# Maximize Digital Channels with Smarter Field Planning

Digital engagement is not a novel concept in the life sciences industry. As early as 2016, **90% of the industry[1] believed that "digital business is an enabler of strategic growth."**

Today, **87% of HCPs prefer either a completely virtual or a hybrid virtual engagement model with sales reps.**[2] Veeva Pulse Data shows that digital engagement channels have been on the rise in the past year. In March 2021, pharma reps around the world sent over eight million rep-generated emails and conducted over 600,000 remote meetings.[3]

HCP ENGAGEMENT PREFERENCES

87% | 48% virtual and in-person
39% virtual
10% in-person
3% no meetings
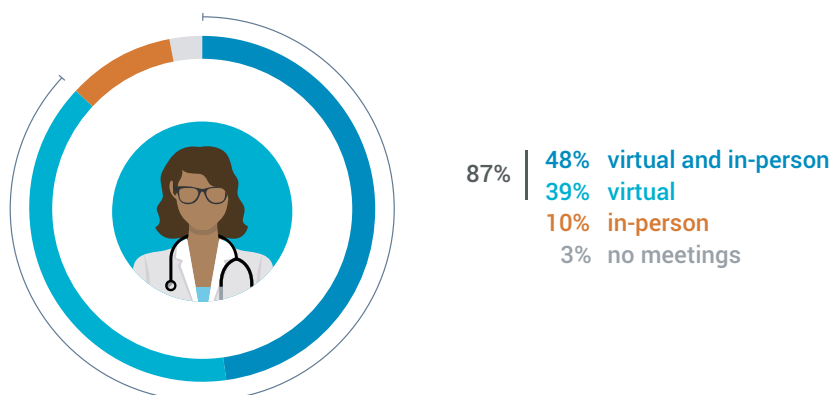
1   "Breathing new agility into the pharmaceutical industry," Accenture, 2016.
2   "Is COVID-19 altering how pharma engages with HCPs?" Accenture, August 2020.
3   Veeva Pulse Trends, Veeva, March 2020 to March 2021.

Opportunities for Deeper Engagement

Though this change is a shift away from familiar paradigms, it presents a unique opportunity to increase reach and engagement with customers in a digital space.

Digital is not new to pharmaceutical field teams. These teams have been using digital channels frequently enough to prove these channels are practical and efficient. According to Veeva Pulse Data, the average duration of a remote meeting with an HCP in the U.S. is 31 minutes long,[4] a substantial difference from the three to five minutes in a face-to-face call. A half-hour conversation with an HCP requires more focus and preparation from the field rep, but also provides more opportunity for deeper engagement.

MONTHLY DIGITAL MEETINGS IN U.S.[4]

Call duration in minutes
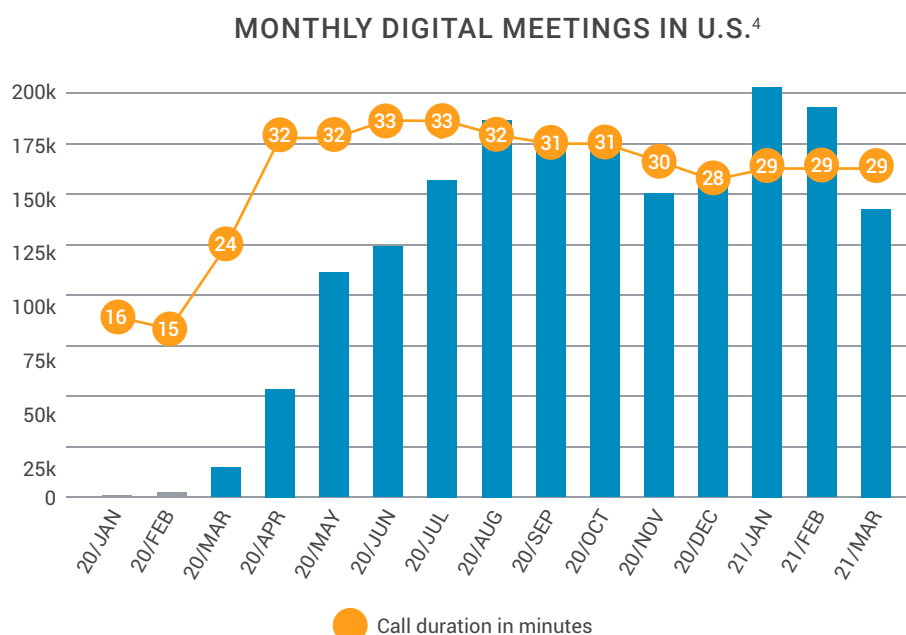
A Multifaceted View of Capacity

The approach most life sciences companies take to structure field teams has remained the same for over a decade. Evaluating capacity against desired reach and anticipated promotional response can still provide value, but the inputs to this process have drastically changed.

