

Optimize your Field Medical team for the omnichannel world

Interactive workshop findings from the Medical Affairs
Professional Society (MAPS) 2023 Global Annual Meeting,
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Introduction

At the Medical Affairs Professional Society (MAPS) Global Annual Meeting 2023, omnichannel in Medical Affairs was a hot topic across numerous sessions. As part of the Field Medical track, an interactive workshop entitled “Optimize your Field Medical Team for the Omnichannel World” was conducted by:

- **Rosie Humphreys**, Senior Director at OPEN Health
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- **Kelly Lo**, Field Medical Excellence, Global and Asia Pacific at Amgen

Across two sessions, over 180 attendees learned how an omnichannel approach is integral to maximizing Field Medical engagement with healthcare professionals (HCPs). The workshop consisted of a presentation followed by roundtable discussion in groups.

To maximize peer-to-peer learning and support, the according to where they felt they were on their omnichannel journey:

1. Just starting out
2. On the journey
3. Doing omnichannel

“Segmenting an audience is a key principle of omnichannel and meant that each group had a more personalized experience due to the increased relevance of the conversation with peers who were at a similar stage in their omnichannel journey.”

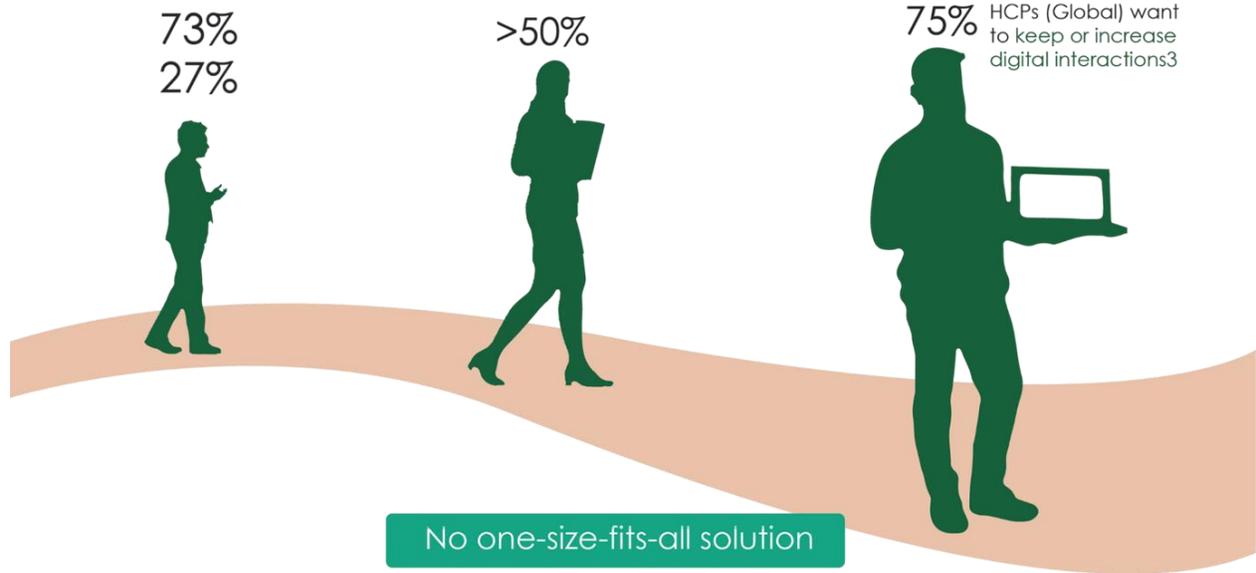
Donnie Wooten Jr. Pharm.D, Organon

Looking back to the industry in 2021, it was reported that 73% of Medical Affairs teams across 15 biopharma organizations were planning to implement an omnichannel approach, but only 27% saw it through by the end of the year.¹ At this year’s MAPS workshop, the largest segment of delegates felt they were “On the journey”, suggesting that some progress had been made since 2021, where the majority of Medical Affairs teams were “Just starting out”.

