Communication with doctors: empowering Pharma field force with modern marketing techniques
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ABSTRACT

Pharmaceutical industry is comparatively a different concept than all the other business segments in the sense of the consumers it targets. When most of the businesses target the end users directly, the pharmaceutical industry designs various promotional strategies mainly targeting the doctors, for them being their prime customers and enjoying the power of prescription. Again the pharmaceutical market is more competitive, unpredictable and players have to devise innovative modes of communication to persuade the doctors, the trends being shifted to e-detailing, online sampling and modern CRM activities. This article basically explores advanced communication strategies, segmentation, personal selling, digital marketing and CRM activities involved to influence prescription because for every segment, strategy and product positioning is different which in turn is based on prescription habit, frequency of prescription and potential of the doctors. The article accommodates due room for the effective feedback of daily call reporting and secondary sales without which quantum increase in sales does not have any possibility. All these strategies focus on the vitality of communication, not only because it is the key for promoting brands but it’s also a strategic view of engaging the customers to that particular brand and increasing the market share.

Key Words: Communication strategies, e-detailing, digital marketing, customer relationship management

1. Introduction
Communication is a core to any successful relationship. It is much more than a common talk between two parties. It usually means speaking and writing or sending the messages to another person. But it also involves insurance that the message has reached to the right person or to the targeted audience and receiver understands it and makes response with the feedback. Business Communication has much proximity to science in which work done can only be considered when force applied makes the thing to displace. In the same manner business communication can only be fruitful when it bears desired results in the form of return. The desired results can only be achieved when there is perfect coding and decoding of the message, along with the curious feedback, between the receivers and the senders. Here, communication in pharmaceutical Marketing starts from the market (chemist, stockist) and ends up to the doctors which involves emailing, video conferencing, web based and telephonic communication as shown in figure 1. But the ways of communication with doctors is worth concentrating here of all because they are the prime customers who play a central role in the entire setup, not the common man. Hence the communication has to be ‘On time, Focused, Relevant, Reliable and Coherent’. Thus as the success of a company’s business in pharmaceutical industry ultimately comes down to the communication with doctors, this article focuses on the modern techniques like e-detailing, digital marketing etc which
improves the sales performance of the company by cutting down the amount of time required to interact with doctors thereby saving time. It also focuses on some key strategies that include segmentation and targeting of the doctors with due attention on other areas like the Retail chemist prescription audit. Digital tools of detailing and CRM activities, detailing the right brand by focusing on Unique selling proposition, Unique perceived benefit which differentiate a company or a brand from the competitors. Communication is not only bound to receiving the response from the doctors sometimes but also for getting the feedback in the form for secondary sales of tertiary. It is also necessary for the organization to manage the control over the field person to effectively implement the marketing strategies (Pharma Marketing-Effective Communication). For exercising this control, new apps and mobile reporting, online reporting / daily call reporting systems are being used to track and control the field work of medical representative and field managers which are also discussed.

![Communication Techniques](image)

**Figure1:** Advanced communication techniques

### 1.1 Segmentation and targeting

Market segmentation and targeting is equally important to decide for the promotional strategy of the company and to establish the reputation of the brand in the minds of the customers, because for every segment of the customer the need will be different so the strategy and product positioning is also different. Medismo Technologies is a unique marketing tool which helps in segmentation and targeting and thus facilitates better positioning strategies to ensure overall success of a brand and company. Pharmaceuticals segmentation and targeting the customers is essential even for small level of every business. To effectively target the doctors, marketing and sales department analyze and segment the doctors by carrying retail chemist prescription audit to understand the potential of doctors, their prescription habit, and frequency of prescription and even the qualification. By properly segmenting the customers the sale persons can prepare the Master Call List (MCL) that helps into focusing the core customers.

### 1.2 Segmentation of physicians

1. Geographic Basis (E.g., Urban Market, Rural Market).
2. Potential of Doctors.
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3. Qualification of Doctors.
5. Type of Customers (Loyal, Switchers, Competitors Loyal, Specialist).
6. Prescription habit or frequency of prescription.

