



EMD Serono: Navigating a Changing Sales Environment

“With everything that’s rapidly changing due to COVID-19, there’s going to be a need for new data and new ways to engage our customers. Emails can’t be the only thing anymore,” says Joel VanderMeulen, EMD Serono’s senior director of commercial strategy and operations for neurology and oncology. VanderMeulen elaborates, “We know that networks are consolidating and there’s a real need to understand those connections between those networks. Those systems, those connections, those networks will be a part of [how we engage with customers in the future.]”

EMD SERONO – AT A GLANCE

- North American biopharma business of Merck KGaA
- US Headquarters: Rockland, MA
- Focus: Endocrinology, fertility, neurology, and oncology

When COVID-19 hit, it took everyone by surprise, and companies — including EMD Serono — had to act fast. “Nobody was ready for this. All of a sudden, within a few weeks, we had to retool all of our materials and implement a digital approach that we didn’t have. We needed to set this up at a rapid pace. Also, we had to do it all from our home offices. I’m sure we were not the only ones in this situation, but we learned a lot of things.”

Customer Reference Data as a Key Business Asset

When asked about the importance of customer reference data to the business, VanderMeulen discussed the impact of having quality data to the business. “It starts with a golden record. It starts with a single source of truth. If you don’t have that, then everything else falls apart. Your analytics, your reporting, if you [don’t have quality data] there, you build a very shaky foundation. I think as we’ve evolved with both Veeva OpenData and Veeva Network, we’re confident in our data, the business is confident in the data, the field is confident in the data, and when they have that confidence, everybody’s just in a better place.” Mr. Vandermeulen also expanded on the value of having the affiliations and network data included in Veeva OpenData, as well as its interoperability with Veeva CRM. “We’ve been able to leverage the affiliations and the networks. We’ve been able to bridge it to help impact our segmentation. We’re constantly learning about new rich elements within Veeva OpenData and how we can integrate that into CRM.” He continues on how that integration with CRM affects the sales team, “My job as an operations person is to get information in the workflow of our reps. If it’s in their workflow, if they see it every day, they will use it. People don’t have time to wait two or three days for a doctor to be put into the system and then validated. It needs to happen very quickly. And that’s one of those inherent advantages of having Veeva OpenData.”

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– **Joel VanderMeulen**, senior director – commercial strategy, analytics and operations, neurology and oncology, EMD Serono

Managing the Internal Change Process at EMD Serono

With all of the change that had to occur so quickly, VanderMeulen also discussed how EMD Serono managed the switch to a new customer reference data system. VanderMeulen recounts, “We deployed Veeva OpenData right at that point when we were growing quite a bit as a company, when everybody gets brand new territories, and everybody gets brand new doctors. Therefore, they didn't notice if there was a change.” Regarding the implementation of Veeva OpenData, he shares the experience from his perspective. “I'm on the business side, not at all the technical side. What it felt like from the business side was pretty incredible. I don't know if it was just really easy to do this, if our internal IT and commercial ops teams are just that good, or if when you partner [with Veeva] it's just that easy. I'm sure it wasn't that easy and that there were lots of hurdles, but I never heard about them. I never felt them, which, from the business standpoint, was perfect. There was very little disruption and I thought it was managed very, very well. So, kudos to [the Veeva team] and to the internal teams at EMD Serono that worked through this together.”

Regarding the internal change management, he remarked, “It definitely helped that we were all aligned. Nobody thought this was catching them off guard. Everybody wanted to make this happen and wanted it to be successful. I would [share with them about the improved quality of the data and show them specific features]. I was able to drum up a lot of interest ahead of time. I think that way, when it came out, people were excited for it.”

Transitioning HCPs was Critical to Success

Helping their customers adjust to a new way of engaging was also an important part of transitioning to the digital model. “We learned very quickly that our customers were also going through a dramatic shift. Some of them were very technology savvy, some were not. So, we tried to approach it with a sense of empathy. Instead of just trying to get time with our customers to just sell them, we spent time trying to understand what they were going through, what their offices were going through. And then, try to get them comfortable with these channels. We don't know what's going to happen when we get to that next normal. Are we going to be out there face-to-face every day? Will a certain percentage of our customers want to engage with us through a virtual channel? We just don't know. So, we need to get comfortable with all of them. We've been able to leverage Veeva CRM Engage Meeting through some of this, which has been very helpful and has received very positive feedback from the field and our customers.”

Going forward, VanderMeulen is excited about the opportunities he sees with the growing amount of data that Veeva continues to add to its solutions. “There seems to be new information all the time. We tend to find one or two things each release that we think might help the business. We'll continue to look to [Veeva] because we know that they are taking in insights across the entire industry and bringing us the type of information that we need to be better in our day to day.”