



Review Article

Exploring Sales and Marketing Strategies in the Pharmaceutical Industry: A Comprehensive Review

Saurabh B. Gade*, Mr. Dnyaneshwar S. Vyavhare, Dr. Megha T. Salve

Department of Bachelor in Pharmacy, Shivajirao Pawar College of Pharmacy, Pachegaon, Ahmednagar-413725

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ABSTRACT

The pharmaceutical industry is characterized by its complex and competitive nature, where successful sales and marketing strategies play a pivotal role in ensuring the accessibility of innovative drugs to healthcare professionals and patients. This comprehensive review article provides a detailed exploration of the multifaceted landscape of sales and marketing within the pharmaceutical sector. These strategies are critical in establishing strong relationships with healthcare professionals and institutions, delivering essential product information, and adapting to a digital-centric era. In the realm of marketing, this review delves into the nuances of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising, medical education, scientific engagement, and the utilization of social media and content marketing. It underscores the need for transparency and adherence to strict regulatory guidelines while navigating these marketing strategies. Challenges in the pharmaceutical industry, such as regulatory compliance, are examined, emphasizing the need for ethical marketing practices. The role of regulatory agencies, particularly the FDA in the United States, is crucial in maintaining the integrity of marketing and advertising activities. The review highlights key sales strategies, including the role of pharmaceutical sales representatives, key account management, and the growing impact of digital sales and e-detailing.


INTRODUCTION

The importance of pharmaceutical sales and marketing has grown exponentially, to the extent that budgets for these functions often surpass those allocated to research and development. Pharmaceutical sales representatives, in particular, play a critical role as they are the frontline

salespeople employed by pharmaceutical, healthcare, or biotech companies to promote their products to various external stakeholders. Beyond sales, they are instrumental in influencing and educating healthcare professionals and key opinion leaders about the benefits of their company's products. In a highly competitive and

*Corresponding Author: Saurabh B. Gade

Address: Department of Bachelor in Pharmacy, Shivajirao Pawar College of Pharmacy, Pachegaon, Ahmednagar-413725

Email  : saurabh19601@gmail.com

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regulated industry, the effectiveness of pharmaceutical sales and marketing has become indispensable for ensuring the success of pharmaceutical products in the market. Pharmaceutical marketing encompasses both traditional and digital strategies aimed at attracting new patients and generating awareness about specific drugs or treatment plans. It can be targeted towards physicians or directly to consumers. In the pharmaceutical industry, companies take on the vital role of designing, discovering, and developing drugs for the treatment, prevention, diagnosis, and cure of various medical conditions.

(1) The drug development process follows a typical cycle time of 10-15 years, representing a prolonged journey from concept to market availability. Interestingly, pharmaceutical companies allocate a substantial portion of their resources to marketing these drugs, aiming to bolster sales and secure their market position. It's important to note that the window of profitability is often limited to the duration of the patent protection, and once this protection expires, generic companies gain the ability to produce and market the same drug, potentially affecting the original manufacturer's market share. (2) In Canada, the pharmaceutical industry allocated \$1.7 billion in 2004 to market drugs to physicians, while the United States saw a staggering \$21 billion spent in 2002. By 2005, the United States witnessed an estimated \$29.9 billion in pharmaceutical marketing expenditures, with one projection reaching as high as \$57 billion. Breaking down the U.S. figures, it's evident that 56% of the expenses went towards providing free drug samples, 25% to pharmaceutical sales representatives engaging in "detailing" – directly promoting drugs to physicians, 12.5% to direct-to-user advertising, 4% on detailing activities within hospitals, and 2% allocated to journal advertisements. Concerns have arisen, supported by evidence, that these extensive marketing

practices can have adverse effects on both patients and the healthcare profession. (3) According to an analysis report by Equity Master, the Indian pharmaceutical market ranks as the third largest worldwide in terms of volume and thirteenth largest in terms of value. Branded generics dominate the market, comprising around 70 to 80 percent of the industry. Although highly fragmented, the Indian