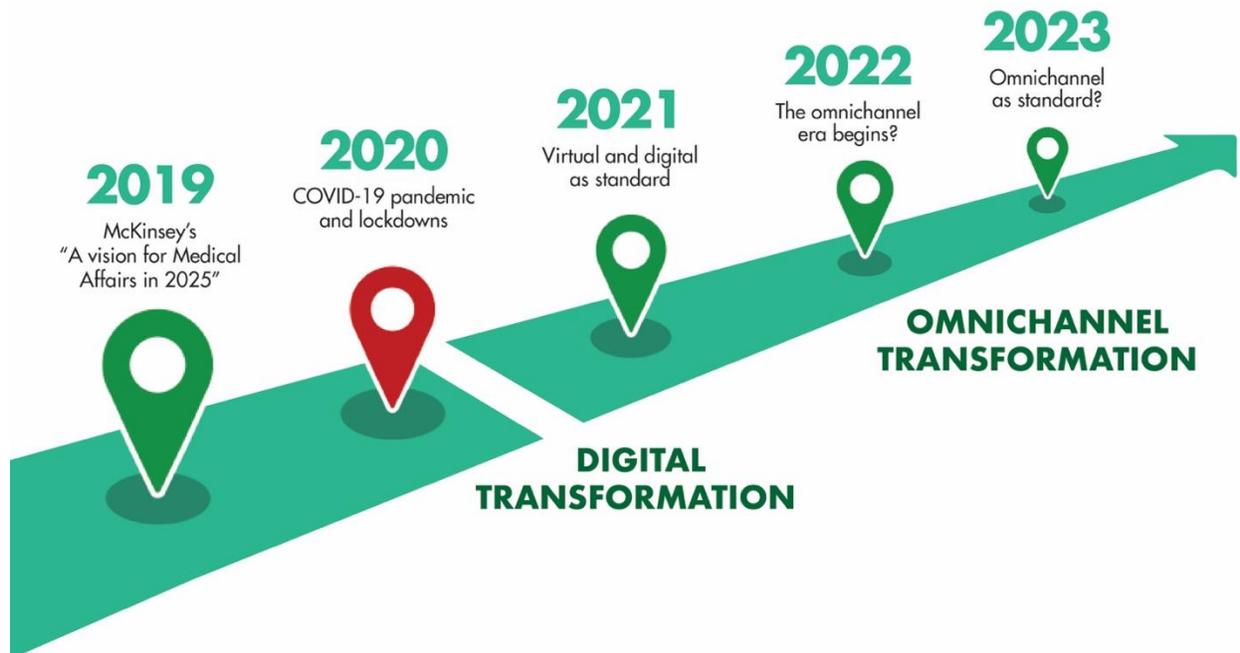
The presentation started by highlighting some of the key drivers of preference and behavior change among HCPs globally, including information overload and the fact that since the year 2020, 70% of HCPs are considered “digital natives”. The consumer experiences of HCPs engaging with companies such as Amazon and Netflix – who take a personalized approach to their customer engagement and content dissemination – mean that many HCPs expect a similarly personalized, seamless experience from biopharma companies.

The journey

Individuals and organizations are at different places in their omnichannel journey



Within Medical Affairs, there has long been a gradual evolution in approaches towards strategic leadership.² However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this evolution to a point where digital transformation rapidly gave way to the omnichannel era. Supplanted by omnichannel, digital strategies are now arguably redundant.¹⁻³

