

The Use of Tablet Computers Among Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs): Trends Over the Past Year



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Background

The use of tablet computers among physicians has doubled since 2011, reaching 62% in 2012.¹ Of these physicians, about half utilize tablets at the point of care and about 40% use them to read medical journals.^{1,2} The increasing use of tablets among physicians is not limited to their own professional purposes but also extends to their interactions with sales representatives.³ With the growing adoption of tablets among physicians and their interactions with the pharmaceutical industry, it would be valuable to explore the trend in the use of tablets among MSLs.

The initial evaluation of tablet use among MSLs was presented last year at the 23rd annual DIA Workshop for Medical Communications.⁴ Most of the respondents with tablets had limited experience with the technology (84% used it for less than 6 months) and had a desire to continue the evaluation of tablet use and functionality.

Objective

To build upon prior research on the use of tablets among MSLs, specifically assessing the current trends in application of tablet technologies, the overall utility of and satisfaction with tablets, and the new avenues for tablet use in facilitating scientific exchange.

Methods

A web-based, anonymous survey consisting of up to 27 questions was disseminated to MSLs at various pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies through the Rutgers Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowship alumni database and MSL LinkedIn groups (MSL World, The Medical Affairs Company). The survey was open from December 21, 2012 – January 18, 2013, and included multiple choice, rating scale, and open-ended questions. Questions were designed to assess the functionality, utility, and satisfaction with tablets and tablet applications (apps). The results of this survey (representing 2012 data) were compared to a similar web-based survey that was previously conducted (representing 2011 data) to analyze trends over the past year.

Results

Eighty-eight (88) MSLs from across the US responded to this survey. Overall, 28% reported using a tablet for 6-12 months, 34% for 1-2 years and 13% for over 2 years. Of the MSLs who use a tablet, all reported using an iPad[®], except one respondent who reported using a Google Nexus[™]. The n-values may vary due to incomplete or partial responses.

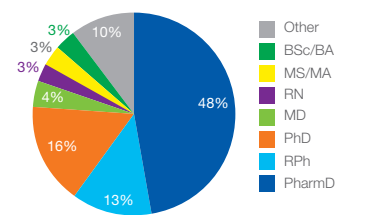


FIGURE 1. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
Respondents were able to check all that apply

