

# COVID-19 Forcing You To Go Digital? Youâ€™re Missing A Trick

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Moments of crisis *a/ways* mean change.

In these times, it's tempting to reach for quotes from leaders who successfully navigated through turbulent times. "Never let a good crisis go to waste," is one often attributed to Churchill and requires us to remain level-headed despite the widespread panic. Companies founded during times of turmoil, like GE, IBM, and Microsoft, know that if they can make their business work during times of upheaval, they can go on to be even more successful in times of stability.

When humans and businesses face uncertainty, they must embrace it if they are to awaken inner creative abilities. A look back in history illustrates that crises and extreme threats can be useful for directing individuals, a country or the world to a solution. Once a crisis is in motion, turning it into an opportunity often requires new ways of **seeing, thinking, and responding**. Applying traditional responses may lessen the pain temporarily, but to lay the foundations for long-term prosperity, it's essential to focus on solving the underlying problem.

**It's now time to consider a new digital business model, a different approach based on the availability of data and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).**



**So, how does the pharmaceutical industry continue to engage healthcare professionals (HCPs) during this crisis – and more importantly, what will be the long-lasting impact?**

The restriction of movement, cancellation of key industry events and global travel bans have all impacted the ability to engage HCPs in person. The obvious answer is to increase the use of digital solutions like remote video calling. Veeva Systems has acted quickly, recently announcing a back-up solution for current CRM users. They are offering Engage Meeting, a product designed to enhance HCP-to-sales rep communication via web-based audio and video content sharing capabilities, free of charge for six months. This is a commendable initiative and will go a long way to bridging our communication needs during this period.

## **Overcoming communication challenges with HCPs is far more complex than simply enabling remote engagement.**

However, as the impact of COVID-19 worsens, merely moving to digital is not sufficient. Indeed, if you believe it will solve your problems, you are mistaken.

Using technology to drive physician engagement is not new. Already, two-thirds of HCPs are digital natives, and by 2025, 75% of the workforce will be millennials or younger [1]. According to Across Health, tools like virtual e-detailing (without the presence of the rep) and eRep (live remote e-detailing) are seeing wide adoption with over 50% of pharma piloting [2] or using this technology as standard practice. In the countries which currently account for over 86% of the first five years of New Active Substance sales, HCP engagement is very much digital. However, there still remains a divide between what pharma delivers and what HCPs require [3].

Overcoming communication challenges with HCPs is far more complex than simply enabling remote engagement. Delivering generic brand messages, whether in-person or virtually, is no longer good enough. Sales representatives must bring value to HCPs that are personalized. What is critical to supporting this personalization? It is the ability to have systems support HCP engagement with data – delivering powerful insights based on a granular understanding for example of patient populations, the environment and historic activity that drives the outcome.

These times of uncertainty must inspire us to seek solutions that close this divide between what Pharma delivers and what HCPs want. Switching from face-to-face interaction to remote video, for example, is an absolute minimum requirement for companies to continue engaging with their customers. But what do HCPs want and need? It's now time to consider a new digital business model, a different approach and design based on the availability of data and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Does facilitating the HCP-sales conversation via digital channels (video, audio and email, etc.) help close the divide? It helps, but to truly close the divide we must deliver more value to both sales reps and HCPs. We must empower the sales teams with the ability to focus on engaging HCPs where the need is greatest, support them with suggestions around what conversations can be had and deliver the evidence they need to take action by explaining why.

Utilising data and AI will enable teams to both **see** and **think** differently about customers, at scale. Reps must be empowered to select the most suitable engagement method (remote or otherwise) that delivers value to the HCP.

**As COVID-19 takes hold, how will reps decide on who to organize a video call with or who should get an email?**

- Should it be everyone?
- Should it be those I can't get access to?
- Should it be my target customers?

- Should it be the doctors I have a good relationship with?

**In the future, how should reps decide on who to organize a video call with or who should get an email?**

- It should be where the highest opportunity exists and reps know why
- It should be the highest priority HCPs and reps know why
- It should be where the highest urgency exists and reps know why

As further restrictions around the movement of sales reps are inevitable, utilising digital channels effectively will become critical for Pharmaceutical companies. Those two-thirds of HCPs who identify as digital natives will only increase in number over the coming years, increasing the incidence of remote HCP-sales engagements as we move into 2021 and beyond. To drive the behavior change desperately needed in our industry, engaging with HCPs remotely must be supported with intelligent AI recommendations. **After all, if we change behavior we can change the outcome.**

***OKRA's new FieldFocus solution combines multiple historical data sources to predict the future. Validated by top pharma, the system delivers the highest opportunity, priority and urgency of a potential engagement directly to the reps and then delivers suggestions on what could be discussed and why.***

## References

[1] PEW Research Centre (2018). Millennials are the largest generation in the U.S. labor force [online] Available

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[2] Across Health (2019). Multichannel Rep Technology is Omnipresent pg. 15 - Across Health Multichannel Maturometer 2019 [online] Available

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[3] Across Health (2019). The journey towards digital natives: is pharma driving against the traffic? [online] Available

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