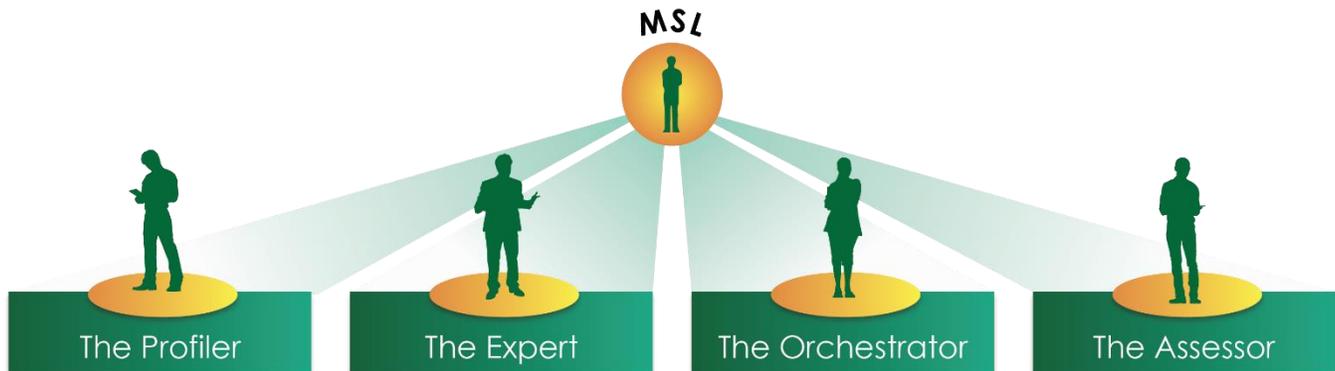


“The omnichannel approach centers around meeting your audience how, where, and when they want to be met. And the Field Medical team plays pivotal roles in driving tailored omnichannel execution.”

Kelly Lo, Amgen

To execute an omnichannel approach successfully, Field Medical teams must leverage preferred content, formats, and channels at a time when stakeholders are going to be most receptive. Delegates discussed that this looks very different depending on the HCP’s specialty, demographics, region, and market.

Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) in Field Medical teams play multiple roles that enhance the possibility for omnichannel success.



1. **The Profiler** – Understanding the customer (preferences, interests, unmet medical needs)
2. **The Expert** – Providing context to complex scientific discussions to ensure virtual and face-to-face communication with customers is impactful and clear
3. **The Orchestrator** – Enabling customer-centric engagement by utilizing the right content and channels
4. **The Assessor** – Reviewing and assessing data, as well as sharing valuable HCP insights with the organization that can inform strategy and allow for course correction

The presentation part of the workshop concluded that, regardless of nuances with the omnichannel approach to HCP engagement, Field Medical teams play a crucial role within the omnichannel ecosystem, with some considering MSLs as a key “channel”.

Insights from MAPS workshop participants

Three interactive exercises followed the presentation, in which participants discussed the skills and support that would enable the evolution of Field Medical teams in the omnichannel world. Roundtables (segmented into groups by stage in their omnichannel journey) discussed and identified the following:

1. Key skills that are needed by Field Medical teams to succeed in the omnichannel world
2. Key skills that are not yet optimized for the omnichannel world
3. Wider support Field Medical teams need to succeed in the omnichannel world

What are the key skills that Field Medical teams require to succeed in the omnichannel world?

It was no surprise that the concept of prioritizing your audience featured at the top of the list for success in the omnichannel world. This mindset is fundamental to the omnichannel approach. If Field Medical teams are not able to understand their audience's educational needs and preferences, then scientific exchanges will remain limited in value.

Throughout the discussions, there were five skills which were consistently identified regardless of the group's stage of the omnichannel journey. Participants highlighted that these skills are now being assessed as part of the hiring process and that MSLs who could showcase experience with digital channels and platforms would be at an advantage.

Top five skills that medical teams require to succeed in the omnichannel world

1. Understanding your customer*
2. Digital literacy
3. Communication (different modalities/channels/adapting for audience)
4. Commercial acumen
5. Knowledge of relevant platforms/technology

*Term used to represent their HCP "stakeholder" or "audience" by delegates in the workshop

What is the current skills gap in Field Medical teams?

In the second exercise, groups revisited their list of key skills and identified skills that have not yet been optimized within their Field Medical teams.

At least three out of five of the identified skills would be considered "soft skills", rather than specific skills necessary for the MSL role, and featured in all discussions regardless of the stage in the omnichannel journey. Traditionally, MSL roles have prioritized scientific expertise, but changing perspectives mean that different skills are gaining importance, including strategic thinking, flexibility, and listening. If the top key skill that MSLs need today is an understanding of their audience, then listening skills must be optimized to achieve this.

