

EBOOK

# THE CRITICAL GAP IN PHARMA OMNICHANNEL MARKETING

Are your field reps “Wild Cards” or “Masters of the Message” during face-to-face HCP interactions?



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# INTRODUCTION

## Snake oil, anyone?

Believe it or not, there was a time when those who manufactured patent “medicines” were completely unregulated. They could market their product directly to patients making any claim they wished, without any safety information, and without any repercussions. Crazy, but true! Thus, the birth of the proverbial term “snake oil,” which is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “a quack remedy or panacea.”

Luckily, we’ve come a long way over the past 150 years...

## Key Milestones in Drug Marketing Regulation <sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

### 1906: The Pure Food and Drug Act

requires drug manufacturers to maintain purity levels, list the active ingredients on the packaging, and not manufacture, sell, or transport products that are “adulterated, misbranded, or poisonous”

### 1912: The Sherley Amendment

prohibits false therapeutic claims on drug labeling

### 1930: The FDA is Named

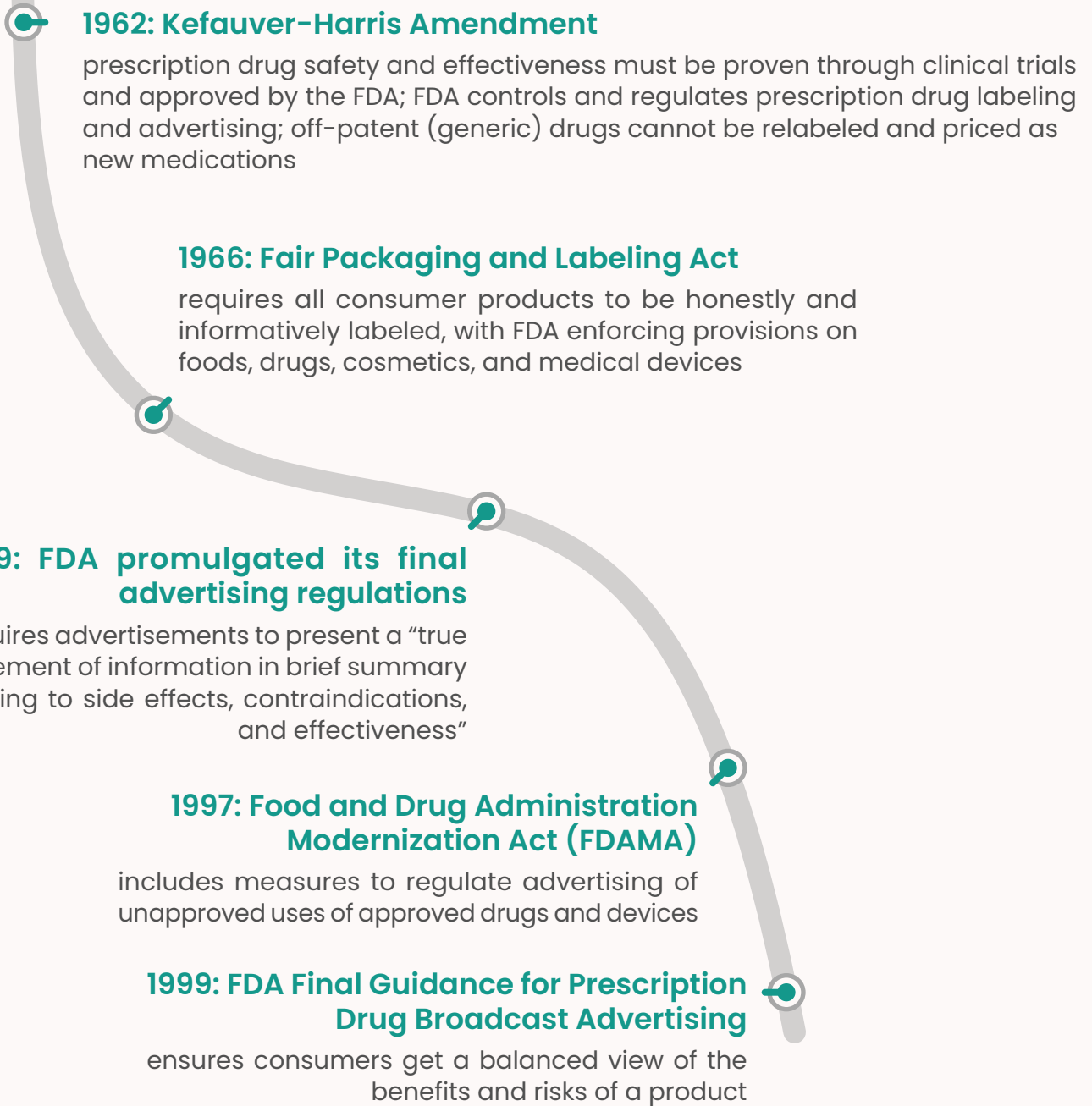
the US Bureau of Chemistry is split into two agencies, one of which is named the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