2. Retail chemist prescription audit (RCPA)

RCPA is a tactics followed by the sales persons in the field to understand the customer’s habit of writing the prescription and is very helpful for updating the core list of customer’s. The main objective of RCPA is to identify and access the potency of customers. The main strategy for the RCPA is to select the right chemist for the doctors, try to communicate the exact brand approach as detailed to doctors with the chemist and build strong relationship by selecting the right approach from the availability of new products and by making personal order booking (Essential Sfa). For prescription audit of an institute or the hospital, the field persons, firstly have to find out the OPD days of the targeted as well as the visiting doctors and understand the prescription habit by conducting the RCPA on different days of OPD and also making an enquiry about the key decision makers/Chief Medical officer (CMO) for bulk purchase (Pharma Knowledge Base). The information from the RCPA is helpful to select the right brand which is to be targeted to doctor’s side by side plan and organize the inputs and distribute samples according to detailed product.

2.1 Personal selling

Marketing is not just selling a product to the customers but it is directly linked with making a genuine, face to face, and profitable life time relationship with them. The main advantage of personal selling is that we can make better relations and have good contacts with the customers. As we know that it is only sales force that facilitates the movement of products and brands in the market and promotes the organization by multiplying customers and making profitable relationships, hence it is all about the way how we communicate with the customers and make them ready to buy our products (Today Cut). The sales person is the only person who drives all movements of the product. So it becomes mandatory for the sales person to be dominant, creative and strategist. The sales person is not only an achiever in sales but also has all the personality traits for making lifelong relation with the customers. For this the sales person is having some of selling styles like need satisfying, problem solving, friendly and hard selling to entice the customers (Brand Speak). The personal selling is eight steps process of managing the relations and getting the profit which includes Prospecting, Pre-approach, Approach, Assigns the needs, Presentation, Meeting out the objections, Gaining the profit and Follow up. The prospecting includes the right approach of sales person and indenting the potential customers of the territory. After prospecting just plan for the pre-approach strategy for doctors call and then present the product with defined strategy. During presentation try to solve all the objections of your customers and to make them involve fully with your product and try to get follow up and manage routine visit to get updated with your customers. Personal selling becomes more easy tool when we follow the 4 c’s i.e. convince, convert, consolidate and consistent approach.

2.2 Effective detailing

Pharmaceutical detailing is the major marketing and promotion tactics utilized by the pharma companies to promote their brands to the doctors and to influence the prescribing habit by
creating interest. It’s an important tool for creating awareness of product among the doctors. This detailing process directly has financial links which, after all, helps in the culmination of a big business. Most of the pharmaceutical companies’ emphasizes on detailing part as it plays a vital and decisive part in marketing. As we know that new trends have come up in the market for improving the detailing part like e-detailing, and other online services but these digital tools will be discussed later on. Let’s have a look on the traditional detailing pattern to understand the main concept in true spirit. Till now, we all are following the traditional ways of using templates and medical journals which require detail / discussion face to face so as to create the magnetic relations with doctors and force out the products from their territory by improving the sales.

Let’s now discuss a widely accepted AIETA model without this promotion of the brand will simply be a nightmare. It includes Awareness, Interest, Evaluation, Trial and Adoption, all in succession. Very first step includes creating the awareness of customer about the product and its benefits which are spontaneously followed by development of interest. After the interest has been created, it requires evaluating the products according to its need and initiation of trial on very small scale to trial the product. Once the customer is satisfied, a brand loyalty bond is generated and then the customer is ready to adopt it even at a large scale. During detailing of product to doctors the field persons should take care of the following steps: text, voice, handling of visual aid, use of pointer, eye contact, body language and the most specific is time management. The text should consist of punch line for every brand which helps the doctors to remember the product with its uniqueness (Rajan Saxena 2009). The detailed product information and literature should be according to the detailing strategy planned by the brand managers because even a slight deviation can lead to wrong, misleading or unclear information. The traditional way of detailing is face to face discussion. So, to be an effective orator the representative should have clarity, audibility, proper pitch, punctuation and soothing voice. And the visual aid folder should consist of required information needed at a glance so as to correlate the continuity in the communication. To prevent the distortion of the vision, the folder/ visual aid should be hold at a desired angle and made sure that the visual aid should not have too shining background. To maintain the objective approach always use pointer which helps in the prevention of distraction from the main topic. The foremost part of detailing is to exhibit confidence and knowledge by the medical representative which will create an impression on the doctor. Thus the customer (Doctor) is open to conversation and this helps in reading the psychology, curiosity and interest of the customer. It helps in an uninterrupted flow of thoughts without any room for ambiguity. As we know that time management is an essence to the efficiency of the call so the medical representative must so try focus on the unique points of detailing strategy and focus on the punch line. Later on when doctor is having free time, try to discuss all the points with open discussion and try to build good relations by providing the evidence of clinical trials data and medical journals in support of your brand.

