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# The Secret to Multichannel Success: Lead with a Conductor

In today's pharma industry, there are nearly as many communication channels as there are instruments in the Philharmonic...

Jan van den Burg looks at what companies need to do to execute a multichannel strategy that's always in tune with the customer.

**T**he London Philharmonic Orchestra's Principal Conductor, Vladimir Jurowski,

coordinates an ensemble of nearly 100 musicians. His expert choreography ensures that when all of their timbres

flow in the right order, at just the right time, they create mind-blowing music.

In today's pharmaceutical industry, it seems there are nearly as many communication channels as there are instruments in the Philharmonic, and a similar level of coordination is needed to ensure multichannel success.

Then, there's the added challenge of managing interactions with today's multifaceted customer, who could be a government agent; payer; physician (primary, specialist, or key opinion



## WHAT PHYSICIANS WANT

In a recent panel discussion with physicians from Spain, France and the UK, three common themes emerged:

- 1) Physicians often prefer to communicate with pharmaceutical sales reps through digital channels;
- 2) Physicians appreciate the variety of channels but are frustrated by the lack of relevant content or coordinated outreach; and
- 3) Physicians don't have time to meet as often with sales reps but still want information that will help them improve patient care.

leader); nurse; hospital administrator; or pharmacist.

Considering all the complexity in today's life sciences industry, hitting the right note is much more difficult than just communicating through all channels. It requires a tremendous amount of coordination between sales, marketing and medical affairs. Companies get it, but don't necessarily have all the right roles, processes and technologies in place to execute a multichannel

strategy that's always in tune with the customer.

To start, we can take a cue from the London Philharmonic by establishing a 'customer conductor' who can orchestrate all elements of communication to deliver a valuable interaction for each unique customer.

With a customer conductor leading the effort (and that could be a team of people), companies can leverage vital data about customer channel preferences, profile data, and insights gained from

previous interactions with the company to guide decisions about content, frequency, and channel. This also places companies in a good position to adapt to changing conditions as they occur rather than waiting until reviewing a campaign report, for example, weeks after the campaign has ended.

**With the cloud, all of the information can be viewed in one place: a single system that's centrally accessible from anywhere in real-time.**

Even when a strong conductor is holding the baton, he or she needs the right instruments — in this case, technologies that seamlessly connect customer communications channels.

New cloud-based

technologies empower companies with increased visibility for a more complete view of customer interactions across channels like face-to-face, phone, email, and online.

With the cloud, all of the information can be viewed in one place: a single system that's easily and centrally accessible from anywhere in real-time. Many new technologies also deliver companies the ability to personally engage with customers through the channels they prefer. Combined, it's a perfect harmony.

**Without customer insight, it's just noise**

From online to face-to-face sales tools, life sciences companies have been spreading their proverbial eggs in many different communications baskets, but each of these channels often stands alone

As a result, this approach only scratches the surface of the full potential of customer-centric, multichannel communication.

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## THE FUTURE OF MULTICHANNEL IS HERE

Consider this scenario: A pharmaceutical rep calls on a doctor and learns that the majority of his COPD patients are children. The rep adds this detail to the customer profile in his organization's multichannel CRM system, available in the cloud for all users. Later that day, when the same physician goes to the pharmaco's web site following an email received from the rep, he is greeted with tailored information, including data about mean change in growth rates in children when using beclometasone inhalers. Perfect – relevant information, exactly when the customer has time to access it. The doctor leaves the site informed and satisfied with the interaction, fostering a long-term customer relationship. This is the future, thanks to modern cloud-based technologies ... and it's here now.

Worse still, more is not always better. In fact, it can have the opposite effect of creating a lot of ear-piercing noise that causes physicians to respond by limiting access and turning their time to other, less intrusive ways of receiving drug information.

Using multiple channels to over-communicate with customers in the hopes that

something will stick is a tactic of limited value, at best.

"Multichannel communication strategies aren't new. For years, the life sciences industry has been investing in various channels, intent on providing customers with the information they need," said Eric Newmark, program director for IDC Health Insights.

"Unfortunately, the customer interaction information has been locked in different systems designed to execute across each different channel individually," added Newmark. "For multichannel to truly be powerful, sales and marketing need a combined, single view of the customer to deliver a seamless and coordinated customer experience."

Indeed, one of the greatest causes of discord today is the fact that customer interaction data — specifically, which channel and what content the physician prefers — is either not captured at all, or, if collected, is isolated in different systems that are not integrated.

Any data that might be useful gets stuck in silos. As a result, there is no consolidated intelligence that can be used to inform brand teams or field representatives in the next customer interaction.

Without this combined data intelligence, current multichannel communications wind up as merely a push of

Using multiple channels to over-communicate with customers in the hopes that something will stick is a tactic of limited value.

content that the company wants to send, instead of a pull of content that the customer wants to receive.

The communications are not based on customer preferences for how they want to receive the information (e.g., which channel) and what information they want to receive (e.g., which message). Plus, by leveraging preferred channels, companies can overcome government-enforced limitations around insights that can be gained from certain individual channels.

For example, email open rate tracking is not allowed in

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Germany, so companies can turn off tracking mechanisms in order to continue utilizing this valuable channel in that region. And, without such insights, commercial teams are limited in their ability to change course if necessary.

Marketing also loses a valuable opportunity to modify interaction tactics mid-campaign to improve impact, resulting in a lower ROI.