# OF EMPLOYEES	% OF RESPONDENTS
> 10,000	39%
5,000–9,999	14%
1,000–4,999	24%
<1,000	24%

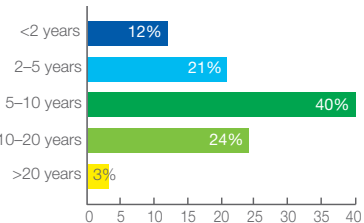


FIGURE 2. YEARS OF MSL EXPERIENCE

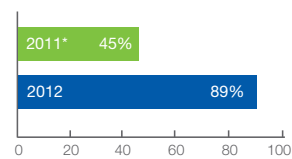


FIGURE 3. USE A TABLET FOR WORK
*2011: n=71

Results, continued

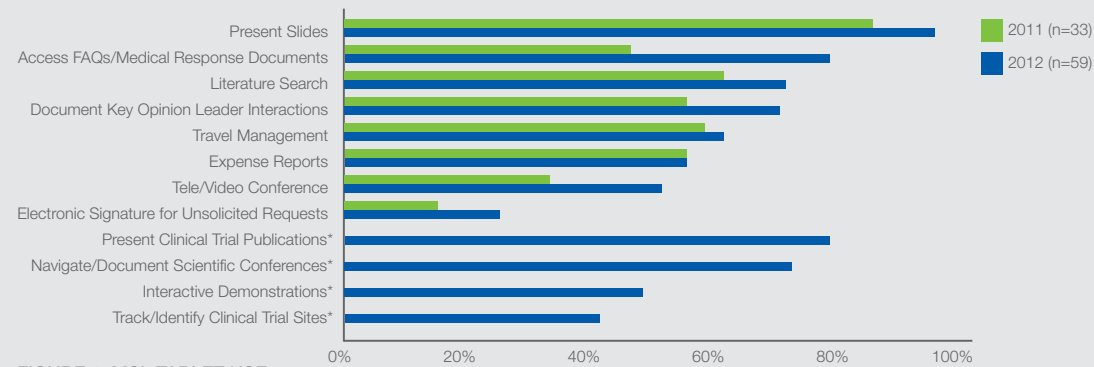


FIGURE 4. MSL TABLET USE
*2011 data was not captured

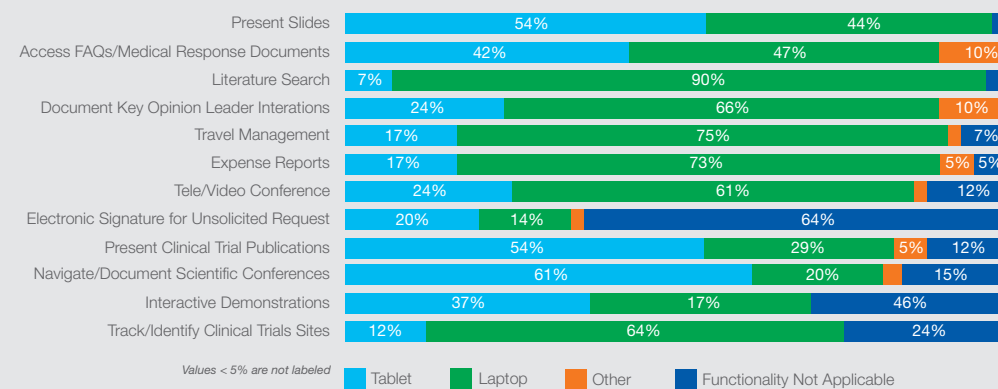


FIGURE 5. DEVICE PREFERENCE
(2012; n = 59)

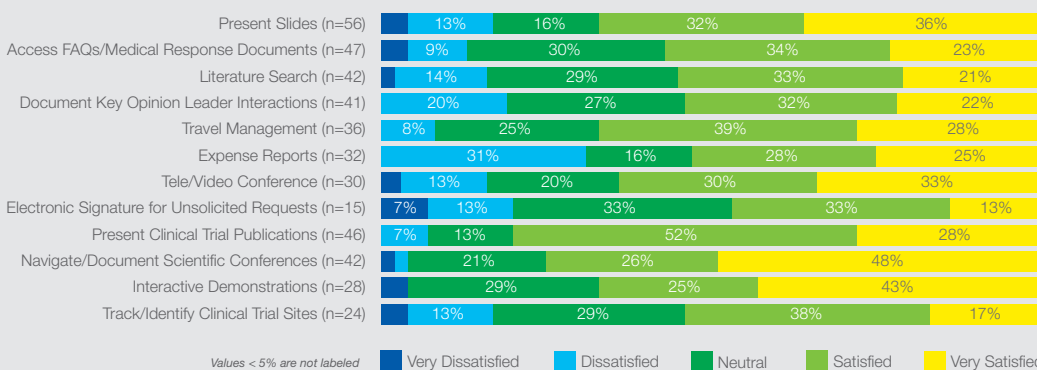


FIGURE 6. SATISFACTION WITH TABLET FUNCTIONALITIES

TABLE 2. SELECTED REPORTED LIMITATIONS OF TABLETS (2012)

Difficult to create/edit documents (ex. PowerPoints, spreadsheets, etc.)
No USB drive
Hard to view emails
Cannot print
Hard to type using tablet keyboard

