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## Background

The current and future social media landscape of the pharmaceutical industry has become a very popular topic of discussion recently, especially in the anticipation of greater regulatory guidance by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on social media activities in the near future. A number of pharmaceutical companies have utilized, or are starting to utilize, social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to advance their agendas in the Web 2.0 era. Web 2.0 is associated with web applications that facilitates greater user interaction in the process of information exchange. A recent report stated that 80% of pharmaceutical companies maintain a presence on one of the three earlier mentioned social media platforms.<sup>1</sup>

The pharmaceutical industry's involvement in social media has not been fully characterized. Whether companies are actually involved in social media by allowing participant interaction or how internal departments interface on social media initiatives is largely unclear. It is reasonable for promotional departments to be involved with social media initiatives, however, the role and perception of the Medical Information Department in company social media activities have not been elucidated.

## Objective

To evaluate pharmaceutical companies' involvement in social media, including the role and perspective of the Medical Information Department in the Web 2.0 era.

## Methodology

### Survey Design

A web-based, anonymous survey created through SurveyMonkey™ was disseminated to 153 industry contacts, including representatives from the Medical Information Department, from 35 different pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical companies. The questionnaire design consisted of two surveys each containing 34 questions; respondents were directed to the appropriate version based on whether their companies have a current presence in social media. The surveys were designed to assess the current involvement of pharmaceutical companies in social media, future industry social media initiatives, and the function of the Medical Information Department in Web 2.0 activities.

### Evaluation of Survey Respondents

- 153 industry representatives were contacted. Of the 60 contacts who responded to the survey:
  - 55% (n=33) completed the entire survey
  - 45% (n=27) did not complete the entire survey
  - Current analysis included information provided by these respondents

Table 1. Survey Respondent Demographics

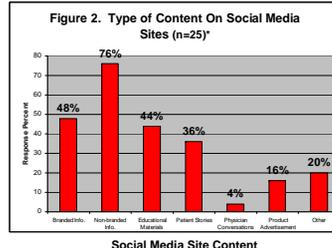
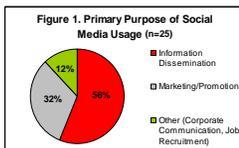
Department	N (% of Respondents)
Medical Affairs	21 (35.0)
Medical Information	14 (23.3)
Marketing	12 (20.0)
Regulatory	3 (5.0)
Emerging/Ebusiness	2 (3.3)
Public Relations	1 (1.7)
Other*	7 (11.7)
<b>Company Presence On Social Media Sites</b>	
Yes, company currently utilizes social media	38 (63.3)
No, company currently does not utilize social media	22 (36.7)

\* Sales, Business Development, Government Affairs, Medical Strategy

## Results†

### Social Media Utilization and Content

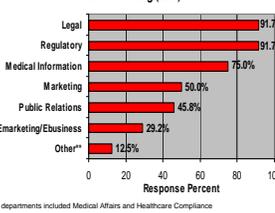
- Utilization of Social Media**
- The top five social media tools utilized included Facebook (60%), YouTube (60%), Twitter (40%), patient communities (32%), and Sermo/other physician communities (24%)\*
  - 76% somewhat agreed or agreed that social media was an effective tool in serving its primary purpose



\* Majority (72%) of social media sites were disease-related\*

† Unless stated, all results regarding social media sites were based on information provided by respondents whose companies currently have a presence on social media sites.  
\* Respondents were asked to check all that apply

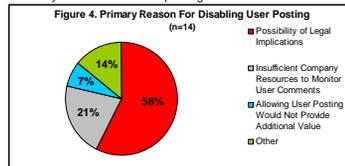
Figure 3. Departments in the Review of Content Prior To Posting (n=24)\*



\*\* Other departments included Medical Affairs and Healthcare Compliance

### Content Monitoring

- User Posting Function**
- 70% noted that they have disabled user posting on all of their social network sites



### Social Media Content Monitoring

- For sites in which user posting have not been disabled, 60% reported that sites were monitored more than once daily
  - The primary purpose (67%) was to monitor for adverse drug events
  - The Marketing Department was most often involved in monitoring\*

### Future Involvement

#### Expanding Further into Web 2.0 – Respondents From Companies With and Without Current Presence

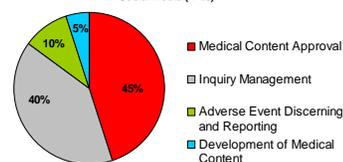
- "Unpredictability of social media – possibility of legal implications" was ranked as the most likely contributing factor to their uncertainty for expansion
- Increased popularity of social media was the primary reason to expand current presence

Table 2. Companies Have Plans to Increase Their Presence in Social Media

	Response Percent	
	Respondents From Companies with Current Presence	Respondents From Companies With No Current Presence
Plan to Increase Presence	58.8%	31.6%
Increase Within the Next 6 Months	20.0%	22.2%
Increase Within the Next Year	40.0%	33.3%

### Medical Information Department

Figure 5. Primary Function of Medical Information Specialists in Social Media (n=20)



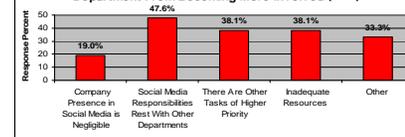
#### Social Media Inquiry Management

- 21% noted that inquiries posted on social media sites were forwarded to Medical Information Specialists
- No Specialists visited the sites directly to respond to posted inquiries

#### Role of the Medical Information Department in Web 2.0

- 59.1% believed that the Department should play a greater role in social media initiatives

Figure 6. Barriers Preventing the Medical Information Department From Becoming More Involved (n=21)\*



## Discussion

Many respondents - both from companies with and without a current presence in social media - noted that their companies have plans to increase their presence in social media. A majority of those with no current presence were still involved with social media indirectly as 73.7% monitor social media activity in general despite not having their own company social media site (data not shown).

Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter were the top three social media tools utilized by pharmaceutical companies. Eighty-five percent reported that of all the social media sites they use, the site with the largest number of followers/subscribers still had less than 5,000 people (data not shown). Most company social media sites don't allow users to post: 70% have disabled the ability for users to post on all of their social network sites. More than half have cited possibility of legal implications as the primary reason for disabling user posting. Further evaluation may be needed after the FDA issues its guidance on social media to assess whether the percentage of companies who have disabled user posting have changed as a result of greater regulatory guidance.

## Limitations

- Survey questions were not validated.
- Survey respondents' knowledge regarding company social media activities was not assessed.
- Difficult to generalize findings across all pharmaceutical companies.
  - Survey results may not represent all companies equally.
  - The size of the company and available company resources may contribute to the degree of social media involvement.
  - Definite conclusions cannot be derived from the relatively small sample size.
- There was variability in the number of responses for each question.
  - Results from some questions were based on only a few responses.

## Conclusions

- Many working in industry are aware of the increased popularity of social media and have plans to increase their presence in Web 2.0.
- These desires to expand further into Web 2.0 are conflicted by legal implications, which also contribute to the various pharmaceutical companies' hesitancy to enable user posting on their social media sites.
- The role of the Medical Information Department will likely expand as more people engage in Web 2.0 in the evaluation of their healthcare decisions. Having more Specialists go to the social media sites directly to respond to posted inquiries will be one mechanism in which the Department might become more involved in the future.

## References

1. L2 Digital IQ Index® (2010). Pharma: ranking the digital competence of pharmaceutical brands. Retrieved October 28, 2010: [http://i2hinkank.com/Digital\\_IQ\\_Pharma.pdf](http://i2hinkank.com/Digital_IQ_Pharma.pdf).