



Four Pillars of Data-Driven KOL Engagement

How medical affairs can surmount access barriers to engage the right experts



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Field medical engagement with key opinion leaders (KOLs) before a product launch correlates to a **measurable increase in treatment adoption**, according to the latest Veeva Pulse Field Trends report **[Figure 1]**.

However, traditional KOL plans over-index on individuals that medical science liaisons (MSLs) already know and can access, failing to prioritize those that could be more relevant. Fragmented KOL data and a lack of visibility into emerging experts act as barriers to finding and accessing the right people. As a result, 30% of global experts¹ have no recorded interactions with MSLs, limiting scientific exchange, medical insights, and potential treatment adoption.

30%



of global experts have no recorded MSL interactions

Source: U.S. Veeva Pulse, Veeva Link Key People data, April 2022–April 2023.

In this white paper, you'll learn how to increase the effectiveness of your MSL team by rethinking KOL identification, prioritization, and engagement.

Leading companies are using deep KOL data and a proven expert ranking methodology to:

- Find new customers and improve their chances of engaging with them successfully
- Develop closer relationships with experts who are already relevant to their organizations
- Improve the impact and strategic value of their MSL teams

FIGURE 1

Early education by MSLs has a lasting impact

MSL engagement prior to launch leads to 1.5x increase in treatment adoption within first six months

1.5x



Source: U.S.-based analysis of migraine products using data from Veeva Link, Veeva OpenData, Veeva Compass, and Veeva Pulse, March 2019–June 2023.

¹As identified by Veeva Link Key People

Pushing on open doors

Plans to identify KOLs often default to manual research of publicly available information centered on limited criteria: think internet searches relating to which experts have recently published or spoken at congresses. However meticulous, this approach quickly reaches its limitations in a dynamic landscape that includes digital opinion leaders (DOLs) and emerging experts [Figure 2].

While such public information is illustrative, it might not succeed in pinpointing the most relevant experts for your engagement objectives. For example, teams could easily overlook digital leaders — HCPs who might not have published much recent research but still have a strong online presence and are influential in the scientific and medical community.

As Robert Faison, executive director of medical affairs at Paratek, observes: “There’s also a key opinion leader that’s in the community. These are more than likely the people who are actually treating the majority of patients.” They should not be overlooked.

A typical outcome of traditional planning is an overreliance on KOLs who already have well-established relationships with an organization. To be more effective, your medical teams need to ensure that data informs your field medical strategy when identifying, segmenting, and collaborating with experts.

FIGURE 2

Traditional plans don’t reflect a dynamic scientific landscape



“We’re really taking a data-driven approach to our engagement with external experts to ensure our science is communicated in a way that’s meaningful and helps positively impact patient outcomes.”

Tom Keith-Welsh,
Head of Medical Digital, Data, Analytics, and Systems,
GSK

Introducing common standards across the organization and taking a more systematic approach to research will increase the chance of finding the right KOLs for your treatment. Using one comprehensive source of information will improve how MSLs engage those experts and, later, form productive partnerships [Figure 3].

FIGURE 3
Four pillars of data-driven KOL engagement



Identify the most relevant experts

Your medical affairs teams will need to engage different experts based on the product lifecycle stage and specific activity. Their audiences will look distinct depending on whether the company is in the pre-launch phase (when early advocacy and product awareness are the focus) or asset planning (when trial and eventual adoption are the goals).

Once medical teams identify which audiences they need to engage, they must accurately match KOLs to each use case. Done manually this is like searching for the needle in the proverbial haystack, as teams are forced to sift through a deep pool of potential physicians and consider all relevant experience against multiple vectors [Figure 4].

FIGURE 4

Searching for a needle in the haystack

POTENTIAL KOL SELECTION CRITERIA

- Activity-based (involved in trials, speaking at congresses)
- Experience in therapy area
- Interest in specified scientific topics
- Willing to engage with biopharma sector
- Strong social presence
- Practices in the community



An ecosystem of key people



Scientific experts

These leaders drive scientific developments by authoring publications and guidelines, contributing to congresses, and leading clinical trials. Although the top tier is well known in its therapeutic areas (TAs), finding the middle and emerging tiers requires data aggregation across multiple channels.