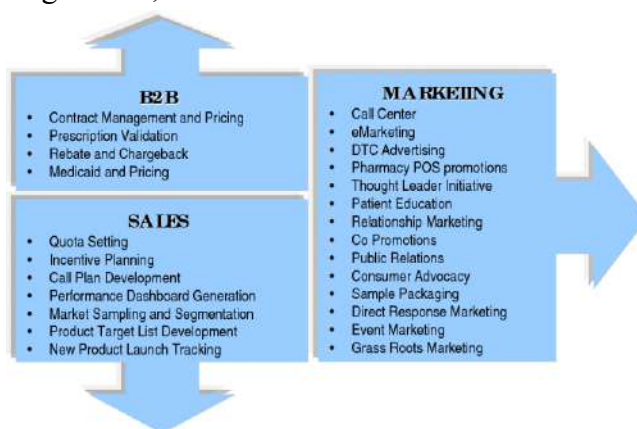


Fig 1. Pharmaceutical Sales and Marketing Business Process Spectrum (4)

pharmaceutical sector is increasingly witnessing consolidation as a defining feature. India has gained a prominent global standing in the pharma industry, with a substantial pool of scientists and engineers capable of driving the sector to even greater heights. (5)

Role and responsibilities of product management team-

Marketing is quite versatile, stretching from planning and developing products to looking after customers even after they've bought. It plays a crucial role when a business wants to go global or boost its exports. (2) Product managers, whether in pharmaceuticals, furniture, or food, have some similar key tasks. They shape the product's direction, oversee its development, and are responsible for how well it does in the market. A Pharmaceutical Product Manager follows these guidelines too. In general, job descriptions for product managers often feature comparable roles and responsibilities. Here are a few examples: (6)

- Conducting research
- Coordinating development
- Communicating plans
- Coordinating development



Fig 2. Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Product Management ⁽⁷⁾

Role- A Product Manager (PM) has a multifaceted role that spans the entire product journey. Typically, a Product Manager takes charge of a product, or a segment of it, right from the initial concept to getting it into the hands of customers. ⁽⁸⁾

While the specific duties of a product manager can vary based on the business environment and organizational needs, the following outlines the fundamental requirements for a product manager in the pharmaceutical industry:

1. Effective time and project management skills.
2. Development of strategic and marketing plans.
3. Conducting comprehensive market research.
4. Demonstrating financial competence.
5. Overseeing product and brand portfolio management.
6. Developing strategic vision and plans for products.
7. Collaborating on new product development with relevant departments.
8. Managing pricing strategies.
9. Handling distribution management.
10. Overseeing marketing communications. ⁽⁹⁾

Pharmaceutical Marketing strategies-

Pharmaceutical marketing encompasses a spectrum of efforts aimed at informing both physicians and the broader public about new and established pharmaceutical brands. This multifaceted approach includes initiatives such as distributing complimentary product samples, providing comprehensive product literature, establishing disease management programs, and offering support materials for patients. Additionally, pharmaceutical marketing incorporates online strategies, as well as organizing events and meetings for physicians. It can also be characterized as a management process that strives to identify and address patient needs in a financially viable manner. In the pharmaceutical industry, marketing predominantly revolves around sales and promotional activities, which are integral branches of this discipline. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Pharmaceutical marketing, as a specialized field within marketing, can be defined as the process of creating a market for pharmaceutical care. It encompasses all the efforts made by individuals or organizations to establish markets for pharmaceutical care. Let's take a closer look at this definition. Pharmaceutical marketing focuses on pharmaceutical care, not just drugs. Any product, service, or concept required to address and fill gaps in pharmaceutical care should be part of the pharmaceutical marketing conversation. The promotion of various clinical pharmaceutical services and programs is as integral to pharmaceutical marketing as the promotion of drug products. In essence, pharmaceutical marketing goes beyond the marketing of pharmaceuticals; it's a broader concept. ⁽¹¹⁾ **Pharmaceutical marketing strategies are designed to reach two primary target audiences:** Patients and healthcare professionals (HCPs). Success in this industry hinges on the ability to effectively engage with both audiences to achieve several key objectives:

- **Building Brand Awareness:** Creating a strong brand presence is essential for pharmaceutical companies to distinguish themselves in a competitive market.
- **Establishing Trust and Reliability:** Building a reputation of trust and reliability is crucial for gaining the confidence of patients and healthcare professionals.
- **Providing Information:** Pharmaceutical marketing strategies should impart essential information about diseases, symptoms, and the range of available treatments, helping individuals make informed decisions about their health.
- **Communicating New Drug Launches:** Keeping patients and HCPs informed about the introduction of new drugs and treatment options is a pivotal aspect of pharmaceutical marketing, ensuring they have access to the latest advancements in medical care. ⁽¹²⁾

Marketing strategies follow by different pharmaceutical companies-

Pharmaceutical companies, no matter where they are in the supply chain or whether they sell to other businesses or consumers, must use a specific marketing plan to successfully promote their products and services. In the following discussion, we will explore some of the most commonly used pharmaceutical marketing strategies. ⁽¹³⁾