From the personal experience of medical representatives, it was revealed that there are three possibilities in the way the doctor replies to the medical representative for prescribing the brand – “Yes, No or we will see”. If the doctor has replied in “Yes” then to a certain extent, he may get emotionally bound to his words and the chances are fair that he may prescribe the brand. However saying ‘yes’ is an easy way to end the conversation and more easy said than done. Therefore the outcome may not be taken for granted until and unless there are follow ups, reminders and prescription generated. In other case, if doctor refuses to prescribe and says’ no’ in a straight forward way, this means customer tries to avoid it probably because the products do not suit his requirements. And last but most frequent answer is ‘let me see’.
Never let the situation end up with such answers because this reflects either communication gap or failure of the communication from the side of Medical representative. Such situations can be tackled in a diplomatic way keeping in mind not to ask closed question such as “will you be prescribing my products?” Instead insist on to start at some smaller level at least. To answer all the discussions properly try to show full confidence in answering the question to the point. Make sure that the customer has understood well what you wanted to communicate. One of the golden rules is to repeat the question, in case of any doubt. Always wait for the question to have an end and never interrupt in between the communication (Pharma Marketing-Effective Communication). Sometimes situation occurs that one may not know the answer of question or have a hazy idea in his/her mind. It’s the most peculiar situation and cannot be avoided but can, at least, be tackled through the application of a common sense. This predicament can be handled with the calmness of mind. Never indulge in arguments. Do not supply the inventive information as this will have negative on the doctor and may lead to further complication. If you feel that your seniors could clear the doubt, assure to get an answer to the same and plan further meeting with an appropriate appointment.

3 How to handle Customer objection or Refusal?

Handling objection in sales especially in pharmaceutical marketing is the toughest part which each one has to come across but it will give you a new opportunity to represent your brand in a different way to handle the objections. Handling the objection in an appropriate manner opens some key business accounts and boosts your sales (Medicin Man, 2012). This can be dealt by taking into consideration potential client’s concern, emphasizing the importance and worth of the product and trying to build interest and trust of customer. Some of the common objections that are seen are discussed below:

3.1 Handling objections

3.1.1 Case 1

Doctor – I am prescribing this brand for the last 10 years.

Medical Representative: No doubt doctor, you are prescribing best brand.

Doctor – So why should I shift to your brand?

Medical Representative: Dr. I just want to share a medical journal with you which has been recently published a clinical trial named (CAPRIE) signify Clopidogrel is safer and more efficacious than aspirin and even aspirin alone shows chances of gastrointestinal bleeding / gastrointestinal haemorrhage.

Doctor – Thanks for sharing this journal with me. I will start prescribing your product to few of my patients and will personally notice the outcome.

3.1.2 Case 2

Doctor - Your product is expensive, the other brand is available at only Rs70/- a strip.
Medical Representative: One strip of 10 tablets costs Rs 100/- and to be administered one tablet on alternate day to controls patient’s blood pressure and the weekly cost comes to be slightly between Rs 30/- to Rs 40/- whereas the other brand is available at Rs 70/- for a strip of same number of tablets with the intake of 1 tablet a day. So the weekly cost comes to be Rs 49/-. Thus the patient saves a handsome amount without compromising with the efficacy.

Doctor – That’s great ……. even your brand is economical to my patients and gives patient compliance by reducing dose frequency also…. I will definitely start prescribing your brand.