The traditional definition of a rep's capacity no longer holds true in a digital approach. There are more factors at play than drive time from one physician's office to the next, which is often reduced or eliminated in digital engagement models. Remote meetings often take the place of some face-to-face interactions and require additional changes to capacity calculations.

The most effective way to adjust the definition of capacity is by monitoring actual data—the number of meetings that field personnel complete in the new market environment.

---

[4] Veeva Pulse Trends, Veeva, March 2021.

REMOTE MEETING CONSIDERATIONS:

➜ Meeting durations are longer with more focused and scientific discussions

➜ Scheduled discussions allow reps to prepare meeting strategy and tailor content in advance

➜ Additional coordination is needed to plan food delivery, multiple attendees, or an in-service approach

➜ Consent capture and digital sample requests must be supported

Veeva Pulse Data[5] shows that the average rep in the U.S. conducts two remote meetings per week using Engage Meeting. Outside of the U.S., this number goes up to three Engage Meetings a week.

Top-performing life science companies curate their remote content, tailor their coaching, and adjust their incentive compensation strategy to boost remote meeting usage.

Accommodating Multiple Channels in Promotional Response

Promotional response is another traditional measure that must evolve to fit a digital approach. As interactions deepen and lengthen but become less frequent, provider response may improve against the old model of regular, quick conversations.

Developing a multichannel equivalence model that values interactions for any channel against a tried-and-true face-to-face interaction is a good way to standardize across all field planning efforts. Multichannel equivalence models assign value to digital interactions relative to the well-known standard of in-person interactions. For example, one rep-generated email could be worth 25% of a classic face-to-face interaction—so four emails are equal to the promotional response of one call.

Channel-specific promotional response curves can help visualize the impact of each channel and determine the most effective channel mix ratios in multichannel field planning.

Understanding the value of a 30-minute remote engagement compared to a three-minute hallway interaction will help improve goals and focus for field teams. Including activity and outcomes data in analyzing the value of remote engagements allow for increased sophistication in multichannel approaches. It also gives valuable insight into the appropriate team structure and can help ensure the team is operating at maximum efficiency. Frequency should not be ignored in this analysis, as there is value in remaining top of mind with customers.

Considerations for Expanding Reach Digitally

Reach as a field planning metric is still useful in a digital strategy. It's also the metric that is the easiest to control. Expanded reach has long been a promise of digital channels. The transition to higher digital usage creates more opportunities to make this promise a reality. Digital channels make it easy to reach previously uncovered customers due to geographic barriers or capacity constraints. Remote sampling capabilities allow reps to collect signatures and provide educational information to HCPs, just like they do in-person. Increasing reach should be done thoughtfully to maximize value and maintain balance across all field teams.
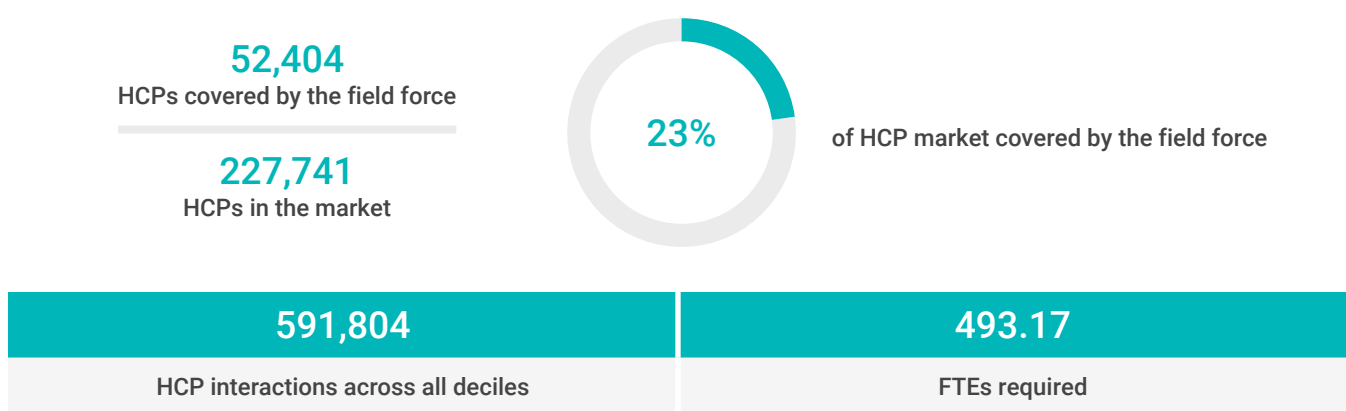
Companies have to ensure they deliver value to the HCPs with each remote interaction. Since remote interactions tend to be longer and more planned than hallway conversations, they require more buy-in from HCPs. It is also harder to create new HCP relationships with a digital interaction model.

