

Service Review

How to Manage the Online Conversation

Community Management Best Practices & Other
Tips from LiveWorld

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As more and more pharmaceutical companies launch social networking platforms associated with their brands, some will allow users (consumers, patients, and physicians) to post comments as part of ongoing discussions about their drugs and/or the conditions these drugs treat. Recent pharma experience with such discussions (see box) demonstrates how important it is to properly manage online communities.

Every social network site, whether it be a blog, Facebook page, YouTube channel, or discussion forum, should have a terms of use policy that specifies, among other things, whether or not users can submit comments for discussion and what topics are acceptable or unacceptable. For pharmaceutical company owned social networks, it seems a given that some form of moderation—review of comments either prior to or after publishing—is necessary to enforce the terms of use to prevent the dissemination of off-label or other information that may violate FDA regulations.



Jenna Woodul

FDA, however, has not yet issued any guidelines on this issue. In public comments made to the FDA, LiveWorld, Inc.—a leading global social network marketing agency that develops, operates and moderates private label social network sites—said “Moderation of user content related to healthcare subjects in social networks is central to the current discussion.”

Pharma Marketing News had an opportunity to interview Jenna Woodul (<http://www.liveworld.com/>), LiveWorld’s EVP and Chief Community Officer, about how pharma companies should manage their social media interactions using technology and “credentialed participants” for moderating and managing online discussions.

The Value of Discussion

In the current regulatory environment and given the experience already alluded to, it is no surprise that many pharma-owned social media sites are not set up to publish user-generated comments in a way that fosters authentic discussions. How important is it, after all, to have such discussions?

“Some pharma companies are trying to do social media without having very much interactivity,” pointed out Woodul in her podcast interview. “In some situations, users are asked to contribute a story, but there really isn’t any interaction. I think they do that out of an abundance of caution due to regulatory concerns. This is not as effective as it might be because it doesn’t involve any give and

take or any real conversation. As a result, consumers don’t get the depth of engagement or information or support they need and want.”

“The natural flow of information, where people are asking questions of one another around their stories and where companies can come in and participate,” said Woodul, “is what we believe is where the most benefit is to be had by everyone concerned.”

To Moderate or Not to Moderate?

In those cases where discussion is encouraged, there is a controversy over whether user comments should be moderated or not and if moderated whether it should be done BEFORE comments are

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What Sanofi-Aventis Learned from Its Facebook Experience

Recent pharma company experience with social media discussions demonstrate how important it is to properly manage online communities. The experience of sanofi-aventis (SA) is case in point.

SA owns and operates a Facebook page called “VOICES,” which is corporate communications effort to “[e]mpower employees, retirees, friends, families and communities to educate, engage, and mobilize with our grassroots network as we focus on healthcare industry priorities.” Shirley Ledlie—a cancer survivor who claimed to suffer permanent hair loss after taking Taxotere, a drug marketed by SA—posted many messages to the VOICES FB page Wall like this one: “Good morning Sanofi, i had your drug Taxotere and as you can see from me photo this is what my scalp looks like 4 years later. Do you have any comment to make?”

From this experience, SA learned that it needed to take its own advice about managing online discussions. In comments to the FDA, SA stated that “It is advisable for company sites to include clearly-stated Terms of Use ... For unbranded (non-promotional) sites, such as those devoted to disease awareness, sanofi-aventis recommends the following Term of Use:

‘This site is not intended as a forum for discussing specific products or other treatments. It’s best to talk to your doctor about specific treatments. You may want to contact our Medical Information Department for product specific questions at 1-800-xxx-xxxx.’”

For more on what sanofi-aventis learned, listen to this Pharma Marketing Talk podcast:

<http://bit.ly/bkPq6y>

published (pre-screening or pre-moderation) or AFTERWARD (post-screening or post-moderation). Pre-moderation means that nothing is published until it has been vetted by a “moderator.” This is typically a procedure followed by most pharmaceutical companies when publishing their own information on the Web. The “moderators” in these cases are legal/regulatory people within the organization.

LiveWorld, in its comments submitted to the FDA, did not recommend that companies be required to pre-screen all user content before displaying it on their sites. “If companies are regulated to a pre-screen only environment,” said LiveWorld, “the resulting lag time (many minutes, even hours) for content to appear will cause their online communities to have weak dynamics, and consumers will head to other venues such as Yahoo or Facebook. There are pharmaceutical companies today that provide disease state online communities with a post-screen model. A pre-screen-only regulation would actually force these companies to take a step backward.”

LiveWorld and Jenna Woodul have been involved with social media for a very long time with over 26 years experience creating and managing social media solutions for global brands—14 years at LiveWorld and 12 years before that at Apple Computer. The company has multiple pharmaceutical companies as clients.

“We have an emphasis on community management and moderation,” said Woodul, “as well as knowledge of the technology platforms our clients need to interact with their customers whether it’s on their own web sites or on external sites such as Facebook.”

Approximately 50% of LiveWorld’s business is the moderation of social network and user content sites, including those built on its own platforms, sites built by other agencies and on other networks. In the last 14 years LiveWorld has delivered over 1 Million hours of moderation, typically delivering 10,000-20,000/month. LiveWorld’s services are deployed in 70 country-language combinations.

“Our emphasis is on the deeper conversational engagement that we think is so effective and helpful to companies and consumers as well,” said Woodul. “Where you have a site where people are invited to engage with each other and perhaps even with a brand,” said Woodul, “pre-moderation stifles a natural flow of conversation.” Woodul pointed out that consumers go elsewhere on the Internet where they don’t have to wait to see their contributions published.

