Pharma Digital Engagement Playbook:

4 Steps to Maximizing Adoption

Veeva

Welcome to the hybrid era

COVID-19 was a catalyst for expediting digital transformation in the life sciences industry, particularly customer engagement. Between March 2020 and May 2021, digital engagement skyrocketed, as the use of remote meetings and rep-sent email both increased fivefold, globally.[1]

Yet the needs and expectations of healthcare professionals (HCPs) were changing long before the restrictions of the pandemic arrived. Personal experiences with mobile, social, and digital technologies have been driving a consumerization effect where HCPs increasingly expect personalized, relevant, and frictionless experiences. This is especially true among digital natives, which now make up nearly 70% of all HCPs.[2]

Reps must now reimagine how they engage with customers and embrace digital as a permanent and essential component of a hybrid engagement model. This practical guide introduces four steps that can help you maximize digital adoption and optimize engagement moving forward.

SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN DIGITAL CHANNELS

5x
Virtual rep-to-HCP
meetings increased 5x

18min
Virtual sales call duration
averaged 18 minutes

36%
Rep-sent emails went up 5x,
with 36% average open rate

4x
Commercial content
volume increased 4x

(January 2020 - May 2021 comparison)

Discover more emerging trends in HCP engagement by visiting our **Digital Engagement Hub**.

The new blended approach to engagement

After more than a year of engaging virtually, both reps and HCPs have come to appreciate the longer and more meaningful interactions they're able to have in digital channels. With fewer interruptions, HCPs can be more attentive and engaged. Conversations can also be more scientific in nature, with most lasting anywhere from 15 to 20 minutes.

It's no wonder then that doctors, in general, don't want a return to pre-pandemic engagement approaches. In fact, 87% of HCPs want either all virtual or a mix of virtual and in-person meetings even after the restrictions of the pandemic end.[3]

Taking a hybrid approach that blends digital channels with face-to-face meetings lets your company deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time and place based on customer preferences.

THE BENEFITS OF A HYBRID APPROACH

More quality time
Make a stronger impact; sales reps engaging virtually get an average of 33% more time with an HCP.[4]

Engaged customers
Gain a deeper understanding of HCPs behavior and preferences and better meet their needs.

Optimized commercial strategies
Refine targeting and alignments combining face-to-face and digital interactions to reach your goals.

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3 "Is COVID-19 altering how pharma engages with HCPs?" Accenture, August 2020
4 Veeva Pulse: based on Top 20 benchmark of 3 Veeva CRM Engage Meetings per week; 30-minute duration of which 20 minutes is with HCP.

Greater sales growth, lower cost

One global life sciences company performed a two-year test to measure the impact of digital channels in one of its emerging growth markets. The program involved three separate segments: reps engaging with HCPs using only face-to-face visits, reps engaging solely via digital, and reps using combined face-to-face and digital interactions. The blended group performed the strongest, with sales growth of 15%, surpassing the combined sales growth of the two standalone segments by 3%. The company also found that digital engagement lowered its total cost of interaction, improving the cost efficiency of digitally enabled reps by 80%.

RESULTS OF HYBRID ENGAGEMENT
Top ten global pharma company — emerging market

15%
GROWTH

80%
COST EFFFICIENCY
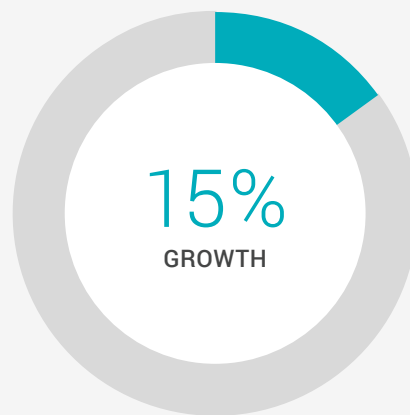
YOY BRAND SALES GROWTH

Rep only	9%
Digital only	3%
Rep + digital	**15%**
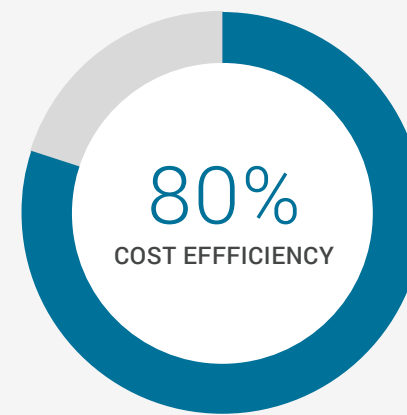
COST