Reaching More Customers With the Same Sales Team

Rethinking the traditional approach to field force sizing and structure can expand reach and frequency for a field team. Using Medicare sales data from 2019,[6] a standard deciling and field force sizing exercise was completed to produce a sample Type II Diabetes field force structure.

A Traditional Face-to-Face Model

For this structure, six face-to-face calls per day were assumed as the capacity goal. Under a purely face-to-face interaction model, these goals would require a field force of about 500 to cover HCP deciles six through ten.

52,404
HCPs covered by the field force

227,741
HCPs in the market

23%
of HCP market covered by the field force

591,804	493.17
HCP interactions across all deciles	**FTEs required**

See Appendix Figure A for the complete set of data used in this exercise.

---

[6] "Medicare Provider Utilization and Payment Data: 2017 Part D Prescriber," CMS, 2019.

Why Hybrid?

If rep-generated emails and remote meetings are added as channels, a field team of similar size can expand coverage to reach HCPs down to decile four.

The average U.S. pharma rep only conducts two or three remote meetings weekly, meaning that switching to an engagement model that relies primarily on remote meetings may require enlarging the field force.

A hybrid digital model delivers the best of both worlds to grow reach and increase the number of HCP touchpoints while maintaining the same field force size. In addition, blending digital with in-person relationship building creates a complementary engagement model that has proven successful.

The evidence bears this out as well. In a two-year-long analysis by a global life sciences company, hybrid reps outperformed both digital reps and traditional face-to-face reps in sales growth while improving cost efficiency by 80%.[7]

> Rep-generated emails can deliver critical information such as in-depth documents, product updates, and event invitations to HCPs already familiar with the rep. They also have almost unlimited capacity due to their short lead time compared to face-to-face calls.

> Remote meetings with HCPs tend to last longer and result in deeper, more detailed discussions, which are an excellent complement to shorter, more personal face-to-face calls and email touchpoints to check in with the HCP. However, this deeper discussion comes with a cost of additional lead time and a lower capacity.

THE CASE FOR A HYBRID MODEL[8]

