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Five Must-Know Things About The UK's Digital Self-Care Revolution

by David Ridley

HBW Insight looks back at PAGB's Digital Week to extract the five must-know things for the OTC industry.

Now that countries like the UK are starting to open up – although COVID-19 cases are surging again – consumer health companies are thinking about how to take advantage of some of the positive changes brought about by the pandemic.

One of its most obvious impacts has been the acceleration of digital, a mega-trend that has threatened to revolutionize the industry for years, but has now been given a shot in the arm thanks to national lockdown restrictions.

What are the key questions that companies need to be thinking about when looking at their digital strategies?

During Digital Week (5-9 July 2021), UK consumer healthcare industry association PAGB took a deep dive into five areas of concern identified by their long-standing work on digital self-care.

Over the space of five days, the conference – for which HBW Insight was media partner – PAGB hosted fascinating discussions of e-commerce, real-world data and evidence (RWD, RWE), advertising and social media, apps and medical devices and self-care.

In this article, HBW Insight summarizes the must-know things from our daily coverage, to help industry make the most out of the digital self-care revolution.

#1 Self-Care: Money Isn't Everything

One of the major lessons of the pandemic, for both consumers and companies, is that money isn't everything.

Four out of the eight COVID-related consumer trends presented by Google's head of strategic insights, Gerald Breatnach at the Digital Week opening plenary concerned non-monetary values. (Also see "[PAGB Digital Week, Day 1: Google On COVID Trends, How To Capitalize On The E-Commerce Boom](#)" - HBW Insight, 6 Jul, 2021.)

Google search data combined with the latest behavioral science showed that consumers are now shopping smarter and based on values like sustainability, self-care and local provenance, he explained.

Ongoing economic pressure related to the pandemic and the threat of furlough schemes being withdrawn are deepening this overall trend, he said, making consumers even more discerning.

Breatnach's analysis confirms HBW Insight's own findings, with awareness of the impact of climate change on the part of consumers driving the Environmental, Social, and Governance of major OTC players like GSK, J&J, Bayer and Perrigo. (Also see "[Bayer Consumer Health Sees Going Green As 'Good For Business'](#)" - HBW Insight, 10 Mar, 2021.) (Also see "[Perrigo Targets Recyclable Blister Packs In Push To Become 'Genuinely Sustainable'](#)" - HBW Insight, 5 Jul, 2021.)

As noted in HBW's 2020 round-up, coming up with innovative solutions to tricky sustainability problems, such as recyclable blister pack alternatives, preventing contamination via pharmaceutical waste and ensuring compliance within the supply chain, will make the all the difference in the race to be the future's greenest consumer health company. (Also see "[2020 In Review: HBW Insight's Five Key Takeaways For The European OTC Industry](#)" - HBW Insight, 28 Jan, 2021.)

At the same time, companies need to avoid over-promising on environmental claims, leading to accusations of "greenwashing" – a type of advertising infraction illegal in the EU, for example – especially online.

Digital Self-Care: Five Must-Know Things

#1 Money isn't everything if you want to appeal to the post-COVID consumer

#2 All in moderation to avoid falling foul of social media influencer guidelines

#3 Change the channel to make the most out of the e-commerce boom

#4 Find your purpose to know whether your app is a medical device or not

#5 Regulation is good for real world data and evidence driven OTC innovation

According to a recent European Commission review, national consumer authorities across the EU believe that 42% of “green” claims on consumer product websites may be exaggerated, false or deceptive, potentially constituting unfair commercial practices under EU rules. (Also see "[EU Commission Vows To Fight Greenwashing Following Website Claims Sweep](#)" - HBW Insight, 2 Feb, 2021.)

#2 Online Advertising: All In Moderation

Making sure online advertising for medicines doesn't fall foul of national guidelines and regulations can be a tricky business for companies, especially when it comes to using “influencers” – which the UK's Advertising Standards Authority defines “as anyone who has been paid by a brand to advertise a product on their own social media, because of their social media influence.”

Often clients blame regulatory restrictions for their unsuccessful social media and influencer strategies, argued Team Eleven founder Nicholas Gill, based on five years' experience of working in this area. (Also see "[PAGB Digital Week, Day 3: Engaging With Consumers Online And Mastering Social Media](#)" - HBW Insight, 8 Jul, 2021.)

The key to success, however, is not “shifting the blame” but getting together the “right approaches and tools to have the right conversations with regulators and work with them to get influencers and social media right,” he explained.

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Dirt & Glory's Ben Moss pointed out that a lot of young people now get their information from influencers, with many “credible and knowledgeable about their subject.”

Drawing on the agency's work with HRA Pharma's morning-after pill EllaOne, Moss suggested utilizing what he described as “educators,” such as columnists and activists, to talk on about themes related to the condition addressed by OTC products, for example emergency contraception, in EllaOne's case.

Influencers aren't the only way for consumer health companies to seize opportunities presented

by digitalization, however.

Bazaarvoice's Adriana Shilton suggested that companies should also consider online reviews as part of their marketing strategies, as they influenced consumers' "consideration, conversion and even loyalty."

The key for successful use of reviews is moderation, she said, specifically ensuring they are posted by real users. "If you're a brand you don't want all five-star reviews as that's not going to give the shopper confidence that they are authentic," Shilton said.

Furthermore, one person's negative opinion of a product can be helpful to someone else, Shilton added. Having a mix of reviews helps to further educate consumers, she said, ensuring that they can make the right purchase decision.

#3 E-Commerce: Change The Channel

Digital advertising compliance is just one of the regulatory complexities created by the turn to e-commerce among COVID consumers.

With its new e-commerce Advertising Guidance, presented at Digital Week, which covers product information, delivery and supply mechanisms and cross border sales, PAGB is trying to address this issue and support its members in navigating this challenging environment.