Rep only	200
Rep + Digital	40

SOURCE: Guide to Digital HCP Engagement: Impact of digital channels in an emerging growth market

Key steps to maximize adoption and optimize outcomes

With digital channels at the core of hybrid engagement, commercial teams need new strategies and capabilities designed to maximize HCP interaction. Here are four steps to help you drive digital adoption within your organization and teach reps skills to succeed in a hybrid world.
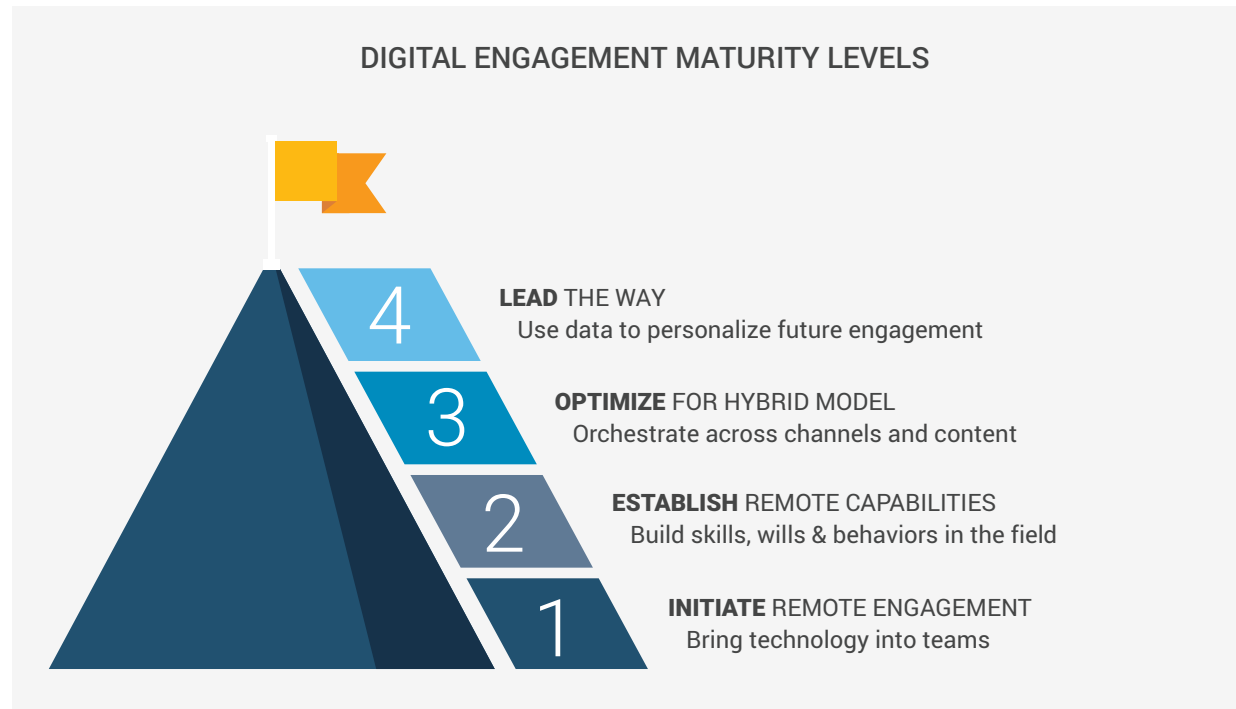
STEP 1 — Assess your maturity level

Before you even start defining what your new model will look like, you first need to understand your current situation. How far along is your company in adopting digital channels? Where are there gaps in skills and usage?

Assess your organization's digital engagement maturity level and review the capabilities required at each of the four stages: Initiate, Establish, Optimize, and Lead. Where does your organization stand in terms of these capabilities?

Don't worry if your company is still at Level 1 or 2. Although the pandemic significantly accelerated digital channel adoption, most companies are not yet fully mature when engaging digitally. The important factor is how quickly and how well you can move to the next level and beyond. That's where the following steps can help.