Digital opinion leaders (DOLs)

The rise of social media has propelled DOLs into key drivers of online medical discourse. Although not yet considered experts in their TAs, DOLs could still have an outsized influence on the online conversation surrounding your drug, as a result of their large reach and high audience engagement.



Clinical leaders

While they are not necessarily driving the science or the digital conversation, these HCPs are treating the most patients. Medical affairs teams need to engage clinical leaders during both the pre- and post-launch phases.

Taking a data-driven approach increases the chance of shortlisting only the most relevant KOLs. An effective KOL data platform will extract, organize, and store live data from a vast number of sources so your teams can hone in on the right audience for each use case. Teams can then analyze and shortlist each KOL objectively, helping to avoid an overreliance on well-established relationships. When integrated with your CRM, this intelligence can be viewed alongside related data, such as all the KOL's previous interactions with your organization.

"It's straightforward to find the top layer of experts, as they publish a lot. Veeva Link helped us to identify the middle group that is important enough to matter but not yet well-known. This is critical for a launch and when you're moving into a new therapeutic area."

Bas Van de Kamp,
Director, Medical Affairs Systems,
Idorsia Pharmaceuticals

Applying common standards across the company should also remove bias and save time. For instance, if the whole organization uses the same scoring approach and can filter and visualize searches, it becomes straightforward to decile KOLs across multiple vectors. Scale becomes achievable with these capabilities.

HOW CAN A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH HELP?

- ✓ Data is collected and curated from myriad sources so it is easier to find the right experts for specific activities
- ✓ Objective scoring approach eliminates bias
- ✓ One source of truth means common standards can be set
- ✓ Identify rising stars and be confident that the full range of experts is accounted for

IMPACT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION:



Avoid hours of incomplete/inconsistent manual research



End over-reliance on established KOL relationships

"Veeva Link Key People is a very useful tool. It provides a way not only to identify [KOLs] but also validate their level. It can actually give you a score associated with their prominence in research and presentations at major meetings and symposia, and their social media presence."

Robert Faison
Executive Director, Medical Affairs,
Paratek

Segment potential experts

Once you are confident that you have a complete set of relevant experts, you can start to segment the list, profile key people for your treatment, and plan field team outreach. Industry data can answer strategic planning questions, including:

- Which experts are most relevant for specific activities e.g., clinical trials, publications, speaking on an identified topic?
- Which experts will help maximize our reach?
- What is the optimal number to approach for a given objective, and how do we make better use of the network effort?
- Are there digital influencers we should engage?
- Which ones are ‘digital originators’ (who share their own ideas) vs. ‘digital messengers’ (who mostly amplify other people’s content)?

Teams benefit from using the same KOL data platform and working from one set of information. For instance, leading biopharma companies like **Astellas** and **GSK** are in the process of streamlining their approach to KOL engagement globally: all teams use the same industry KOL intelligence data, which provides curated expert

profiles with objective scoring of their scientific and digital activities.

Medical affairs finds it easier to complete their analysis and make competitor comparisons (for example, during fair-value assessments) when working from a single source of truth.

Importantly, using trusted industry data doesn’t rule out evaluating KOLs against bespoke criteria important to your organization (such as whether access is even likely).

HOW CAN A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH HELP?

- ✓ Objective scores for segmentation and tiering
- ✓ Standardized, scalable approach across the organization
- ✓ Easier to analyze and make competitor comparisons
- ✓ Target lists can be regularly refreshed against agreed criteria

IMPACT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION:



Analysis feeds into resourcing models and decisions



Make best use of field resources



Match the right KOL to the right activity



Clear rationale for each KOL saves time, improves accuracy, and transparency

“The right data is foundational to our engagement strategy. We can quickly identify who the relevant KOLs are, and organize those KOLs based on when and where they are sharing scientific information and what scientific information they are sharing.”

Christine Castro,
Director, Medical Affairs Excellence,
Lundbeck

PILLAR 3

Surmount access barriers

According to **Veeva data**, 30% of global experts identified in Veeva Link Key People have no recorded interactions with MSLs. Whether medical affairs teams are overlooking these KOLs in mapping exercises or simply failing to record interactions, opportunities are being missed — either to engage at all or to bring insights back to the organization.