New multitenant cloud-based systems and platforms, however, enable multichannel data accessibility, seamless integration, and flexibility. Companies can collect and analyze important data about customer interactions to enable both sales and marketing to understand a customer's needs and respond appropriately.

Each proceeding customer interaction, then, is consistent, relevant and timely for higher quality interactions — rather than just high quantity. It ensures that customers receive the content they want, when and how they want it — say,

in between appointments on a mobile device, after-hours on an iPad or at lunch in their email.

When physicians' interests are accounted for, they are more willing to take the time to absorb the information because it is relevant, personal and delivered on their own terms.

### The encore — ongoing positive interactions

The next crucial step is to leverage the insights gathered from previous multichannel customer interactions to continuously tailor customer engagement with each new interaction.

A life sciences sales rep with a full view of the customer can now effectively coordinate what information goes to which customer, the best channels to use, and when to deliver the content, designing a customer-centric engagement strategy that brings everything together.

That is not to say that sales will determine the marketing plan — sales and

## The informed multichannel sales rep can serve as a customer conductor with the ability to influence other channels...

marketing have separate roles for a reason, and should complement each other.

Instead, the informed multichannel sales rep can serve as a customer conductor with the ability to influence other channels and create a unique, cross-channel synergy that incorporates customer preferences and personal relationships.

The result is that each communication will be more impactful and more likely to be consumed, whether it's direct mail, an online detail or a face-to-face interaction. With each positive experience, the physician is more receptive to

communications from the rep in the future — possibly one of the greatest benefits yet.

As it is, the average primary care physician has just two to eight minutes (depending on the country), to spend face-to-face with pharmaceutical sales reps.

Omar Ali, formulary development pharmacist for Surrey & Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, explains:

“Physicians are up against the clock all day to manage both high-quality best patient care and meet financial and administrative challenges. Meeting with reps ranks low on the priority list, so we don't see as many — and the time we do spend with reps is significantly decreasing.”

Furthermore, as CMI/Compas Media Vitals' 2013 study points out, the number of physicians willing to see reps is steadily declining.(1) Also, in a 2013 survey of 1,000+ general practitioners in the UK, 52 percent stated that they do not see any reps in a typical week, while 26 percent only see one rep a week.(2)

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Many European governments have enacted policies either banning or dramatically limiting drug reps from accessing physicians.

For example, access to physicians in Sweden is limited to one visit per year. In Poland, reps can only access physicians in state hospitals after 6 p.m., and pharmacy access is heavily restricted in Turkey.

Better customer interactions and new digital channels may open windows where doors had been shut, to greatly expand pharmaceutical selling opportunities. In fact, studies show that the proportion of European doctors who prefer to consume their information on their mobile phone or via text over in-person visits has grown from zero to 29 percent in recent years while 66 percent of doctors prefer email, up from 58 percent in 2009.(2)

“Even though I’m pressed for time, I still usually need the information that reps deliver so I often request that they send via email ... or even by text,” added Ali. “I continue to be shocked

— and, worse still, frustrated — when reps say they are prohibited from email and they don’t offer a digital alternative.”

Fortunately, things are changing quickly. Today, only the most advanced cloud CRM technology enables sales reps to send approved promotional content via email — a practice once considered challenging in the industry due to risk of non-compliance.

Email communications, expertly orchestrated by a customer conductor, offer a dramatically new level of value and effectiveness. Reps can quickly and easily respond to the question “can I get a copy of that,” extending the call beyond the walls of the office. And, low-access physicians may become easy-access with just a few clicks.

In addition to email and mobile, there’s also a growing interest in e-details and other online sources. Nearly a quarter of the 1,000 general practitioner respondents to a doctors.net.uk survey said they preferred to find drug information via

## Life sciences companies can finally engage with their customers on their terms...

independent online resources. Indeed, it’s a multichannel world these days – physicians are choosing an average of 2.9 different preferred channels of communication, according to a 2013 study.(2)

“Reaching me via different channels is not merely a luxury today; it’s essential to providing me with any important information that pharmaceutical companies want me to learn,” said Dr. Jean-Paul Stahl, who practices in France. “Ideally, I would like to receive drug information through various means so I can carefully review it during an unexpected break, or from home.”

Cloud-enabled multichannel interactions offer many benefits, including:

- Comprehensive view of the customer, including preferences and behaviors.
- Highly orchestrated communications based upon customers’ specific needs.
- Ability to leverage the right multichannel tools most efficiently.
- Best physician experience, regardless of how or when they engage with the company.
- More productive interactions versus stand-alone, uncoordinated communications; and
- Enhanced marketing effectiveness with firsthand view of customer interactions.

### A standing ovation

By combining next-generation technology with informed customer conductors, life sciences companies can finally engage with their customers on their terms to foster strong, lasting relationships. Sales reps benefit from a more complete view of the customer, including channels that they may otherwise have been

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unable to leverage or see.

This full-scale visibility, combined with integrated technology that makes it easy and efficient to extend interactions well beyond face-to-face visits, makes even non-personal channels ... personal. The multichannel communications are more meaningful, and customers, in turn, are better informed about the latest drug information to best meet the needs of their patients. Please, take a bow.

### About the author



Jan van den Burg is vice president of commercial strategy, Europe for **Veeva Systems**.

He focuses on developing business strategies in the commercial pharmaceutical function.

### Sources

1. CMI/Compas, “**2013 Media Vitals Study**,” July 2013.
2. **Doctors.net.uk**, part of the M3 Group with operations in Asia, U.S. and Europe.

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