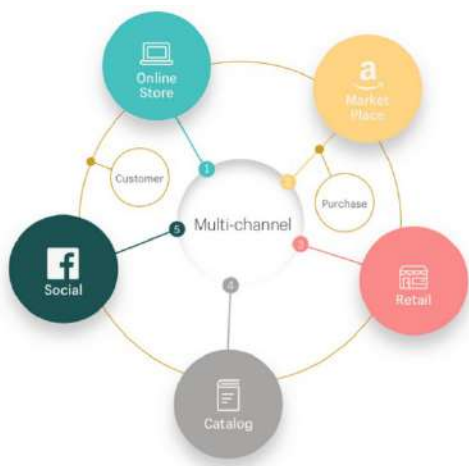


Fig 3. Multi- channel for pharmaceutical marketing. ⁽¹⁴⁾

1. **AFFILIATE MARKETING-** Affiliate marketing is a kind of marketing where a company pays individuals (affiliates) for bringing in visitors or customers through their own efforts. It fits in here because affiliate programs are all about selling products efficiently, with affiliates getting paid for each sale they generate, minimizing marketing costs. ⁽¹³⁾

2. **TARGET MARKETING STRATEGY-** Target marketing is an integral component of every pharmaceutical marketing strategy. It allows organizations to concentrate their efforts on specific market segments, tailoring marketing campaigns and messages to a particular audience. This approach enhances relevance to the audience and boosts the likelihood of



converting them into customers or clients, ultimately emphasizing the importance of catering to the customers an organization can serve most effectively. ⁽¹³⁾

3. **CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY-** A widely embraced strategy, employed by most companies in one form or another. The objective is to craft captivating content and experiences that stimulate interaction and engagement. In today's tech-driven landscape, with the proliferation of marketing platforms and channels, a customer engagement strategy is a prevalent approach for both B2C organizations and B2B brands seeking meaningful two-way communication with their audiences. This is true for us at Orientation Marketing as well. Our goal is to foster a community around our brand, where audiences can actively engage with specific content. ⁽¹³⁾



Fig 4. Top customer engagement strategies ⁽¹⁵⁾

4. **DIGITAL MARKETING**- In today's world, 'digital' is a big part of our daily lives. Many industries have quickly embraced the digital age. However, the pharmaceutical industry hasn't fully embraced digital marketing, except for having websites. Nowadays, more pharmaceutical companies are starting to use social media and online stores as digital marketing tools, allowing customers to buy products online. Some companies are still figuring out the full potential of digital, while others are making it a key part of their overall marketing approach.

Types of digital marketing

- Search engine optimization
- Social Media Marketing
- Pay Per Click Ads
- Email Newsletters ⁽¹⁶⁾

5. **PHYSICIANS-TARGETED PROMOTIONS**- Promotions by drug companies can subtly impact the prescription choices of doctors. In 2002, the pharmaceutical industry spent \$5.63 billion on these promotions, which ranged from free office supplies to fully-covered events, sales reps, and awards for physicians. ⁽¹⁷⁾

6. **DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER ADVERTISING**- Advertising directly to consumers can boost sales of promoted drugs, but it might not always be the best choice for patients, both financially and for their health. For instance, from 1990 to 1998, about 4 million patients sought medical help for allergy symptoms, but in 1999, this number

suddenly jumped to 8 million. This increase matched the fact that in that same year, over 50% of the \$1.85 billion spent on direct-to-consumer advertising was for prescribed oral antihistamines. ⁽¹⁷⁾

7. **SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)**- is the practice of enhancing a website's visibility in search engine results. The ultimate goal is to drive more traffic to the site. In today's competitive markets, achieving visibility often requires a well-planned, time-intensive strategy, with results that can have a lasting impact. In the pharmaceutical industry, digital-focused awareness campaigns are becoming increasingly popular. For further information on SEO for pharmaceutical firms, you can visit this website. ⁽¹⁸⁾

8. **DIRECT SALES**- Even today, numerous businesses continue to send sales representatives to specific regions to attract new clients. This holds especially true in the business-to-business pharmaceutical sector, where face-to-face interactions remain a vital part of conducting business deals. This non-marketing approach focuses on guidance for finding and hiring sales professionals with a track record of success in emerging markets with high potential. ⁽¹⁸⁾