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT MATURITY LEVELS

4 — **LEAD** THE WAY
Use data to personalize future engagement

3 — **OPTIMIZE** FOR HYBRID MODEL
Orchestrate across channels and content

2 — **ESTABLISH** REMOTE CAPABILITIES
Build skills, wills & behaviors in the field

1 — **INITIATE** REMOTE ENGAGEMENT
Bring technology into teams

Any change at the organizational level must begin with leadership. Active executive sponsorship is a critical success factor for an ambitious transformation, helping ensure the hybrid strategy receives the prioritization and collaboration necessary to maximize adoption and effectiveness.

Define and share the vision

Now is the time to decide what the future state will look like. Define your vision for what a hybrid engagement model should include and how digital channels will support your efforts. You can start by developing simple and clear messages that answer these five key questions:

➜ How can we articulate the vision and align it with business objectives?

➜ Who will be part of the strategic team to educate employees on the new model across functional areas?

➜ How can we clearly communicate expectations?

➜ What will be our measures of success?

➜ How should we hold teams and individuals accountable?

Articulating the vision to your staff and field teams will help them understand the importance of their roles in making the new strategy successful. Explain the support they will receive to be successful, including training plans that enable them to attain and hone the new skills they'll need as their jobs evolve. Highlight the benefits for HCPs and reps of using digital channels to deliver more personalized interactions at the right time in the right channel.

85% of B2B organizations expect hybrid reps to be the most common sales role over the next three years.

"Omnichannel in B2B sales: The new normal in a year that has been anything but," McKinsey & Co., March 2021

Gain buy-in and overcome resistance

Anticipate the challenges of changing established processes, responsibilities, and mindsets across the company as you transform the engagement model. Don't underestimate the effort required to enact change across the organization.

For reps, the change required to embrace digital engagement is anything but easy. Many will need to step outside of their comfort zone, rethink their approach to selling, and adopt new ways of working that strike the right balance of in-person and remote engagement across different work environments.

Members of your field force will typically react in one of four different ways to change: as Critic, Victim, Bystander, or Change Navigator. During the pandemic, the sudden acceleration in digital engagement saw field forces reacting mainly as Change Navigators ("it's finally time to change") and Bystanders, who are tempted to avoid remote engagement until an improbable "back to pre-pandemic" normal returns.

Therefore, your main challenge as you move to the next level of maturity is to get buy-in from the Bystanders in your organization, converting them into Change Navigators by helping them understand the benefits of evolving towards their new roles.

THE FOUR REACTIONS TO CHANGE

Critic	**Victim**	**Bystander**	**Change Navigator**
Vocally opposes and undermines change	Panics and feel too much of a change at once	Avoids getting involved or is in denial	Positive, resilient, and able to adapt to new circumstances

Empower reps with robust training and coaching

Creating meaningful interactions via digital channels will require learning new skills for most of your salesforce. Training and coaching are essential to help your teams quickly adopt and excel at digital engagement.

Ultimately, the most critical aspect of any training program is ensuring the involvement of first-line managers, district managers, or sales managers in the program. By involving the local leadership teams, they can influence adoption and provide valuable insights and feedback to adjust and optimize your training program.

➔ **Technology training:** Make it a priority to get reps comfortable with the technology they'll use to engage with HCPs digitally. Your training should also include basic troubleshooting and interface tips reps can use when they're helping HCPs use the technology. For example, give them practical advice on how to handle a typical situation with an HCP, from downloading the meeting application to connecting from a hospital computer.

➔ **Digital communication skills training:** Provide soft skills training to help your reps communicate effectively during remote meetings. Address telegenic skills (managing eye contact, tone, and pace) and active listening skills to ensure engagement and minimize distractions. Time management should also be honed to respect and maximize time with the customer.

➔ **Role-playing:** Put theory into practice and ensure maximum program effectiveness with role-playing. Work on progressive levels of complexity in terms of participants and scenarios, with an average of 15 minutes of role plays and targeted feedback. Role-plays should include real-life situations that enable reps to practice handling situations such as a distracted HCP, an HCP with an emergency, an HCP requiring specific information, and technical issues during remote meetings.

➔ **Coaching:** Empower first-line managers in the adoption process by briefing them ahead of reps to deliver clear messages. They must then drive the coaching program to help field reps grow their skills and address potential concerns immediately. Programs should include setting and evaluating objectives, remote coaching, and sharing best practices.
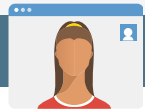
THREE KEY PILLARS FOR AN EFFECTIVE COACHING PROGRAM

OBJECTIVES

- Set/reevaluate progressive and reachable monthly objectives
- Conduct activity checks (e.g. number of meetings, duration, content shown, postponment rate, etc.)