3.2 Trendy marketing tools

3.2.1 E sampling

Sampling is the most effective marketing tool by which doctors can start the treatment immediately and test the tolerance of the product on their patients according to the state of disease. It also helps the doctors to undertake it as a routine practice for the particular brand and helps to recognize the name of the brand as it continues to reverberate in their mind. With the development of the technology demand of physical supply of the samples can be made through ‘E’ sampling of the products by doctors. By using this online technique on mobile or laptops doctors can easily apply for the sampling request form (PR News Wire). This has changed the whole scenario of delivering the samples and availability of the products by providing best services. Once this procedure has been adopted by the doctors then medical representatives can easily analyze through the data generated on the applicability of samples with the doctors and their area of interest in a particular drug. According to that they can tailor their approach of detailing the product to the doctors and try to focus more on doctor’s prescription to understand his molecule of interest.

3.3 E-Detailing

E-detailing is used as a digital tool for communication with doctors by pharmaceutical sales force. It is not bonded up to detailing because even web based medical information is available for 24x7 on websites. Detailing usually refers to the communication between the doctors and sales representative when a representative provides information scientifically and logically. The E-detailing term is having a broad meaning which includes email conversations, e sampling online webinars and detailing of product through laptops or by using tabs as discussed in figure 2. Pharmaceutical industries spent more time on focusing this area to deliver the best service and providing the medical information in a fast and easy way which improves the productivity of sales as well as is beneficial to the physicians in saving their time (Andy E. Wang). Also, side by side, this approach will also become an easy tool for the sales department as it lends the opportunity to furnish detail information and facts in a new and attractive way. Few noteworthy “E-Promotional/ E-Detailing” activities are worth mentioning in our discussion. These are Direct to Consumer web marketing, E detailing, live web video conferencing, online CME’s and conferences.

3.4 Digital marketing

In the present scenario, digital marketing is no more the monopoly of IT sector or is limited to social advertisements but now has been established as a deciding force in pharmaceutical sectors also for the promotion of the products. Earlier the digital marketing had captured the Over the Counter (OTC) segment of pharmaceuticals but right now this trend has entered in
sharing of medical information of prescription drugs to doctors. It focuses on the detailing to providing sample and online Continuing Medical Education (CME) to the doctors using digital technique (Nigel Wright).

![E Detailing](image)

**Figure 2:** E detailing

Even the web conversation is most popular in these days, if doctors want to consult with web representative about any medical information or about the product then they just login to the web site and get linked directly with in a second. Many companies have started realizing the importance of digital marketing and trying to utilize this marketing tool for the expansion of customer base. For eg. Johnson and Johnson was the first to initiate the YouTube channel similarly Pfizer started social networking websites for customer interaction. There are few more companies such as Quantum Pharmaceuticals and Special Labs who offers online ordering facilities ensuring the ethical practices and abiding the professional rules and regulations. Another good example is Sanofi’s used YouTube channel to create awareness abiding the prescription ethics and rules by not mentioning the brand names.

### 3.5 Unique selling proposition (USP)

USP is the fundamental part of solid marketing campaign as discussed in figure 3. It signifies the products epitomized in the market and how differently the product benefits the customers. The USP mainly emphasizes on product differentiation and adding the factors which attract customers and enforce them to say that they want this brand only. The objective of finding the USP of your product is to give the reason to the customers that why they should buy this brand. A perfectly created USP has the power to take your business out of the ‘price war’ and into a position of being able to charge a higher price and have less competition. Before entering into neck to neck competition just analyze the market and your product (Entrepreneur). Also find out the product unique selling preposition vis-à-vis those provided by other homogeneous brands. Unless one epitomizes the product qualities, one may not be able to target sales efforts effectively and the energy spent will get wasted.

**Unique -** It clearly positions you ahead of your competitors, making you avail more and more opportunities.

**Selling -** It persuades others to exchange money for a product or service. "Buy this product, for this specific benefit."

**Proposition –** A strong enough proposition has the ability to turn the tide.
3.6 Unique perceived benefit (UPB)

Unique perceived benefit slightly differs from USP. The USP only emphasizes on product differentiation whereas UPB focuses on the customers’ prospect and the ways they get the unique benefits by using this particular brand, UPB looks after the needs and benefits from the customers’ point of view and differentiates the product by satisfying them in a unique way.