### 1938: Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA)

requires that drugs have to be proven safe and receive the FDA’s approval before they can be marketed

### 1951: Durham-Humphrey Amendment

defines the kinds of drugs that cannot be used without medical supervision/requires a prescription by a licensed practitioner



The impact of this regulatory evolution in the Life Sciences industry resulted in a shift from 100% direct-to-consumer (DTC) prescription drug advertising in the first half of the 20th Century to marketing and selling almost exclusively to doctors by 1960.<sup>4</sup> With this change, the pharmaceutical sales rep was born.

From the 1950s to the early 1980s, biopharmaceutical companies invested solely in indirect marketing via sales reps, advertising in medical journals, continued medical education events, and other marketing programs targeting healthcare providers (HCPs). However, in the early 1980s, political and social shifts led the industry back to DTC marketing. DTC advertising started with print and television campaigns to increase awareness of underdiagnosed conditions, sponsored by pharma companies, followed by direct product advertisements. In the mid-1990s, DTC marketing expanded and flourished online, as the world turned to the internet as their primary source of information.

Fast forward to today, and you have a complex mix of direct-to-consumer and direct-to-HCP marketing through a myriad of channels that didn't even exist 5, 10, or 20 years ago, alongside armies of pharmaceutical sales reps out in the field, all operating in one of the most highly-regulated environments in the world.

This intricate web of marketing influence has many benefits, but also has introduced some new challenges. This eBook explores these benefits and challenges and digs deep into **the one challenge that has led to a critical gap in pharmaceutical omnichannel marketing.**

**“ With growing competition from similar or virtually identical products manufactured by different companies, the importance of favorable interpersonal relationships has become increasingly important... ”**

**RR Rehder**

*Communication and Opinion Formation in a Medical Community: The Significance of the Detail Man*

