Industry Report: The Long Game of Strategic Relationship Building with Medical Experts

The digitization of healthcare has impacted more than how information is shared. Building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with external stakeholders, medical experts, and key opinion leaders (KOLs) is more difficult than ever. Those relationships are key to Medical Affairs and Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) for a multitude of reasons. The ability to identify and influence those key influencers quickly has repercussions that echo beyond business goals. That ability is what stands between a life science or medical device company's therapies and treatments and the patients hoping for a better outcome.

Fostering these relationships is a long game that requires commitment, time, and detailed planning. Importantly, KOL engagement is a team sport and close coordination between different individuals and teams across the organization is a critical key to success.

To better understand the challenges and needs MSLs face during the digital revolution of healthcare and a pandemic, we conducted an industry survey of more than 200 MSLs in collaboration with the Medical Liaison Society. We asked:

1. **Why are integrated KOL engagement plans so important?**

2. **What makes implementing these plans so challenging?**

3. **How can these challenges be addressed?**

Only 36%
utilize an integrated
engagement plan

Almost 60%
are NOT familiar
with what integrated
engagement planning is

Less than 30%
align strategies for their
region with colleagues
in other regions

Four Barriers to Success

1. **Overused KOLs –** relying on the same roster of existing external experts is a serious problem especially for established teams. To avoid overusing and potentially burning out existing KOLs, develop an integrated plan and go through the entire vetting process. This ensures that the best KOLs and the right number of KOLs are selected for a specific task.

2. **Uncoordinated KOL mapping and identification –** is inefficient and often leads to duplication of efforts and a waste of time and resources. This is particularly problematic if KOL mapping is done by different groups throughout the organization in parallel using time-consuming manual approaches, e.g. desktop research. Using a single, comprehensive source of data, integrated planning, and cross-functional coordination can eliminate such inefficiencies and improve productivity.

3. **Inefficient collaboration -** large organizations are especially prone to challenges with cross-functional transparency and coordination, e.g. between the activities of regional and global MSLs. Lack of coordination can lead to suboptimal KOL engagement, missed opportunities and at times can lead to MSL mistrust of the organization or product.

4. **Inconsistency in expert integration –** frequently, companies engage external stakeholders in an on-again, off-again fashion that is at cross-purposes with building those all-important, long-term relationships. An integrated engagement plan and tighter cross-functional coordination can help avoid this pitfall.

What Is the Value of Good KOL Engagement?

A KOL satisfies many of the emerging needs for HCPs by emphasizing expertise over "selling." First, a KOL's annual compensation is often much lower than compensation for a rep, even though the KOL's credentials may significantly eclipse the credentials of a sales rep. This is due to the very strict regulations regarding compensation terms for KOLs contracted by life sciences firms. In addition, the contract nature of a KOL means that factors like benefits, training, and paid vacation don't eat into return on investment (ROI).

The Goal of KOL Engagement: Long-Term, Mutually Beneficial Relationships

To ensure that external experts have the best possible experience and can work seamlessly with the organization requires continuity and internal transparency. Both are impossible without an integrated, cross-functional engagement plan that clearly lays out not just who within the organization is interacting with which KOL but also what activities they are engaging them in.

> **Reaching the ultimate goal of KOL engagement - building a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship - requires a comprehensive plan, measurable objectives, and alignment with all cross-functional team members and the KOLs.**

Meaningfully Connected Data Underlies Integrated KOL Engagement

One engagement plan does not fit every KOL. In fact, engagement needs to be custom-tailored to each specific external expert and has to meet their scientific needs as well as the objectives of the organization. Underlying personalized expert engagement is comprehensive data about the experts.

> **Data is the fuel that powers the engine of the MSL, commercial, and data insights teams. A single source can be a great advantage if leveraged across the organization and used to better understand KOLs and their sphere of influence.**

Based on a deep understanding of a KOL's background, activities, and interests cross-functional teams can develop an integrated plan that identifies the best way of engaging the KOL across the entire organization and select the most value-added activities.

In addition, a shared HCP knowledge base makes ongoing cross-functional coordination easy and provides a space to continuously gather information across medical, commercial, and clinical teams to share that information.

Here's Where KOLs Boost HCP ROI

KOLs aren't a means to replace sales reps. They are meant to fortify and bolster the work being done "on the ground" by bringing credibility to a product. In addition, resources created in collaboration with KOLs allow a firm to "replicate" the work of the KOLs during every meeting and digital engagement through shareable videos, podcasts, published papers, and presentations that sales reps can pass on to their clients. KOLs aren't necessarily replacing the role of one-on-one engagement that is needed to close the sale. However, they are closing the gaps created by the emerging challenges in pharmaceutical marketing that have developed due to changing policies and trends.

> **The long game requires the right players, the right team, and the right plays for a winning strategy and ultimately a successful development and launch.**

To learn more or schedule a demo please visit
h1.co/request-demo

H1

Creating a healthier future