9. **EMAIL MARKETING AND LIST BUILDING**- Email marketing has evolved into a highly successful strategy for companies in the rental industry. Some firms can generate revenue by renting their email lists to other businesses. This allows the clients of these businesses to reach the subscribers on the email list, increasing the chances of those clients' buying products or services from the renting company. ⁽¹⁸⁾

10. **UPDATE YOUR WEBSITE**- Your website serves as your company's online resume. That's why it's important to refresh it regularly to keep it modern, appealing, and up-to-date, making information easy to access and navigation user-friendly. It's crucial to collaborate with your web developer to ensure that your site is

mobile-friendly. Research reveals that 92% of the leading pharmaceutical manufacturer websites pass Google's mobile-friendly test. However, none of the top 25 meet Google's Core Web Vitals standards, and 92% fall short in Google's mobile speed test. ⁽¹⁹⁾

11. USE ONLINE COMMUNITIES TO CONNECT WITH PHYSICIANS-

LinkedIn is the largest professional network on the internet, but to reach a verified and specific healthcare professional (HCP) audience, it's a good idea to join HCP-specific channels like Sermo. By collaborating with Sermo, you can connect with over 1.3 million healthcare professionals in 150 countries, enabling more effective networking with your HCP audience. ⁽¹⁹⁾

12. USE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) TECHNOLOGY-

Incorporating CRM technology into your pharmaceutical marketing strategy is essential for success. It enables you to collect and utilize data about your leads, fostering reliable and enduring relationships. CRM tools gather and centralize information, including communication preferences, relationship history, and online interactions. You can leverage this data in various ways, such as

- sending tailored email campaigns based on website interactions.
- cross-selling new drugs and therapies based on past choices.
- personalizing messages for birthdays and milestones.
- offering post-sales support.
- sending free sample offers. ⁽¹⁹⁾

13. PROVIDE FREE SAMPLES-

Speaking of free samples, this happens to be one of the time-honored marketing tactics in the pharmaceutical industry and can be quite effective if your healthcare professional (HCP) networks permit it. Giving physicians free samples can increase the likelihood of them prescribing a drug.

However, it's crucial to proceed with caution and ensure that sample distribution is handled responsibly. ⁽¹⁹⁾

14. USE DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR EACH AUDIENCE-

The strategies employed to engage healthcare professionals (HCPs) are often distinct from those used for patients, and vice versa. These two markets differ in terms of platforms, research methods, and their unique points of interest. Effective communication with each group also requires adjusting the tone accordingly. For instance, patients tend to respond better to an emotional and empathetic approach, while HCPs generally prefer analytical, data-driven communications. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Sales Strategies:

Recent transformations in the pharmaceutical sales model have compelled global pharmaceutical sales leaders to explore fresh sales strategies. Nevertheless, not all of these new commercial models (NCMs) have been definitively established as successful. A point of uncertainty in pharmaceutical sales strategies is the decline of the once highly effective, tactical sales representative-to-doctor model. ⁽²⁰⁾ Selling in the pharmaceutical sector differs significantly from other industries, primarily due to the unique nature of the products involved. Several critical factors need to be taken into account, including stringent regulations, ethical considerations, the role of key influencers (such as key opinion leaders), and the overall intricacies of the selling process. ⁽²¹⁾

The Sales Process- For over 80 years, the fundamental steps in the selling process have remained largely unchanged, representing one of the oldest paradigms in the field of sales (Moncrief and Marshall, 2005, p.13). The theoretical model of the sales process typically consists of seven well-defined stages, and our interviewee concurred that this model is 'more or less' applicable to the pharmaceutical industry.



However, he highlighted a crucial distinction – in the pharmaceutical industry, selling takes the form of a repetitive cycle rather than a linear process. ⁽²¹⁾



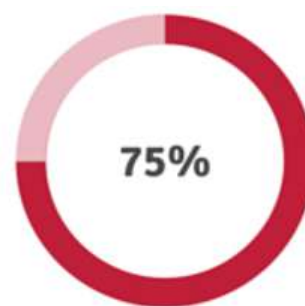
Fig 5. The seven stages of the sales cycle ⁽²²⁾

1. **EVOLVE OLD STRATEGIES**- The adoption of Strategic Account Management has yielded positive results. However, there's a growing trend of allocating resources to new customer outreach methods, even in the absence of a clear and established return on investment for these initiatives. This also raises the possibility that the inclination towards these approaches might be attributed to a deficiency in knowledge or skills when implementing a digital pharmaceutical sales strategy. ⁽²⁰⁾