Academy of Management Journal, 1965

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**Footnotes:**

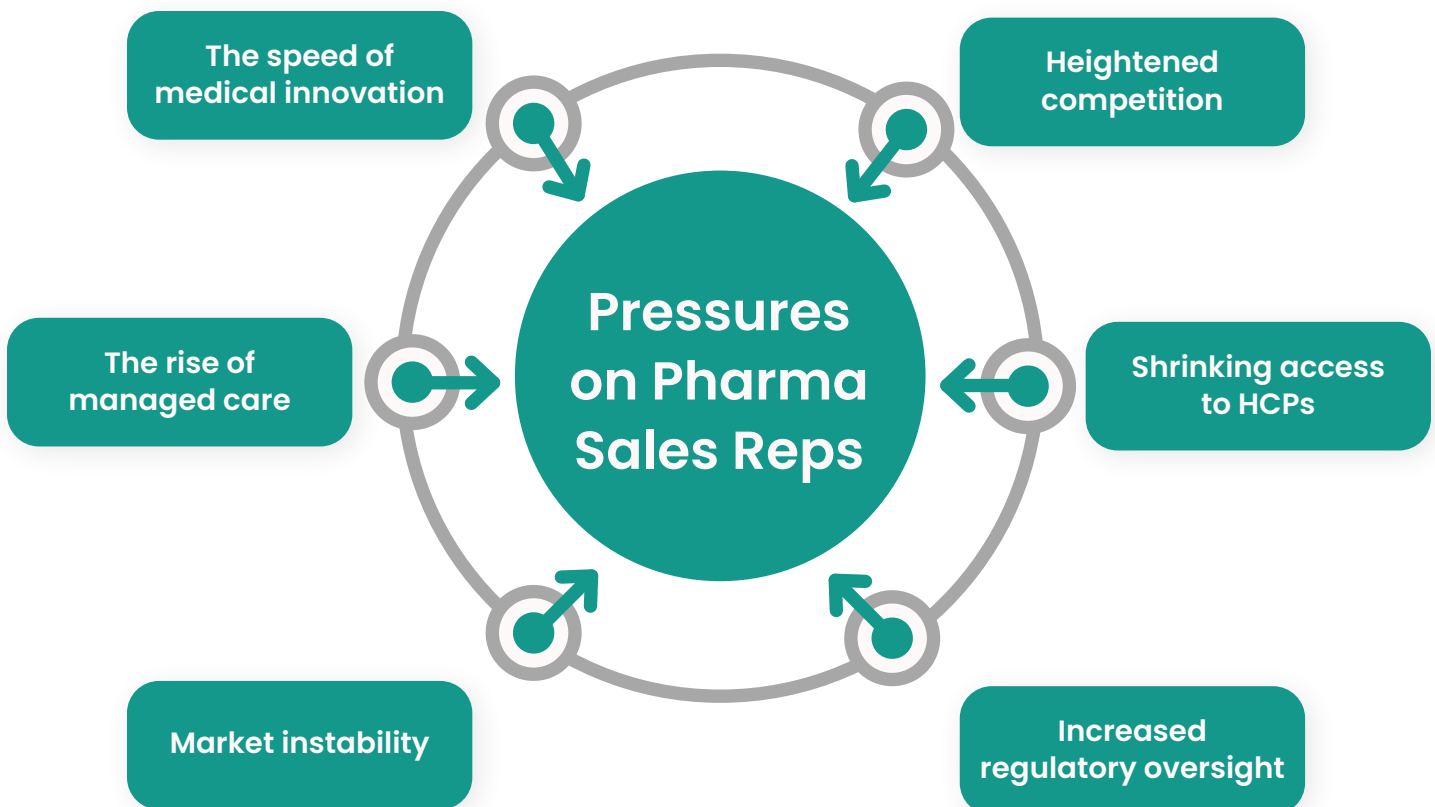
- 1 <https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/fda-history>
- 2 <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/pharmaceutical-marketing-history>
- 3 <https://www.fda.gov/media/109482/download>
- 4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2690298/>

# THE EVOLUTION OF THE PHARMA SALES REP



When pharmaceutical sales reps arrived on the scene in the 1960s, they were equipped with little more than a car, marketing materials, and samples to drive engagement and brand preference among HCPs. At that time, there were fewer pharmaceutical companies and drugs, and it was easier for reps to get access to, and time with, doctors. Good reps could easily build trust and meaningful relationships with their HCPs.