3.7 Point of difference and point of parity

Point of difference is a positive way of differentiating the product from the market competitors. These are the important and unique aspects of product that are different from the competitor’s brand. For positioning the product in the market, the first important criteria is to fit in the customer need criteria. Again, position of new product should have point of parity even from the products with similar features. This will help in changing the purchasing behavior of the customers. In ideal way of marketing promotion, companies may highlight most of the product qualities but as the customer may not be able to remember all of them so the organizations keep on making a reverberation on the point of difference to capture the interest of the customers. Therefore, the organization has to maintain an appropriate balance while communicating to the customers about the product (Axle Davids). It should have sufficient points of parity with adequate points of difference. Being “different” may not always mean functional difference in product rather one can be different with creativity of customer promotion and building customer relationship.

3.8 Customer relation management activities (CRM)

CRM is the platform for building the relationships with the customers as discussed in figure 4. The main objective of CRM is to track the database of the customers to maximize the sales and improve customers’ relations. Apart from detailing and providing samples, the companies also invest on the doctors in providing the services like e sampling, medical conference, medical journals, online webinars, online conferences and others type of ethical services (Business Ball .Com). MR reporting system also manages the data of CRM activities to track the interest area of the doctors and helps to understand the customers and making good relations that directly help in movement prescriptions. Well-designed CRM activities automate the details of the customers’ profile (Sales force). It also helps to shift the focus of organization from product to the customers and decrease the customer management cost side by side increasing the business relations with the customers. With the drastic change in the technology and availability of the CRM cloud app, sales manager can easily assess his team
CRM activity includes:

1. Social media networking with customers.
2. Retain customers by online Webinars and CME activities.
3. Sales force automation by using applications.
4. Data management of customers.
5. Online sampling and Services.

![Figure 4: Customer Relationship Management Activity]

4. Performance feedback

4.1 Daily call reporting (DCR)

DCR app helps to have an effective control over the sales force activities because flawless, speedy estimation and analysis can only be ensured when there is sincere monitoring of each and every activity. As discussed above all the service activities are connected with the digital technology, even reporting and sales data management are no exception to this. The mobile app software and tabs are connected with servers for smooth functioning of the routine activities covering the whole sales force and ensuring their accountability. It also helps in organizing the uninterrupted information flow from the field to the senior marketing managers (Medismo). The DCR includes the name of doctors visited, name of chemist visited, name of products promoted, gifts delivered, daily expense management and other related activities. Thus enactment of this procedure ensures better supervision, management and accountability of complete sales force at a stretch. If implemented in true spirit it can prove itself the backbone of the business.

4.2 Secondary sales management

Secondary sales refer to the actual sales of the territory and help to estimate the value of product sold from the stockist level to chemist level. The secondary sales are the actual parameter which helps to estimate the sales made by the medical representative in the whole month. The main objective of secondary sales management is to manage the monthly and quarterly sales data of the territory. The secondary sales management software helps in automation of managing the sales data accurately and in a systematic manner. At every closing of month the medical representatives have to fill all the details of secondary stock.
5. Conclusion

Communication to doctors means exposure to brand message. How this exposure gets converted into increase in sales and how much it makes impact on the customer’s prescription habit will depend on the strategies evolved and involved by the pharmaceutical companies. The significant change in mentality to make a quantum leap in the business lies in answering to the questions—What does exactly a customer want and need? How can we fulfil these needs? Unique Selling Point and Unique Perceived Benefits are the tools being adopted by the pharmaceutical companies that consider the business as a never ending activity. Whereas RCPA identifies potential of the customers, segmentation and targeting, on the other hand, helps in preparing Master Call List. Traditional methods such as “personal selling” and the modern technique like e-detailing and digital marketing” run simultaneously to achieve the goal. Daily Call Report ensures better supervision, management and accountability of sales team. It becomes a reliable feedback to evaluate their efficacy without which quantum increase in sales (the ultimate goal of fruitful communication) may remain a far–fetched dream.

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