The right intelligence will help cut through to experts that your organization cannot currently access. By understanding KOL interests, education backgrounds, patient mix, and recent scientific activities, MSLs can prepare for calls more effectively: this could range from minor changes (e.g., a better icebreaker) to finding a compelling reason why that expert should engage with your company for the first time. Knowing where a KOL stands on a topic important to them will help MSLs improve their approach.

It's easier to open doors once you understand the connections between HCPs and how they've collaborated previously. Knowing which peers are in a KOL's sphere of influence could help bridge the gap to a previously inaccessible HCP. You could gain visibility of a KOL's environment through the lens of related associations (for instance, close connections to other members) and congresses (e.g., if they are due to co-present or chair a speaker panel).

HOW CAN A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH HELP?

- ✓ MSLs can see aggregated profiles of each KOL's interests and scientific activities across channels
- ✓ Network maps help teams find mutual connections
- ✓ Association maps identify opportunities to make an introduction or arrange a meeting

IMPACT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION:



Reach low-access KOLs by understanding their needs



Use network maps to understand influence and connections



Share a single customer view to improve cross-functional collaboration

“One of our field medics had been seeing a particular thought leader for a long time and thought they knew everything there was to know about them. By looking at Veeva Link, they found areas of unknown insight into some of the thought leader's activities. It took that conversation onto a different level, built their credibility, and it means that both have a much more valuable conversation.”

Worldwide Capability Lead,
Customer Profiling and Insights,
Top Ten Pharma

PILLAR 4

Deepen scientific exchange

MSLs are expected to master the different treatment pathways (and associated risks) in their disease area. They need to understand the broader clinical picture, including the competitive landscape, new clinical developments, scientific discoveries, and emerging technology.

MSLs that bring a deep clinical understanding and good knowledge of their customers' interests and activities are best positioned to facilitate genuine scientific exchange. Deep data about a therapeutic area ecosystem supports MSLs to build knowledge quickly – critical during a launch – so they can translate their expertise into effective messaging. This is particularly important for new MSLs, who usually face a steep learning curve.

MSLs will spend less time on manual research if they can go to one place to access all relevant information about their KOLs' recent activities and interests before trying to engage them. It's easier for these teams to reach out proactively when the latest developments, general medicine news, and education about their TAs are at their fingertips.

HOW CAN A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH HELP?

- ✓ MSLs gain knowledge quickly and easily on their KOLs and TAs
- ✓ New MSLs get up to speed quickly
- ✓ Accelerate MSL readiness during launch
- ✓ Track engagements (e.g., in CRM) to measure impact

"Veeva Link is a very valuable resource. Our MSLs were able to find all the information at their fingertips and better prepare for meetings with thought leaders and HCPs."

Jessica McDaniel,
Senior Director, Head of US Field Medical Affairs,
Genmab

IMPACT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION:



MSLs spend less time on manual research and are more productive



Stronger scientific exchange means closer expert relationships



Real-time intelligence leads to more opportunities to engage

"The real-time insights from Veeva Link enable fast reactions and more focused and impactful engagements. They help us build broader and deeper connections with the scientific community."

Margaret Doyle,
Senior Global Medical Affairs Leader, Teclistamab,
Johnson & Johnson Innovative Medicine

Beginning a high-quality dialogue

Commercial success in biopharma hinges on the effectiveness of medical affairs: these teams play a critical role in identifying and engaging the right experts at different stages of the product lifecycle, taking into account activities, channels, and potential impact.

Their interactions provide valuable market feedback on a product's potential in clinical and commercial terms. When able to access the right intelligence, field medical can extend its reach by prioritizing KOLs based on influence and engaging emerging experts.

Irrespective of whether or not you plan to expand your MSL workforce, helping medical affairs to work smarter and have higher-quality interactions with the right customers will maximize their impact.

"In the launch phase, you want to get the data out to as many healthcare providers as possible. Because of their sphere of influence, KOLs allow you to do that. By engaging the right KOL, you can actually impact the knowledge of hundreds or thousands of healthcare providers."

Robert Faison,
Executive Director, Medical Affairs,
Paratek

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