

# An e-Renaissance for Direct-to-Practitioner Marketing



## E-marketing opens up new avenues for pharmaceutical marketers

and gives physicians a convenience and ease they seek,  
which they've never had before.

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E-technology — it's the latest weapon in the battle to market products to physicians, and it's getting more sophisticated every day. Pharmaceutical marketers are always looking for a more effective way to get their product in front of physicians. Those who turn to e-technology — particularly in sampling and detailing of pharmaceutical brands — can get the edge they need.

### The Traditional Method

A tried-and-true method has been to send in the ground troops, sales reps who visit physicians in their offices, detail the benefits of their company's product, and hand out samples. But traditional methods have become less effective for several reasons:

- The quantity and costs of field personnel have skyrocketed during the last five years.
- Regulatory intervention by the federal government Prescription Drug Marketing Act (PDMA) has increased potential liability to the pharmaceutical manufacturer.

- Feedback mechanisms to the pharmaceutical marketer pertaining to use of medications by specific patients have been limited by other legislation, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA).

As a result, old marketing tactics are being replaced by new methods of e-marketing.

### E-Marketing

Some e-marketing methods have been around for years, but pharmaceutical marketers have been slow to take advantage of them. The reason? Fear that e-marketing technology will erode the relationships sales reps have built with physicians.

This fear creates a hypothetical sales concern that e-marketing could lead to a decrease in product prescriptions and fear that the physicians simply may

not use the Internet. But statistics may indicate a different story. In a recent study conducted by the Quintiles iQLearning group, 98% of physicians surveyed used the Internet weekly for services; 75% of that group had broadband access to the Internet. Other surveys have shown that 75% of physicians polled would use e-sampling and detailing services if cohesive and effective programs were available.

That's terrific news for pharmaceutical marketers looking for more effective ways to target hard-to-reach and non-called on physicians. Those physicians can be out of a sales rep's reach for a number of reasons: primary reps are not available, the physician is in a rural area, the physician group has new rules for access, physicians are not called on since they are not considered potential high writers for the drug, or the company has chosen not to put sales reps in a particular geographic area.

With e-sampling and e-detailing, marketers can reach the busiest physicians, at their convenience, in the most out-of-the-way places. Whenever the physicians are ready to sit down at their computer, you're ready to educate them about your product.

### E-Sampling and Detailing: Then and Now

Historically, when marketers have spoken about e-sampling, they often have referred to the process where a physician can go online, print out a request for a sample, fill out the paperwork, and fax it back to the pharmaceutical company.

But a revolutionary new system has emerged: completely paperless e-sampling. In this process, physicians can go online and view what samples are available to them and enter their sample requests directly from their desktops. There's no paperwork involved. The physicians are validated and authenticated in real time and in a fashion to ensure PDMA compliance.

Physicians already spend quite a bit of time online adding to their medical knowledge. Many are members of Web-portal organizations, such as iQLearning, where they participate in CME and other programs. Marketers can now work together with Web-portal companies to educate physicians about their product and to offer samples. When a physician visits the site, they can access e-sampling and e-detailing offers directed specifically to them.

This is a powerful pharmaceutical marketing tool for several reasons. First, it provides access to all of the physician members of the Web portal. Second, e-technology can pinpoint physicians with tailor-made offers, analyze the ROI effectiveness of the offers, and easily make changes to the offers.

Furthermore, it can reduce the high cost of field reps and allow those reps to focus time and efforts on more productive physician education. In a recent publication, AstraZeneca stated that by eliminating the sample-drop function of reps, they were able to focus on other more important issues with physicians. This resulted in a 10% savings on PDMA paperwork and eliminated issues of non-PDMA compliance.

It is clear from physician surveys that there is a future for e-sampling and e-detailing. Studies have shown that potentially 70% of surveyed physicians would order samples weekly online if such systems were widely available to them on the Internet. This is an extraordinary gauge, when one considers how many physicians now receive samples directly from field reps.

While e-marketing will not replace traditional marketing, its future is bright. E-marketing opens up new avenues for marketers and gives physicians a convenience and ease they seek, which they've never had before. The industry will be watching to see which marketers become the new innovators in the world of pharma e-marketing. ■

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