In its comments to the FDA, LiveWorld offered some moderation best practice guidelines that FDA should provide. LiveWorld suggests that moderation can be provided by the company itself or by 3rd-party vendors that the company has approved. It recommends that moderation specifics—including types of moderation, pre-screening or post-screening, volume of moderation and time coverage, and how all of that applies to different types of content—should be determined by the “reasonable judgment of the company.”

Survey Results

Pharma Marketing News and Blog asked readers their opinions on how pharmaceutical companies should moderate online discussions on sites that they own and/or control. Responses to an online survey were collected from 14 to 24 April 2010 for analysis. You can still take the survey here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FPXCJXN>

The survey asked respondents to consider a consumer/patient focused social network site that is owned and operated by a pharmaceutical company. It could be an “unbranded” disease information site or it can be a branded product support site. Visitors are allowed to submit comments to be posted to the site. The goal is to offer information and support through active discussions among site visitors and between visitors and the pharmaceutical company. The site’s terms and conditions specify what types of comments are acceptable and how they will be moderated.

To see the entire set of survey results, please read the article “Moderation Best Practices for Pharma Social Networks” (PMN Reprint #94-03). Here we present only a summary of the responses to this question: To enforce the terms of use of the site, what type of moderation should be employed?

- Pre-screening comments BEFORE they are posted
- Post-screening comments AFTER they are posted
- NO screening/moderation at all

The survey results are shown in Figure 1 (pg 4).

Comments in favor of pre-screening include:

“You have to pre-screen comments before they’re posted,” commented Nicole Rivera, Product Marketing Manager at SMI Health Media. “The majority of people posting these comments are patients, and the only medical knowledge many of them have is what they read on the Internet. You can’t allow people without medical degrees to post side

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affects from various drugs. Sometimes they're having these side affects because they suffer from something else, and it's unrelated to the drug. I'm not saying that is always the case, but to have unsubstantiated medical advice all over the Internet is quite scary. I'm all for free speech, but I also like facts."

Comments in favor of post-screening include:

"I feel pre screening is not consistent with the meaning behind social networking," said Steve Massi, a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry.

"Only insulting or other otherwise non socially acceptable comments should be moderated," said an anonymous consumer respondent. "Negative comments about product/company are acceptable otherwise we become China."

"Screening could very well lead to censorship," said an anonymous respondent who works for a pharmaceutical company. "I think comments should be screened in general to avoid misleading information and potential liabilities, but after they are posted so it's clear the company is not censoring in the first place. In cases of difficult comments the company needs to have a well-thought out strategy/SOP in place to handle and respond appropriately."

"The first thing we recommend is to spell out in detail what is allowed and what isn't allowed on the site," said Woodul. "You need to agree on what the core unit of exchange is about and express that to users so that they know what's in bounds and out of bounds."

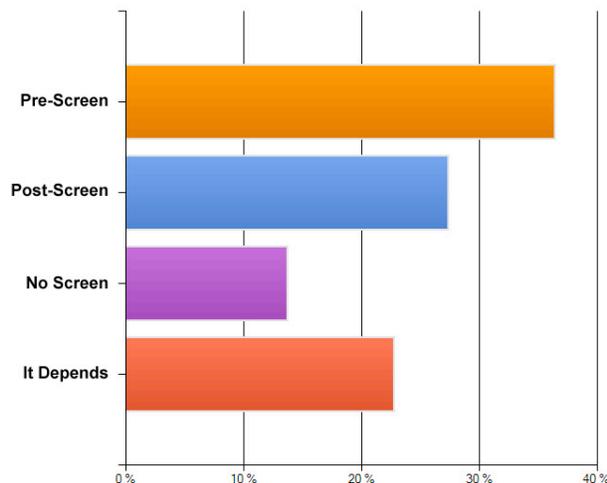


Figure 1. Moderation Survey Results: To enforce the terms of use of the site, what type of moderation should be employed?

A Strategy for Community Growth

Monitoring and moderating the discussion is not only necessary to ensure compliance with laws and regulations, it also part of an overall hosting strategy that fosters community growth. "As everyone reviews priorities and budgets in this economy," said Woodul, "one tendency is to focus on the basics by spending on platform and features. However... those who have experience with online communities know that a company must also commit resources—internal or outsourced—to support the social tone and culture of its community. Otherwise, community growth can plateau or at least grow much more slowly than it might."

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Pharma Marketing Talk™
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Online Community Management
Moderation Best Practices & Other Tips for Pharma Social Media Managers



A conversation with **Jenna Woodul**, EVP, Chief Community Officer, LiveWorld, Inc., about how pharma companies can manage their social media interactions using technology and "credentialed participants" for moderating and managing online discussions.

Aired LIVE on April 15, 2010

[Listen to Audio podcast here...](#)

Woodul and LiveWorld believe that pharma companies who make a real commitment to social media need to be prepared to provide "credentialed" representatives of the company who actually take part in the community. "The ideal form of engagement," said Woodul, "is when this representative, who may be a medical expert, takes part in the natural flow of the conversation and doesn't just come in every now and then when needed to correct misinformation. We've seen communities go from stagnant to thriving based on the efforts of genuinely interested, topically savvy, culturally resonant hosting."

Conclusion

LiveWorld believes that the evolution of technology, particularly consumer-generated content, has "unalterably shifted the marketing paradigm from impressions to customer evangelism, from brand as a static concept to brand as a living organism." Your brand no longer lives just on television or in print ads,

but in the very voices of the customers, employees, and physicians who influence the brand's success.

According to LiveWorld, "the victors will see and seize upon this shift in advance of their competitors, becoming not just participants, but custodians of this online dialogue. Those who fail to act will be left only to react. But those who lead will reap the benefits of growing employee engagement, improved collaboration, nimble product development and innovation, stronger brand loyalty, and deeper public trust."

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