



Crafting a Social Media Strategy That Makes Sense

The Pew Internet and American Life Project¹ estimates that approximately 75-80 percent of U.S. adult Internet users have looked for health information online. Internet resources, from health destination sites such as WebMD to pharmaceutical-sponsored brand sites to online communities such as PatientsLikeMe, are second only to a physician when it comes to gathering trustworthy information about health-related topics.²

The increasing penetration of broadband access has made information gathering on the Internet a habit for many Americans. Of the 91 percent of American households who have broadband, 78 percent use their high-speed, high-impact access to gather health information specifically.³ Broadband access not only increases frequency of Internet usage, but also the nature of online engagement. Broadband users are more likely to view more Web content, including video and message boards, than those using dial-up. They are also more likely to consume multiple forms of media simultaneously, accessing online information to supplement offline information gathering.

At the same time that health-information seeking has become commonplace among Internet users, consumers' use of social media has exploded. Forrester Research estimates that three in four online adults in the United States participate in or consume some form of social media at least once a month.⁴ While the level of engagement with social media still varies, with the majority of online users still in a spectator role, 2009 has seen a significant increase in the use of tagging, peer-generated video, blog readership, and social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. In fact, 35 percent of adults have a profile on at least one social networking website.⁵

Many brand marketers in the consumer packaged goods, technology, travel, and automobile industries have successfully embraced social media platforms as an effective marketing strategy. While some pharmaceutical marketers have used social media, most are still unsure how to implement social media strategies in a way that balances business objectives with authentic engagement – and with good reason. The very nature of a consumer's engagement with a pharmaceutical brand shifts the dynamics of social media participation – making the equation not just a simple function of audience engagement but of the relationship patients have with their condition and their perception of the pharmaceutical industry as well.

Are Social Media and Pharmaceutical Marketing Contraindicated?

The success of social media relies on facilitating dialog with brands themselves, as well as among members of a brand's followers. Perhaps no better example of the power of social media was Barack Obama's presidential campaign. Through astute and integrated use of a variety of social technologies, including blogs, social networking sites, video distribution, and social bookmarking, the Obama campaign successfully mobilized a generation untapped by previous candidates. The result? A political database of millions of supporters that grew organically and enabled the campaign to raise over \$600 million dollars in campaign funds at relatively low cost.⁶ The campaign highlights the critical components for a successful social marketing campaign: a compelling product, a community of like-minded individuals, and their collective desire to join in a dialog.

Herein lies the challenge of pharmaceutical marketing and social media. Even with a compelling product and like-minded individuals, few people have a desire to identify themselves with a specific pharmaceutical brand. For the most part, the conditions people suffer from and their remedies represent tribes most would rather not join. How can a pharmaceutical brand leverage social media in a way that is relevant to consumers and furthers brand objectives? Through an intimate understanding of the audience's social media engagement and their relationship to their condition.

Engagement vs. Investment: Solving the Social Media Puzzle

Social media isn't just for teenagers and college kids. Seventy-two percent of adults ages 45-54 say they use social technologies.⁷ With the exception of conditions affecting the elderly, social marketing makes sense for almost every age group, and even then, opportunities exist to engage the caregivers and support partners of these patients.

If every age group is adopting social media, why isn't every pharmaceutical marketer adding social media to their strategy? In their seminal book, *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*⁸, Forrester Research analysts Josh Bernoff and Charlene Li described a social engagement ladder. The ladder provides a construct for increasing levels of engagement from inactives to content creators. It is not enough to understand that consumers are participating in social media, marketers must understand how they are engaging. However, audience engagement only represents one piece of the social media strategy puzzle. The other component is what we call "outcome investment."

Outcome investment represents a patient's relationship to a condition, a combination of several factors, which include severity of symptoms, visibility of symptoms, social impact of condition, and potential morbidity. Outcome investment answers two key questions:

- How much does someone have to gain by actively seeking a resolution to symptoms or a treatment for the condition?
- Are the benefits of resolution greater than the potential downside for identifying with this condition or brand?

