Review of Promotional Material

Key strategies to transform the process into an enabler for pharma marketers exploiting the digital boom

Future Ready Healthcare™

Problem Definition

Pharma has finally caught up with the digital age, which has already swept most other industries. In its wake, marketers are trying to make the most of the multitude of channels that are now available to them for nonpersonal promotion – mobile, web, and social to name a few (by some estimates, almost 60% of marketing spend is on digital formats currently). However, this along with a changed approach from regulatory authorities toward fast-track approval and pressure from generics and biosimilars means speedy response to competitive, market, and environmental pressures are table stake.

Decoupled production helped reduce the cycle time of creating marketing material through the mantra of "more for less." On an average, assets are created 35% to 40% faster using these "digital factories." Now, the "digital factories" are all set to use automation to further accelerate the marketing and sales process.

Even as the marketers are navigating life in the fast lane, they are constrained by a slow-moving vehicle ahead of them – the review process to approve promotional material. This understaffed, technologically constrained, and woefully inefficient process is unable to manage the deluge of material that is being submitted for approval. For example, a global pharma company sometimes may take up to 3 months from concept approval till release of marketing material for use. Because of this, sometimes companies may end up responding too late to a competitor or an environment change.

All in all, there is frustration on both sides. Marketers are unable to fulfil the needs of the brand, while reviewers feel they are being unfairly targeted for trying to do their job the best they can. This leaves the patients and the physicians in a lurch.

A View from The "Other" Side

A reviewer would rather be doing tactical activities such as building relationships with Key Opinion Leaders, providing strategic inputs, and so on. They prefer doing anything other than reviewing text-heavy documents riddled with typographic errors, formatting errors, and so on. What is worse is that they are at the receiving end of "gold plating" – submission of material for cursory reviews just so that it becomes someone else's responsibility. New approval tools are only as good as the people using them and most agencies have their entry-level staff upload material which leaves reviewers to sort through junk of varying degree before they even start the actual review.

Light At The End Of A Long And Dark Tunnel

The time is apt for a transformative change. All hope is not lost. Pharma companies – big, medium, or small – are looking at ways to optimize the review process and maximize the efficiency without compromising on the quality or increasing the compliance risks. Some of these strategies can be implemented before the review process starts (upstream) and other strategies after the initiation of the review process (downstream).

Upstream Strategies

One top 10 Pharma company found that a staggering 30% of jobs were being rejected right at the submission stage itself for various reasons. Majority of the reasons are ascribed to the agency making the submission. There are various ways to ameliorate this “operational stress”:

01 

CREATE A GATEKEEPER TO MONITOR AGENCY SUBMISSIONS, a coordination layer, that is, the nodal point for creating jobs, uploading assets, tagging references, and interacting between stakeholders (internal and external). This step alone can enhance the efficiency of the review team by 15% to 20%.

02 

EDITORIAL AND PROOFREADING LAYER, to review for typos, adherence to style guides, etc.

03 

REFERENCE LIBRARIAN, as a central conduit for all references to avoid unnecessary wastage. A global pharma company was able to manage the references at 40% of the original cost through a dedicated library service.

Downstream Strategies

Typically, the medical team is the most affected among the 3 (medical, legal, and regulatory) functions in the review team. Most of the ideas are around maximizing the efficiency of the medical personnel without increasing the organizational burden.

Focus internal medical resources only for approval

Highly-skilled internal staff can be freed-up from repetitive and effort-heavy tasks such as data fact-check for non-promotional and corporate material and technical review of promotional and non-promotional material. These staff can be assigned to quality check and approve previously reviewed material. At least 40% cost savings in time and resources can be achieved at steady state.

Delineate launch and growth brands from mature brands

In most cases, mature brands require review only by the medical team as the material is repurposed from previously created ones. No new claims get added either. Hence, the internal medical team can focus on more important brands and leave the mature brands to be reviewed differently.

Premedical review

Material for all brands can be reviewed by an external team beforehand so that the internal team can focus on the final review and approval. Approximately, 70% to 80% of the time of the internal team can be saved in this manner.

Reduce and eliminate “live” reviews

With the advent of technology, having all the reviewers in one room going through the material page by page is rather archaic. Instead, each reviewer can provide comments off-line at their own time and need to meet only if there are conflicting or contentious items.

Filter resubmissions

About 20% of the reviewers’ time can be saved by having someone else review resubmissions and confirm all changes have been carried out. If they have, the job gets approved, and if not, it gets re-routed to the agency to fix. Of course, this means that reviewers have to provide objective comments in the first place – no easy task!

Technology Interventions

With the advent of Artificial Intelligence and machine learning across industries, there are opportunities to leverage them to improve the review process as well. Some ideas include submission validator, automated claims library, automated quality checks, and track-change comparison. By some measures, these technology interventions can reduce cycle times by 30%, increase efficiency, and eliminate errors as a result of manual tasks.

Bottomline

As some companies have demonstrated, there is a way out of the quagmire so that the review process does not become a bottleneck in the eyes of the marketer and instead is a true partner to ensure fully compliant and error-free content reaches the marketplace to impact patients' lives.

Future Ready Healthcare

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