TABLE 3. APP PREFERENCE

	# APPS REPORTED	# UNIQUE APPS REPORTED	APP MOST FREQUENTLY REPORTED (# TIMES REPORTED)
Present Slides	46	17	Keynote (10)
Access FAQs/Medical Response Documents	15	11	No majority
Literature Search	20	5	Web browser (5)
Document Key Opinion Leader Interactions	20	11	iRep (5)
Travel Management	18	7	Concur (12)
Expense Reports	23	3	Concur (21)
Tele/Video Conference	20	6	WebEx (13)
Electronic Signature for Unsolicited Requests	5	4	Company-developed (2)
Present Clinical Trial Publications	20	9	Good Reader (6), iBook (6)
Navigate/Document Scientific Conferences	17	10	Evernote (5)
Interactive Demonstrations	4	3	Company-developed (2)
Track/Identify Clinical Trial Sites	5	5	No majority

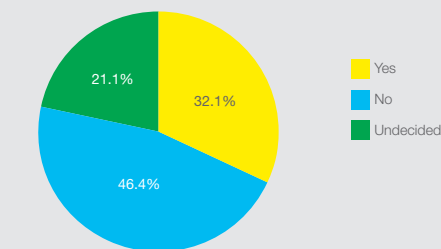


FIGURE 7. PREFERENCE TO EVENTUALLY ONLY USE TABLETS
(2012; n = 56)

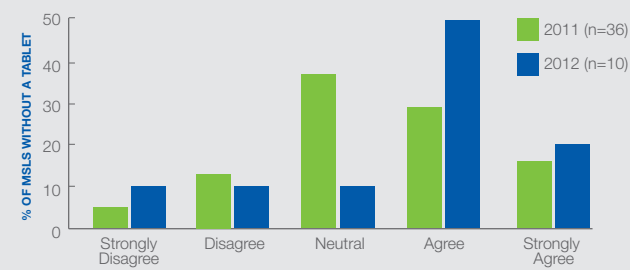


FIGURE 8. NOT HAVING A TABLET IS A DISADVANTAGE
Respondents were MSLs who do not use a tablet

Discussion

- The majority of MSLs reported using a tablet for one to two years, which is a logical continuation from last year's survey results, where the majority of respondents reported using it for less than six months
- The iPad is the most common tablet utilized by MSLs, which may be due in part to the fact that it was the first tablet to gain significant popularity with the general consumer; this trend may change as the tablet market continues to develop and expand
- The percentage of MSLs who reported using a tablet increased dramatically in the past year (89% vs 45%; Figure 3), which indicates that pharmaceutical companies are increasingly incorporating tablets into their field medical departments
- Laptops remain the preferred device for conducting literature searches, documenting KOL interactions, travel management, expense reporting, tracking/identifying clinical trial sites and tele/video conferences, which suggests potential areas where the tablet has room to improve or where new apps would be welcomed (Figure 5)
- MSLs appear most satisfied with the use of tablets for presentation of clinical trial publications, and navigation of scientific conferences (Figure 6)
- Other key issues reported with the tablet include not being able to print and having difficulty with typing/creating spreadsheets & presentations (Table 2)
- The number of unique apps used for the various tablet functionalities ranged from 3–17 different apps (Table 3), showcasing the variety in app selection amongst MSLs
- Among the MSLs who are not using tablets, 70% agreed or strongly agreed that not having a tablet is a disadvantage (Figure 8), suggesting a growing trend towards embracing tablet technology

Limitations

- Survey questions were not validated
- Due to the small sample size, definite conclusions cannot be drawn from the data, nor can they be generalized to all pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies
- Equal representation of MSLs among companies could not be guaranteed due to the anonymity of the survey
- Some respondents discontinued the survey prematurely, and partial responses were included in the analysis

Conclusion

Pharmaceutical companies are increasingly incorporating tablets in their field medical departments. MSLs are utilizing their tablets for a variety of functions; however, based on the results of this survey, it does not appear that tablets will completely replace laptops in the near future due to concerns with functionality and ease of use for certain scientific and business functions. Additional studies are necessary to assess the adaptation of tablet use in the upcoming years.

References

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