For example, someone with chronic lower back pain has less outcome investment than someone with cancer. At the same time, someone experiencing a condition with visible symptoms, such as acne, has a higher outcome investment than someone with erectile dysfunction—an embarrassing, but somewhat private, condition.

Outcome investment can be viewed as a continuum with three categories. Those with low outcome investment can be considered "indifferent," as the impact of their condition is relatively limited. In the middle are those who are "influenced"—their condition affects them, yet doesn't define them. Those with a high outcome investment can be considered "invested"—the impact so deeply felt that they are willing to take action to find resolution or a community of like-minded sufferers.

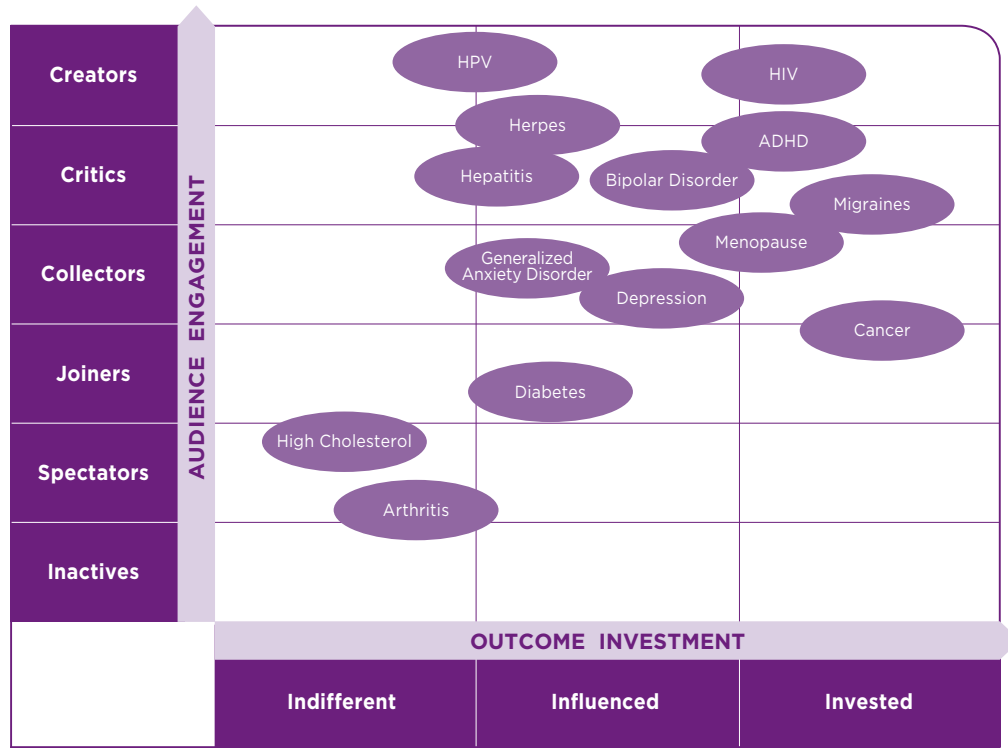


Figure 1: Top Health Conditions Researched Online, Mapped by Audience Engagement and Outcome Investment

To understand if social media is appropriate for an audience, marketers must map two axes: audience engagement and outcome investment. When comScore’s top conditions researched online are mapped on these axes in Figure 1, distinct similarities emerge across four quadrants:

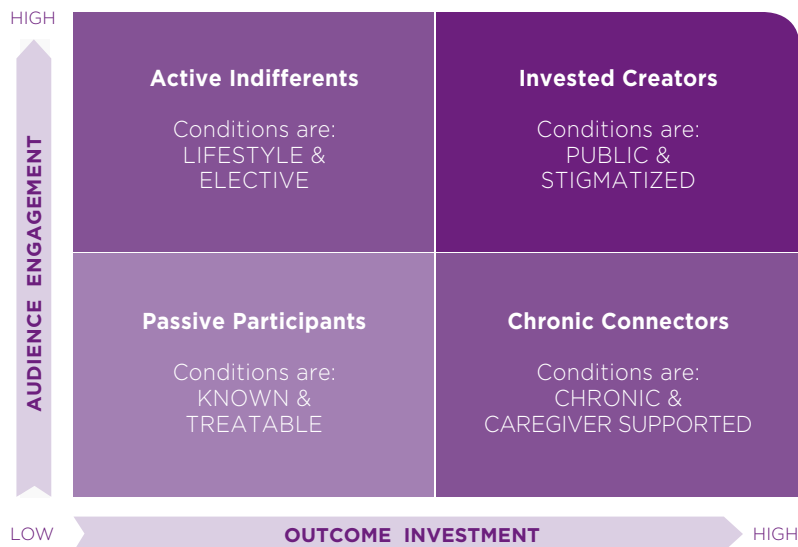


Figure 2: Four Categories of Healthcare Social Consumer

As the mapped conditions are evaluated, four categories of healthcare social consumer based on social media engagement and outcome investment emerge. In each quadrant, condition “themes” also emerge:

Passive Participants

Low Audience Engagement/Low Outcome Investment

Conditions that fall in this quadrant tend to be chronic and often associated with aging (such as osteoarthritis or overactive bladder). The population for these conditions is often older, resulting in relatively low audience engagement for social technologies. While these conditions can be serious, the motivation for connection is limited. These are “everyman” conditions with known etiologies and clear treatment protocols.

Active Indifferents

High Audience Engagement/Low Outcome Investment

This quadrant holds the “lifestyle” conditions such as birth control, erectile dysfunction, cosmetic procedures, and vision correction. While the audiences for these conditions are often younger and savvy creators and consumers of social media, the motivation for connection is still limited. These are often private, personal choices made without regard for the broader population.

Chronic Connectors

Low Audience Engagement/High Outcome Investment

Conditions in this quadrant are often very serious, with symptoms that limit active participation by sufferers themselves. These conditions tend to be prevalent in a relatively older population, but the motivation to connect and gather information from like-minded individuals is high. Consumers in this category are more likely to use traditional modes of information seeking and have high trust in their physicians as sources of information. This quadrant also sees a strong caregiver or support partner audience.

Invested Creators

High Audience Engagement/High Outcome Investment

These conditions (such as ulcerative colitis or acne) represent the most likely candidates for social media strategies as they affect relatively younger populations who are comfortable with social technologies. The social stigma associated with many of these conditions represents a high outcome investment. There are significant personal and social advantages to finding relief, resolution, or support. The anonymity of the Internet also provides a discreet platform for sufferers of these conditions.

Understanding where a therapeutic area maps to the quadrant can provide guidance for an appropriate online brand objective and corresponding social media strategy.

Creating Relevant Social Marketing Strategies

In *Groundswell*, Bernoff and Li outline five objectives for social technologies¹⁰:

- **Listening:** Gaining insights from listening to customers
- **Talking:** Using conversations with customers to promote products and services
- **Energizing:** Identifying enthusiastic customers and using them to persuade others
- **Supporting:** Making it possible for customers to help each other
- **Embracing:** Turning customers into a resource for innovation

The objectives pharmaceutical marketers pursue for their brand should not only align with business objectives, they should also be reflective of the audience's engagement with social technologies and their outcome investment. Listening, which includes monitoring brands on social media platforms, is an essential strategy for all brands. From there, the higher the level of engagement and investment, the more opportunities exist to leverage social media strategies to meet brand objectives. Interesting to note, the opportunity with Chronic Connectors lies with caregivers and support partners, as well as the patient population.

Consumer Quadrant	Common Pharmaceutical Brand Objectives	Social Media Objectives
Passive Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condition Awareness • Brand Awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Talking
Active Indifferents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branded Requests • Adherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Talking • Energizing
Chronic Connectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient and Caregiver Support • Compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Talking • Energizing • Supporting
Invested Creators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand Advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Talking • Energizing • Supporting • Embracing

Not Necessarily Risky Business

Even with a solid strategic foundation, championing a social media project within a highly regulated pharmaceutical environment poses many challenges. The risks associated with opening a dialog with consumers are very real in this age of heightened DTC scrutiny.