Top five skills described as "not yet optimized"

1. Commercial acumen
2. Data/metrics interpretation
3. Strategic thinking
4. Adaptability/flexibility
5. Listening

The relationship between Medical and Commercial functions has long been a complex one. This has varied from periods of stark separation to today's world in which omnichannel success is not possible without some cross-functional alignment and collaboration. It is therefore significant that "Commercial acumen" was discussed as one of the primary skills which is both required for success and still requires optimization.

The vision of the "omnichannel MSL" therefore looks different to the traditional MSL. With commercial acumen and soft skills as a priority, this may further diversify the MSL talent pool.

"Historically there has been aversion and fear around being linked to the Commercial function. However Medical teams are increasingly realizing the value of their Commercial counterparts. It was interesting to hear Medical teams noting that Commercial is further along in its omnichannel journey, as well as discovering their potential to learn from Commercial colleagues."

Rosie Humphreys, OPEN Health

What wider support do Field Medical teams need to get there?

Understanding the key skills required and identifying the skills gaps in your organization is a good starting place to support Field Medical teams in the omnichannel world. But more broadly, Medical Affairs will not achieve omnichannel success without wider support from relevant stakeholders, platforms, and processes.

The areas of support that were identified in this workshop further highlighted the need for cross-functional collaboration and strategic alignment with Commercial. Many felt that omnichannel transformation starts from the top, with buy-in and financial investment from senior leadership. For Field Medical teams, effective execution of omnichannel strategy requires internal training and knowledge management.

The final exercise of the workshop highlighted how an organization's wider support priorities vary along the omnichannel journey. When first implementing an omnichannel approach, cross-functional collaboration and senior leadership buy-in were identified as critical factors. As organizations progress, internal training helps to realize the ambitions set by leadership. It became apparent through discussions that budget was an important element later in the journey. For organizations to continue executing omnichannel effectively, ongoing strategic support is required, often from their solutions providers. Integrated technologies and platforms are also needed to execute organizations' omnichannel plans.

Top five areas of support Field Medical need to succeed with omnichannel

1. Cross-functional collaboration
2. Budget
3. Training and knowledge management
4. Senior Leadership buy-in
5. Strategic alignment (e.g., with Commercial)

Conclusion

Overall, participants concluded that there is no conflict between embracing the core principles of omnichannel and the mission of Medical Affairs and its Field Medical teams – to serve patients, advance clinical practice, and address educational needs. Omnichannel provides methods and tools for Field Medical teams to engage more efficiently, and with more measurable results than before.

That said, a high level of variability remains regarding how Field Medical teams execute omnichannel for Medical Affairs. The majority of pharmaceutical organizations recognize that omnichannel will continue to play an important role over the next 5 years, and that it is a key contributor towards Medical Affairs achieving its projected strategic leadership role.²

For Field Medical teams, success lies in the ability to transform the existing scientific mindset. Although the thirst for knowledge and ability to adapt and evolve based on the data remain as important as ever, teams must also embrace the soft skills required to gain a deeper understanding of customers.

Omnichannel strategies should be driven by insights, and these are garnered from a variety of sources and channels. The Field Medical team represents a vital channel in the channel mix, with the ability to orchestrate and assess omnichannel engagement with HCPs.

Abbreviations

HCP, Healthcare Professional; MAPS, Medical Affairs Professional Society; MSL, Medical Science Liaison

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About MAPS and the Field Medical Focus Area Working Group (FAWG)

MAPS is the premier non-profit global Medical Affairs organization “FOR Medical Affairs professionals BY Medical Affairs professionals” across all different levels of experience/specialty. Together with over 9500 Medical Affairs members from 280+ companies globally, MAPS is transforming the Medical Affairs profession to increase its value to patients, HCPs, industry, and society.⁴

Focus Area Working Groups (FAWGs) are committees of MAPS members with area expertise who collaborate to produce content and training resources and provide guidance and guidelines to steer the future direction of their specialty within Medical Affairs.⁵ This whitepaper was written in partnership with the MAPS Field Medical FAWG’s omnichannel workstream.

Find out more about the Field Medical FAWG and its mission and strategic objectives [here](#). Get in touch with the FAWG omnichannel workstream leads below:

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