The guidance also covers the numerous e-commerce channels – PAGB has identified seven in total, including online marketplace and direct-to-consumer (D2C) models – how they work, how they are controlled, and which attributes must be present within each model.

A key advantage of being an Amazon seller is the ability to bundle products, enabling you to offer lower prices and "control the buying box," while covering costs to achieve as close to the recommended retail price as possible, advised Sam Wandj, World Product's senior operations manager.

For companies that have chosen marketplace models such as Amazon – the most popular according to Reckitt's regulatory affairs manager Ana-Maria Boncu – the key question is whether to be a seller or a vendor.

Vendors are manufacturers that sell products to Amazon, which then takes care of the rest. This approach is good for firms that can deliver in bulk and like to outsource their customer service operations, argued digital service provider World Products.

Sellers, on the other hand, have full control of the listing, continued Sam Wandt, World Product's senior operations manager.

A key advantage of this approach is the ability to bundle products, he said, enabling you to offer lower prices and "control the buying box," while covering costs to achieve as close to the recommended retail price as possible.

Being a seller also allows pharmaceutical manufacturers to have complete control of customer service, he added, "giving you end-to-end traceability of batch control," for pharmacovigilance purposes, for example.

#4 Apps And Wearables: Find Your Purpose

Alongside e-commerce, consumers have also embraced mobile health app and wearable technology in a big way during the pandemic.

In the UK, over half of consumers now use some form of health technology, reported Hamell Communication's clinical director, Alison Carr. (Also see "[PAGB Digital Week, Day 5: Challenges And Opportunities For Digital Self-Care](#)" - HBW Insight, 12 Jul, 2021.)

UK consumers can choose from over 300,000 health apps, ranging from sports and fitness trackers to doctor appointment managers, added the PAGB's acting senior regulatory manager, Christina Gkouva. (Also see "[PAGB Digital Week, Day 4: Harnessing The Potential Of Apps For Self-Care](#)" - HBW Insight, 9 Jul, 2021.)

But what distinguishes a mobile health app or wearable from a medical device? To answer this question, Gkouva said that companies needed to consider the app's "intended purpose."

Does it diagnose, monitor, or treat a disease? Does it compensate for an injury? Investigate, replace or modify the anatomy or a physiological process? Does it control conception? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, Gkouva said, then it will be classed as a medical device by the UK Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

An example of an app that can answer "no" to all of the above and is therefore not a medical device under UK or EU regulations is J&J Consumer Health's new Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack product.

**J&J's Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack
– Getting Inside One Of 2020's Biggest**

Through SmartTrack app, users set their own smoking cessation goals and track progress against their goals, explained marketing director for J&J CH's global smoking cessation Franchise, Julie Sutherland.

“Just by making that information available to them, it really increases not only their awareness, so they can make more conscious choices, it also acts as a motivator,” she added.

Google's new AI-powered dermatology assist tool, on the other hand, uses smartphone cameras to help match skin symptoms with possible dermatological conditions so that users can then research further online.

While the web-based tool is “not intended to provide a diagnosis nor be a substitute for medical advice as many conditions require clinician review, in-person examination, or additional testing like a biopsy,” Google points out, it has been CE marked as a Class I medical device in the EU.

#5 Real World Data/Evidence: Regulation Is Good

Apps and wearables offer not only exciting new digital self-care opportunities for consumers, but also tools for industry innovation.

By using apps and wearables, large volumes of real-world data and evidence can be collected, recording digital biomarkers, such as cough and sneezing frequency, sleep patterns, physical activity and stress levels, explained IQVIA Consumer Health's global senior director R&D services, Dr Volker Spitzer. (Also see "[PAGB Digital Week, Day 2: Real-World Evidence And Its Potential In Consumer Healthcare](#)" - HBW Insight, 7 Jul, 2021.)

Spitzer highlighted the example of the Hyfe app which measures the acoustic signature of a cough and records cough frequency. Such an app could be utilized by an OTC company to show how using their product improved a consumer's cough over a 14-day period, he suggested.

With so many possibilities for RWE, why has it not been more widely adopted by industry? Spitzer suggested this is due to a number of factors, including the concerns of regulators, questions over whether apps are reliable sources of information and how to accurately interpret

UK Launches

By [David Ridley](#)

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HBW Insight speaks to Johnson & Johnson's Bill Twomey and Sven Sjovald about how one of the biggest OTC launches of 2020 – Nicorette QuickMist SmartTrack – uses behavioral science techniques to help motivate consumers to quit smoking and overcame COVID-related supply chain difficulties to launch a much-needed digital smoking cessation aid in the middle of a pandemic.

[Read the full article here](#)

recorded data.

For RWE to deliver its potential, industry needs to be open, Spitzer argued, to collaborate early with regulators and experts and to ensure their studies are scientifically sound, while putting the consumer first.

Echoing both Spitzer and the PAGB's position, Bayer Consumer Health's director of clinical development, Andreas Ehret insisted that RWD/E is "not new," having been used for safety signal evaluation and risk management and in the Rx sector for "quite some time."

However, the lack of agreed definitions and appreciation of the lifecycles of OTC medicines has held back its use in consumer healthcare, Ehret noted.

To accelerate its use in self-care, RWD/E should be "defined more broadly by regulators," he argued, and "should include data generation from real world studies, as very few data are routinely available and can be used for generating RWE."

After COVID-19, Consumer Health Firms Need To Rethink Their Innovation Strategies

By [David Ridley](#)

13 Apr 2021

Given the scale of changes wrought by the coronavirus, IQVIA Consumer Health advises OTC companies to re-think their innovation strategies and consider "new and maybe more risky approaches," such as Rx-to-OTC switch, digitalization and personalization.

[Read the full article here](#)