

Using Social Media to Listen BEFORE YOU LEAP

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e-Patients: Much More Than Targets

Technology has given rise to a new kind of patient—one who is empowered, educated, and hungry for information that digital media can provide. These e-Patients have captured the imagination of healthcare marketers, who are poised to spend \$1.12 billion in 2011 (per eMarketer) to reach them. Pharmaceutical companies use a dizzying variety of tactics—from gaming, to paid search, to mobile apps—hoping to engage these consumers. Yet before launching a single banner ad, savvy marketers are recognizing the advantage that comes from first listening to what e-Patients are saying.

Real Conversations. Rich Insights.

Raw and unfiltered, social media conver-

sations about health topics can be filled with valuable insights for marketers. Online social media users may be desperately seeking to get answers. Others connect to feel validated, finding and talking with “people like me.” Many use social media to vent: about the conditions they’re living with, their care, and their medicine. All are looking for a place where they can share, learn, and belong.

Given the volume and diversity of conversations, marketers aiming to listen need a blueprint to make sense of what they hear. For

example, we applied an insight mining process with three phases to understand what e-Patients were experiencing in the Alzheimer’s category. This 3-phase process—analysis, journey, and educational framework—helped us distill social media conversations and amplify the findings, implications, and solutions. Our findings on Alzheimer’s disease uncovered opportunities and underscored our belief that social listening can produce positive outcomes for patients, caregivers, healthcare providers, and marketers.

Putting Patients on the Map — a Process

Thousands of Alzheimer’s-related verbatim conversations can be found on message boards, blogs, and social media sites. It’s our job as social marketers to tease out emerging themes and sort them into a knowledge base according to their frequency and emotional and educational weight.

Using this foundation, combined with a knowledge of Alzheimer’s, it’s possible to create a patient journey map (see below) to represent the most poignant and actionable themes — key insights — and points at which users were most likely to encounter them.

Overall, the results provide a clear, intuitive presentation of the barriers, motivators, and needs facing Alzheimer’s e-Patients and their caregivers.

The Patient Journey

The patient journey can reflect common barriers, drivers, emotions, attitudes, behaviors, and influencers for patients based on where they are in the treatment cycle.

This approach helps to identify the key points where people can get stuck so that companies can develop innovative solutions to provide the right information at the right time.

Symptom or Side Effect? Recognizing the Difference

“She has been on Brand X for five years but started with aggression, so we stopped it.”

“He was put on Brand Y last year and improved but now he started complaining he was tired and didn’t sleep last night.”

“They put her on Brand X, and she is having delusions and trouble talking.”

After analyzing the caregiver quotes above, we wondered how many times treatment is stopped because of an Alzheimer’s symptom instead of a treatment side effect. It also led us to question how patients and caregivers were supposed to differentiate between the two, as symptoms and side effects can be quite similar. This finding uncovers a significant gap in current patient education programs and materials, and one that might not have been revealed without social media research.

Using Unique Insights to Build Innovative Solutions

A need exists to offer symptom and side effect content together. Doing so can promote effective dialogue between patients, caregivers, and the healthcare team about what to expect and what to do when symptoms or side effects occur. In turn, this may increase awareness and understanding of this barrier for pa-

tients and caregivers and help them work with their healthcare team to make informed treatment decisions.

In conclusion, the return on social listening is hard to ignore: an inexpensive source of raw and often untapped insights about medicine and the treatment experience, immediately available for analysis. In a way, user conversations are like gems lying just below the surface — they wait for marketers who recognize, in their glimmer, a revealing view of educational gaps. Once these gaps are identified, strategic solutions can be crafted to meet the unanswered needs of patients and engage them where they are searching for meaningful responses to managing problems day to day.

To learn more on how social media impacts the patient experience, visit www.healthed.com/social-media-and-the-patient-journey.

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