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Facilitating Physician Access and Education Through Online Conferencing

By John Mack

Pharma companies are under increasing pressure to bring relevant clinical trial information to the marketplace. Recently, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association (PhRMA), announced that information about ongoing clinical trials -- beyond what is required by law -- will be made available by pharmaceutical companies and posted to the government's existing clinical trial registry (www.clinicaltrials.gov) beginning July 1, 2005. "Patients and physicians have asked pharmaceutical companies to make available information about all clinical trials, not just some trials, and to make that information more easily accessible," said Billy Tauzin, PhRMA president and CEO. Several pharma companies have announced their own plans to provide more public information about the clinical trials they sponsor.

Physician Access is a Problem

Pharmaceutical companies have also used Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and their Medical Science Liaisons (see other articles in this issue) early in the drug development process to provide physician education about clinical trials and other data supporting their product's efficacy (see "[Developing Win-Win Key Opinion Leader Relationships](#)"). Sometimes, pharmaceutical sales reps act as facilitators, scheduling educational activities as a means of increasing access to physicians, gaining a bit more credibility and face time with their clients in the process.

Access to physicians is becoming more and more of a problem. Doctors need immense amounts of medical information, but their patient loads limit their ability to see pharma sales reps or attend conferences or other educational activities away from their offices at such venues as local restaurants and hotels. And it is impractical to bring KOLs and experts into the physician's office.

Recent studies indicate, however, that more and more physicians are accepting and even preferring online interactions with pharmaceutical companies. In a recent Verispan ePromotion Annual Study released December 17, 2004, more than two-thirds

of physicians said they participate in ePromotion in addition to face-to-face promotion, while 5% participate in ePromotion instead of face-to-face promotion. Participation in ePromotion is expected to grow; 43% of physicians reported that they expect their participation to increase in the next 6 months.

Web Conferencing is the Solution

One way in which ePromotions and educational programs are delivered to physicians is through Web conferencing. Web conferences allow physicians to interact directly with researchers and other physicians who have firsthand knowledge of the science and clinical trial results behind new drug therapies. The conferences, which are attended by physicians using a standard PC with Internet access, allow doctors to see and hear live medical presentations and also have the opportunity to submit questions and comments by voice or online chat.

MedConferenceLive® – a managed, turnkey web conferencing service provided by the Maxwell Group – routinely connects some 25,000 physicians a month, or about 20 conferences per day, through live, online interactive web conferences between doctors in their own offices and leading researchers and opinion leaders working with top pharmaceutical companies. "MedConferenceLive® brings the experts directly to physicians whether in the office or at home using their own PCs," says Bob Maiden, president of the Maxwell Group. A recent day's seminars included topics on new cholesterol reducing statins, the latest research on osteoporosis and the health benefits of new allergy medicines.

Connecting the Dots

"There are plenty of generic conferencing providers," says Maiden, "but connecting the dots between physicians and key opinion leaders is a whole different ballgame. You need to have a thorough understanding of the goals and objectives of the sponsor, as well as the ability to customize and manage the technology."

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During every live event, an experienced facilitator is available to support the speaker, and a toll-free help desk provides any necessary technical support. On the backend, the Maxwell Group provides an extensive survey and reporting component that allows drug companies to measure the success of their events.

"We currently average approximately 50 physicians per event with some attracting over 200 physicians per event," says Maiden. "Our post event surveys allow us to measure satisfaction levels (speaker, message, level of content, ease of connection, etc.). In addition, participating physicians can be measured against peer groups for changes in script writing pre and post event."

The Maxwell Group also offers a companion service that allows live web events to be recorded and archived for 24/7 viewing (MedConferenceOnDemand®).

Types of Conferences

The conferences that the Maxwell Group provides fall into two broad categories. Brand drug promotional events allow drug sales representatives and physicians to jointly participate in the event. These presentations might be attended by a number of the practice's doctors at a lunch-and-learn session, for example. The following table compares this service to eDetailing.

Feature	eDetailing	MedConferenceLive®
Message	Brand Specific	Balanced
Speaker	Pharma rep	Key Opinion Leader
# Docs	One	Many
Cost Per Doc	High	Low

TABLE: Web conferencing vs. eDetailing

MedConferenceLive® has also found a major market in speaker training – a promotional technique whereby pharmaceutical companies train key opinion leaders to present information on new drug therapies to other health providers.

"We view MedConferenceLive® as the wave of the future in how pharmaceutical companies will more intelligently and efficiently update their speakers," says Angela Fiordilino, executive vice president of Phoenix Marketing Solutions, a client of the Maxwell Group.

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