REMOTE COACHING

- Assess the meeting proposal: tone, value proposition structure, frequent objections, etc.
- Calls with Area Manager as silent third-party
- Role plays with assessment grid
- Same frequency as in-person

BEST PRACTICE SHARING

- Constant communication on challenges, best practices, and success stories
- Identify area/team champions
- Community and group sharing

STEP **4** **Optimize and scale your content**

While always important, content has become even more critical since the pandemic began. Our global Veeva Pulse data shows a 4x increase in the volume of commercial content produced—likely driven by the longer virtual meetings and more rep emails sent during the pandemic.[5] Indeed, roughly 80% of virtual meetings now use pre-approved content versus just 30% of in-person HCP calls.[6]

That said, it's important to focus on more than increasing the quantity of content available to your reps. To engage HCPs and help your reps become trusted influencers and educators, you need to create content that is:

> ✔ **Fresh and timely**   ✔ **Personalized and meaningful**   ✔ **Optimized for remote engagement**

That's why brands are embracing new modular content strategies that help them quickly deliver and repurpose compliant, personalized content across markets, channels, and regions.

Effective digital engagement requires content that is created or customized with digital channels in mind. Text, diagrams, fonts, colors, imagery, and flow should all be optimized for digital presentation and viewing. For example, complex diagrams with contrasting colors and small fonts won't translate well for HCPs using small devices.

COMMERCIAL CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS

Elements	Digital Channels	In-Person/CLM Detailing
Messaging & Content	• Customer-centric, personalized content • Scientific and service-driven information • Both high-level and in-depth information for longer, more meaningful virtual meetings	• Additional opportunities to personalize the conversation • Product information, including leave-behinds with more in-depth information
Style/Structure	• Grabs attention early with relevant, engaging information • Simple and clear language • Encourages HCP engagement	• Rep delivery helps engage the audience • Supports reps discussion points • Body language helps reps communicate key points
Format	• Variety of CLM content and formats (CLM, PPT, PDF) • Easy-to-read, one-topic slides • Avoids animations/transitions	• Mainly one CLM content piece • Slides with multiple topics • Animations and transitions to enhance interaction
Design	• Easily viewable on a small device • Font size, imagery, diagrams are sized appropriately	• Can use more complex illustrations and diagrams

[5] Source: Veeva Pulse Data, Global comparison, March 2020 to April 2021
[6] Source: Veeva Pulse Data, January – December 2020

One million virtual meetings later

Boehringer Ingelheim, a top 20 global pharmaceutical company, had the vision to pilot virtual engagements in select markets even before COVID-19, which allowed for quick acceleration of its global rollout in 2020. The company standardized on **Veeva CRM Engage Meeting**, using the platform to host roundtables, seminars, and advisory boards that allow physicians to exchange useful information on medical cases and diagnoses.

By easily facilitating compliant online meetings, Boehringer Ingelheim was able to extend the reach and productivity of its field team, giving them greater flexibility to connect with HCPs anytime, anywhere.

HIGHLIGHTS

1 million remote meetings hosted in 12 months

Doubled the average duration of medical sales reps' remote meeting to 20 minutes

Adopted remote meetings as a preferred channel for interacting with many HCPs

> *Veeva Engage Meeting gives our medical sales reps and medical science liaisons a better way to connect with doctors and provide them with the information they need on new therapeutic options.*
>
> Alex Renner, Global Head of IT Marketing and Sales, Boehringer Ingelheim

Conclusion

Even now that healthcare organizations are allowing in-person activity again, there hasn't been a return to pre-COVID face-to-face engagement levels. Needs and expectations have changed too much in the meantime for a return to business-as-usual.

As you transform your commercial model to embrace a flexible approach that mixes face-to-face, virtual, and on-demand meetings, you'll realize the benefits of using digital channels to keep HCPs engaged. By delivering the experience that HCPs want and expect, you'll optimize the impact of your sales and marketing efforts and drive new levels of commercial sales, which ultimately helps you help those who have the most to gain: the patients who need your products.

To learn more, head to Veeva's Digital Engagement Hub.

About us

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