and policies to achieve maximum results with your digital efforts.

By deploying superior technology, agile tactics and advanced digital strategy, combined with real-time analysis, SearchDigital helps drive actionable insights for optimum, effective and immediate growth.

We work directly with businesses and their key staff to make sure there is a team effort in place, providing the help, direction and additional 'heavy-lifting' needed where internal teams resources are already fully stretched.

As an award-winning digital technology company, SearchDigital is constantly innovating – looking for effective ways to propel our clients' businesses forwards to achieve rapid and sustainable growth.

One of the ways we do this is via our Enterprise Growth Engine™ - a second generation digital transformation system that's been specifically designed to accelerate organisational growth.

We do this through innovation and excellence at light speed*.

Some Services We Provide:

- Web Systems Development
- Ecommerce Platform Development
- Digital Channel Marketing and Advertising
- Digital Creative Services and Consulting
- Big Data Analytics
- Customised Dashboard Reporting
- Content Management Systems
- Content Strategies, Development and Distribution

Conclusion

BHS; Blockbuster; Clinton Cards; Comet; HMV; Kodak and Woolworth's... well-known and well-loved brands, in the US, UK, and around the world.

All have one thing in common: they no longer exist.

This is due, in no small part, to the fact that they failed to acknowledge and embrace the digital evolution or recognise that continuous innovation is the only way to thrive – and survive.

A decade ago we were dialling up the internet, as well as our phones. It was an era when phones weren't stylish - let alone smart.

Would your younger self have believed that, one day, you would be streaming a video from Netflix in 4K HD direct to your phone wirelessly?

Yet here we are. Our phones are part of our lives, fulfilling so many more functions than for conversation alone – and brands need to utilise everything they can to connect with potential consumers.

The prevalence of digital media today is ubiquitous. There is no way around it.

For businesses who want to remain relevant in the now digital era, leveraging social channels will be inevitable for success.

However, not all businesses have the luxury of sharing their message with the public without conforming to compliances and restrictions.

Such is the case for the pharmaceutical and life sciences industries. Utilising social media for marketing is a tightrope to walk for brands and businesses who must answer to multiple compliancy agencies who are watching every move.

Some businesses will take the chance to innovate by recognising that the rewards outweigh the risks.

The majority of reticent businesses have sat back and waited for others to pioneer the

digital frontier, and pray for a guiding light that is not too late.

Fortunately, we can and have learned from the pioneers of this industry.

By harnessing the power of technology and utilising the full advancement in digital, we can positively impact enterprise growth.

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