2. **BARRIERS TO CHANGE**- Moreover, the pharmaceutical industry has come to the realization that the traditional tactical sales approaches are no longer effective in a shifting market landscape. It's been observed that numerous companies have merely made slight adjustments to their existing models as an attempt to conform to the evolving market, rather than embracing entirely new strategies. ⁽²⁰⁾

3. **SAM ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT**- Strategic Account Management (SAM) has demonstrated its effectiveness when executed appropriately. As depicted in the diagram below, it's evident that in the pharmaceutical industry, the predominant approach has been to repurpose the old sales representative model into an account management

model, with little substantial change being realized. ⁽²⁰⁾



4. **PROVIDE SPECIALIZED SALES TRAINING**- The top pharmaceutical sales representatives possess an in-depth knowledge of their products, enabling them to respond to potential buyers' inquiries with precision and self-assurance. However, the training provided to your representatives should encompass more than just product knowledge. They should also possess a strong grasp of your competitors' offerings. This equips them to emphasize the benefits of your products and distinguish them from rival offerings. ⁽²³⁾

5. **USE A MULTICHANNEL SALES STRATEGY**- Motivate your pharmaceutical representatives to utilize digital channels for communicating with buyers. In 2023, phone calls, email campaigns, and social media platforms remain effective methods for engaging physicians. Representatives who leverage these channels are likely to achieve better results compared to those who do not. ⁽²³⁾

6. **FOCUS ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**- Pharmaceutical sales revolve around relationship-building. When a rep gains a physician's trust, it opens the door to multiple sales opportunities in the long term, rather than just a single sale today. The question is, how should your pharmaceutical sales reps go about nurturing these crucial relationships? For instance, reps can make multiple visits to doctors, sharing new information during each encounter. They can also embrace a

multichannel sales approach, which includes using digital channels like email and text messages to communicate with physicians. ⁽²³⁾

7. EQUIP REPS WITH THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY- Last but not least, ensure that your pharmaceutical sales representatives have the essential tools at their disposal. What tools do we suggest? It's beneficial for each of your reps to have a tablet. This way, during in-person meetings with doctors, they can utilize images and videos to enhance their sales efforts. Trust us, visual aids will significantly boost your sales process. ⁽²³⁾

Challenges and Regulatory Considerations:

The pharmaceutical industry is the world's largest, with global revenues reaching approximately US\$2.8 trillion. Recent years have brought significant changes to the industry, imposing new demands on payers, providers, and manufacturers. Customers now expect the same level of choice and convenience from the pharmaceutical sector that they find in other industries. The Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is positioned for sustained high growth in the coming years, driven by various factors. This knowledge-driven industry heavily relies on Research and Development for product innovation and growth. However, basic research, such as discovering new molecules, is a time-consuming and expensive process, traditionally dominated by large global multinationals. ⁽²⁴⁾ Pharmaceutical marketing presents a complex landscape, especially for companies unfamiliar with the industry's stringent rules and regulations. Navigating the pharmaceutical sector involves adherence to numerous regulations, including strict HIPAA standards and FDA laws, to ensure that all marketing messages comply with these rigorous limitations. ⁽²⁵⁾ While pharmaceutical companies have employed various strategies to target different customer segments, changing business and customer trends present new challenges and opportunities for increasing profitability. In the

pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors, a complex network of decision-makers influences the prescription process, with doctors being direct customers of the pharmaceutical industry. The use of medical representatives to market products to physicians and influence decision-makers is a long-standing tradition. Sales force expenses typically account for 15 to 20 percent of annual product revenues, making it the largest expense item on the balance sheet. The most prominent performance-related issues from an organizational perspective are listed below:

- a) **Increased Competition and Unethical Practices:** The industry faces heightened competition, and some companies resort to unethical practices.
- b) **Low Customer Knowledge:** There's a lack of comprehensive customer knowledge, including doctors, retailers, and wholesalers.
- c) **Poor Customer Strategies:** The industry struggles with ineffective customer acquisition, development, and retention strategies.
- d) **Varying Customer Perception:** Customers have diverse perceptions of pharmaceutical products and services.
- e) **Quality and Quantity of Medical Representatives:** The number and quality of medical representatives can vary significantly.
- f) **High Territory Development Costs:** Establishing and developing territories comes with substantial costs.
- g) **Training Costs:** Training and re-training sales personnel can be expensive.
- h) **High Attrition Rate:** The industry faces a high attrition rate among sales personnel.
- i) **Limited Time with Doctors:** Busy doctors has less time for sales calls.
- j) **Poor Territory Knowledge:** Medical representatives may lack in-depth knowledge of the business value within their territories.
- k) **Retailer Revenue:** The value of revenue from each retailer in a territory may be unknown.