But participating in social media isn't necessarily risky. In a recent Nielsen Online analysis of over 500 user-generated health messages, only one met the FDA's four reporting criteria for adverse events.¹¹ Like every marketing approach, there is a continuum of risk—and potential benefit—depending on the execution. Risk is a factor of control over content and the environment in which it is distributed. As defined here, there are four levels of engagement for a brand, each with an associated risk and traditional marketing analogue:

- **Dissemination:** Using social technologies to distribute controlled content to a controlled environment (examples: RSS feeds or podcasting).
- **Syndication:** Distributing controlled content into an uncontrolled environment, or one which allows for two-way communication (examples: social bookmarking or corporate and brand blogs).

- **Conversation:** Facilitating dialog between the brand and consumers or among consumers within a controlled environment (example: branded community message boards).
- **Creation:** Creating user-generated content in uncontrolled environments (example: independent patient blog). Pharmaceutical marketers cannot create this type of content, although they can monitor and help frame the conversations as they would influence a media outlet.

Engagement Level	Content	Environment	Associated Risk	Traditional Analogue
Dissemination	Controlled	Controlled	Low	Direct Mail
Syndication	Controlled	Uncontrolled	Medium	Press Release
Conversation	Uncontrolled	Controlled	High	Town Hall Event
Creation	Uncontrolled	Uncontrolled	High (must monitor)	Media Coverage

Once a decision has been made to pursue a social marketing strategy, brands can choose tactics that align with their strategic objectives and their company's risk tolerance. For example, a diabetes drug seeking to support patient adherence could use a variety of social media tactics across the risk continuum:

Engagement Level	Social Media Tactic
Dissemination	Create a Twitter feed that provides daily inspirational messages to patients
Syndication	Create a day-in-the-life branded patient blog
Conversation	Create a moderated product wiki on brand Web site
Creation	Host a briefing for influential diabetes bloggers

As with any marketing program, the success of social media programs relies on a solid strategic objective and clearly defined success criteria. Educating the medical, legal, and regulatory teams about the brand's goals and objectives and what components are necessary for success can help marketers forge a successful partnership with the review team.

Crafting a Social Media Strategy

With adoption of social media skyrocketing at an exponential pace, the question of whether a brand will engage in social media is no longer “if,” but “when” and “how.” Use the following checklist to evaluate the social media opportunity for your brand.

- ❑ “Listen” to your audience talk about your therapeutic area and brand within social media: Use free aggregation tools such as Social Mention and Twilert to keep track of what is being said about your brand online, or use a monitoring service to conduct a full social media study for your brand.
- ❑ Map your audience on the engagement vs. outcome investment quadrant: Compare your audience demographic and psychographic information with the Forrester Social Technographics database. Leverage qualitative research findings to plot your audience on the outcome investment continuum.
- ❑ Determine the social media objective that is aligned with your audience and business objectives: Once you have mapped your target audience on the engagement vs. outcome investment quadrant, consider what social media objectives make sense for your audience. Remember to consider all stakeholders, including HCPs, payors, and caregivers, in your strategy.
- ❑ Facilitate conversations about social media and risk tolerance within your organization: Don’t wait until you are trying to get a social media program approved to start the conversation with your medical, legal, and regulatory teams. Schedule a meeting to introduce your audience findings and pertinent examples from your peers within the industry. Creating guardrails up front can expand your options for implementation.
- ❑ Stay up to date with social media programs within healthcare: Several resources exist for monitoring new social media programs that have launched in the healthcare industry. The Dose of Digital Healthcare Social Media Wiki logs and categorizes social media programs launched by pharmaceutical companies. Follow Twitter feeds of pharmaceutical interactive marketing experts.
- ❑ Implement a social media pilot: Once you have a strategy, consider implementing a pilot program to cost-effectively gauge interest and risk. Use the findings from the pilot to refine your strategy or secure funding for a larger scale implementation.

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