15%
GROWTH

80%
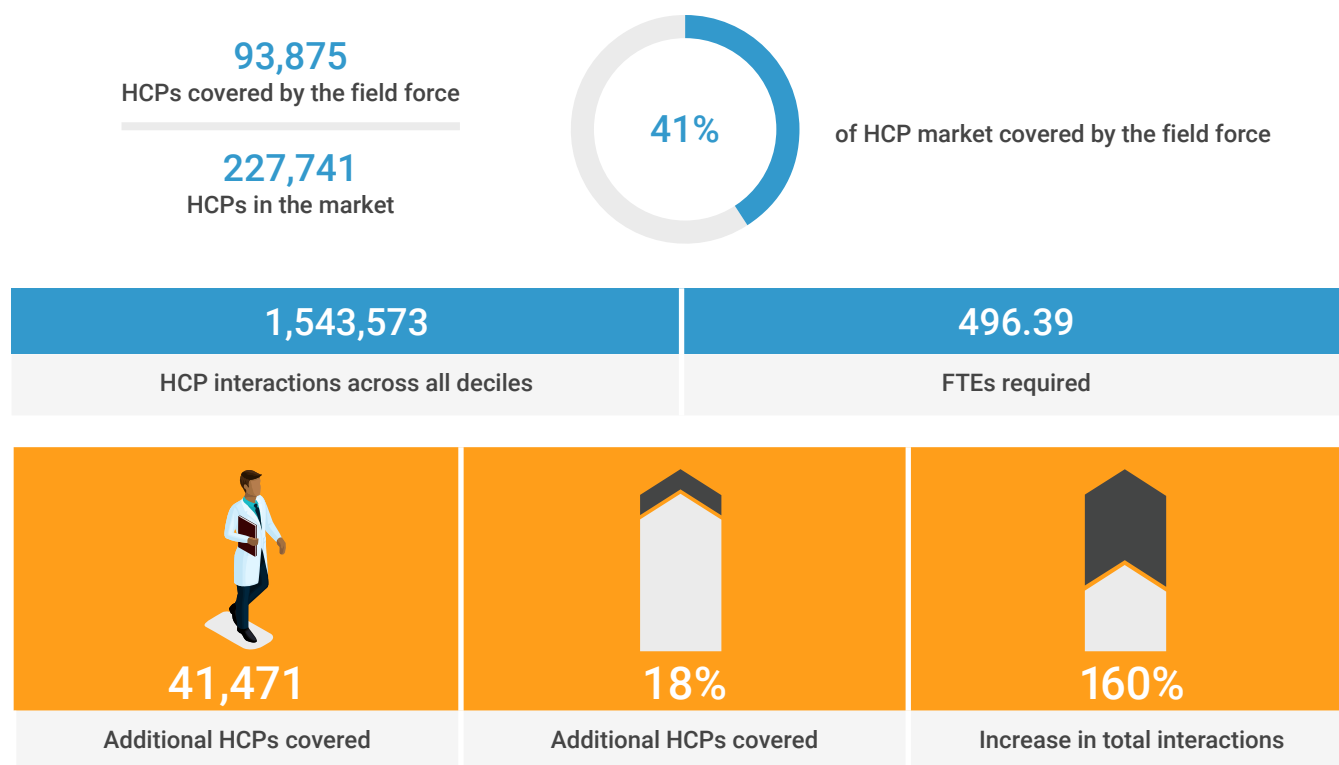COST EFFICIENCY

SEGMENT	SALES		
	2016	2017	GROWTH
Rep only	121	132	9%
Digital only	32	33	3%
Rep + Digital	**46**	**52**	**15%**

[7,8] "Guide to Digital HCP Engagement," Veeva, 2020.

Implementing a Hybrid Digital Approach

A multichannel equivalence model can help visualize how a hybrid strategy can grow HCP coverage into more deciles.

Using the assumption that each rep-generated email is weighted at 25% of a standard call and that a remote meeting is weighted equal to one standard call, the same field team can increase reach to an additional 18% of the total market.

93,875
HCPs covered by the field force

227,741
HCPs in the market

41%
of HCP market covered by the field force

1,543,573	**496.39**
HCP interactions across all deciles	FTEs required

41,471	**18%**	**160%**
Additional HCPs covered	Additional HCPs covered	Increase in total interactions

See Appendix Figure B for the complete set of data used in this exercise.

This model results in a 160% increase in total interactions from the original face-to-face-only model. Even without consideration of HCP segmentation or channel preference, this expanded reach brings a positive return.

Getting the Most Out of Your Digital Channels

Transitioning field planning to support a more digital-centric selling model can be a challenge. However, with creativity, leadership, and ingenuity, this transition can maximize the potential of digital channels. Existing field teams can do more with digital to interact with customers beyond geographic boundaries and build stronger relationships.

This transformation starts with incorporating digital channels at every step of the field planning process and using data and analysis to gauge digital impact and adjust strategy. With the right data and evaluation metrics as a guidepost, the field can maintain the same level of customer support across a wider customer base—helping more patients find better treatment.

Set your organization up for digital success today.

Veeva Vault CRM Align

Align solves your digital field planning needs. Align enables collaborative field force management with support for multichannel models and remote channel capacity. Field force management, roster management, and feedback capabilities mean fewer spreadsheets and more agility in territory alignments.

Align & Veeva Business Consulting

Optimize your sales strategy with the power of analytics and insight. Veeva Business Consulting can help you come up with a plan to get the right message to the right customers—and translate it to territories in Align.

Align & Multichannel Veeva Vault CRM

Close the gap between strategy and field execution. The built-in integration between Align and Vault CRM pushes territory alignments and user assignments out to the field at the click of a button, eliminating errors and saving you valuable time.

SEE ALIGN IN ACTION

Appendix

Figure A: A sample field force using only face-to-face calls as an interaction channel.

Decile	HCP Count	Annual Call Goal	Total Calls	FTEs required
10	3,788	24	90,912	75.76
9	5,936	24	142,464	118.72
8	7,641	12	91,692	76.41
7	9,417	12	113,004	94.17
6	11,492	6	68,952	57.46
5	14,130	6	84,780	70.65
4	17,805	0	-	0.00
3	23,666	0	-	0.00
2	35,567	0	-	0.00
1	98,299	0	-	0.00
Totals	227,741	-	591,804	493.17

Figure B: A sample field force using a hybrid interaction model.

Decile	HCP Count	Annual Interaction Goal	Face to Face	Approved Email	Remote Meetings	Total Interactions	FTEs required
10	3,788	24	4	16	4	166,672	56.82
9	5,936	24	4	16	4	261,184	89.04
8	7,641	16	4	16	2	183,384	76.41
7	9,417	16	4	16	2	226,008	94.17
6	11,492	9	2	12	1	149,396	57.46
5	14,130	9	2	12	1	183,690	70.65
4	17,805	4	1	12	-	160,245	22.26
3	23,666	4	1	12	-	212,994	29.58
2	35,567	0				-	0.00
1	98,299	0				-	0.00
Totals	227,741	-				1,543,573	496.39