l) Sales Forecasting: There's an absence of an ideal mechanism for sales forecasting at the field sales level, leading to significant deviations.

m) Time Management: There is a lack of analysis on the time invested in profitable and less profitable customers, and a need for better time-share planning to develop the customer base and tap into new markets. ⁽¹²⁾

Current scenario and challenges for pharmaceutical marketing:

The growth of internet users, particularly in Asia and Europe, has ushered in the digital era across various industries. Digital marketing, compared to traditional methods, is more cost-effective and time-efficient for engaging with customers in any sector. In the pharmaceutical industry, it allows for data-driven, strategic engagement with prescribers and physicians. However, several challenges hinder the full integration of digital marketing into the pharmaceutical sector:

1. Inadequate Company Vision: Many companies lack a clear vision for implementing digital marketing solutions. Strategies may not be well-defined, agreed upon, or effectively communicated internally. A strong management team is essential to establish the vision, set objectives, and monitor progress. Identifying digital pharma champions within the organization is often lacking. ⁽²⁶⁾

2. Lack of Digital Expertise: The pharmaceutical sector faces a shortage of skilled professionals who are eager to drive digital change. Successful digital implementation requires employees who understand digital marketing and the complexities of the pharmaceutical industry. Finding individuals well-versed in both areas can be a challenge. ⁽²⁶⁾

3. Digital Catastrophe: While some pharmaceutical companies have initiated digital channels and campaigns, executing a comprehensive digital strategy remains a challenge. The proliferation of data has made its

analysis and utilization in digital strategies complex. To address this, pharmaceutical marketers should unify data across channels, use it in real-time, and adapt digital strategies accordingly. ⁽²⁶⁾

4. Strict Regulations: The pharmaceutical sector operates under stringent regulations, varying by jurisdiction. Life sciences marketing faces more rigorous compliance requirements compared to other industries. The sector must adhere to regulations from the FDA and the Federal Trade Commission, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) to protect patient data. The pharmaceutical companies are cautious about adopting new digital marketing practices due to regulatory constraints. ⁽²⁶⁾

5. Poorly Maintained Websites: Some biopharmaceutical manufacturers are slow to embrace social media and continue to follow a one-way flow of information. This approach, reminiscent of the "Web 1.0" era, features carefully screened and legally approved content with limited interaction. Outdated and poorly maintained websites may be detrimental, and effective human resources are needed to manage these digital interactions. ⁽²⁶⁾

Overcoming these challenges requires a strategic approach, investment in digital expertise, and a strong commitment to compliance within the pharmaceutical industry.

Modern Challenges for Pharmaceutical Sales Reps:

In the modern pharmaceutical sales landscape, representatives face distinct challenges that their predecessors didn't encounter. Here are the four primary ones:

1. Limited Access to Physicians: Meeting with pharma reps is less desirable for most physicians due to invasive marketing tactics and time constraints. Trust in pharmaceutical sales reps has diminished, and doctors are increasingly



overwhelmed with patient care and administrative duties.

2. **Evolving Communication Channels:** Advances in technology have transformed communication. Physicians now engage with pharma sales reps through various digital channels, allowing them to access information and interact with companies more efficiently, considering their hectic schedules.

3. **Intensified Competition:** On average, physicians receive approximately 2,800 contacts annually from pharmaceutical companies. With the frequent interactions, pharma reps must work harder to distinguish themselves, cultivate enduring relationships with doctors, and consistently promote their products effectively.

4. **Lack of Personalization in Sales:** Pharmaceutical sales reps are often trained to follow a predefined script. Over time, these scripts become outdated, leading physicians to disengage. The rigid, impersonal approach hinders effective sales in today's environment, where personalization is a crucial aspect of success across industries.⁽²³⁾

CONCLUSION

The pharmaceutical industry's sales and marketing landscape is evolving, with a growing emphasis on digital strategies and a continuing need for effective communication between pharmaceutical companies and healthcare professionals. While the challenges are significant, the potential benefits, in terms of improving patient care and addressing unmet medical needs, remain substantial. A nuanced and ethical approach to sales and marketing is essential to success in this industry. This comprehensive review provides insights into the multifaceted world of sales and marketing in the pharmacy sector, highlighting the strategies and considerations that drive success in this vital field.

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