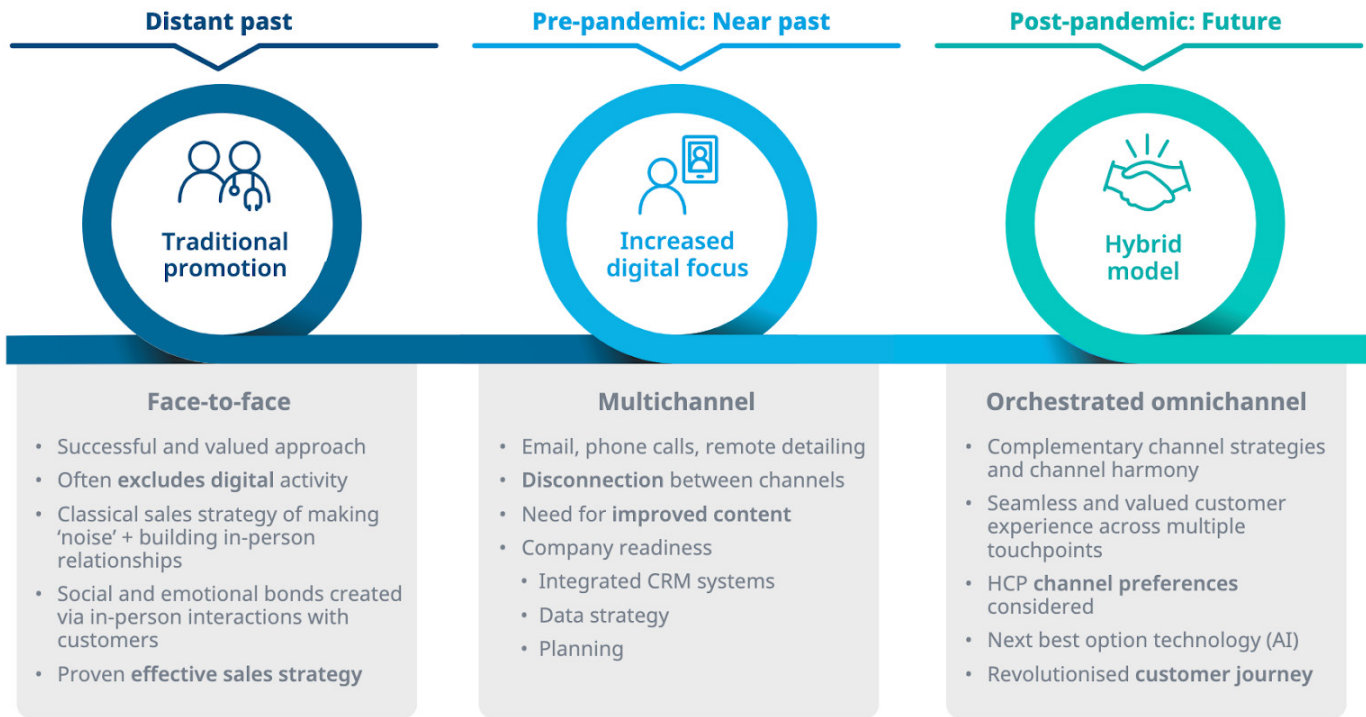
Since then, there have been significant changes in the industry that have made the job of the pharma sales rep more difficult.



Further complicating matters has been the explosive growth in technology, digitization, and online channels to reach, influence, and engage HCPs. Digital communication channels such as email led to the rise of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms, while more recently, the availability of data such as HCP prescribing habits, channel preferences, and content engagement have led to Next Best Action (NBA) insight and tools. And today, artificial intelligence (AI) is leading the charge.

The pharma commercial model has evolved from traditional promotion dominated by face-to-face (F2F) interaction, to a multichannel approach including digital avenues, to the current hybrid model that leverages an orchestrated omnichannel strategy <sup>1</sup>:

Figure 1: Progression in commercial model over time



Source: IQVIA

The pressures on the pharma rep’s selling environment, combined with the increased HCP insight available to them, has propelled pharma reps to rapidly evolve their roles. Being a brand ambassador is no longer sufficient. Reps need to show up and prove themselves to be trusted advisors and strategic partners to their HCPs. To establish value, they need to be prepared to speak about their product initially in terms of a new treatment option, followed by more clinical education, and then progress the conversations to how their product impacts better patient outcomes and better practice/HCP outcomes. In so doing, sales reps position themselves as trusted advisors who can help HCPs achieve desired results with their patients and with their practice. <sup>2</sup>

**“Despite accelerating digital adoption, the sales force still represents 80% of the non-direct-to-consumer promotional spend across pharma organizations.” <sup>3</sup>**

**Footnotes:**

- 1 From Surviving to Thriving: Changing the Paradigm of HCP Interactions
- 2 BTS: Insights Pharma Sales Transformation
- 3 The Evolution of Pharma Field Force Deployment and Targeting

# THE BENEFITS OF OMNICHANNEL MARKETING IN PHARMA



Originally, the goal of omnichannel marketing was to create a consistent brand experience for consumers no matter when, where, or how they encountered a brand. Whether they interacted with a brand's website, physical store, advertisement, or social media, the idea was to strengthen brand affinity with every touchpoint.

What quickly followed was an additional goal, which was personalization. With the ability to track consumer content and channel preferences, companies could tailor content and touchpoints to make brand interactions even more meaningful and impactful. The Life Sciences industry has taken this a step further by enriching the Marketing interaction data with syndicated data, claims data, and other privacy-compliant datasets that allow pharma companies to hyper-personalize their HCP messaging and strategy.

## THE BENEFITS OF HCP OMNICHANNEL MARKETING <sup>1</sup>

- ✓ **Deliver relevant content**
- ✓ **Deepen HCP connections**
- ✓ **Maintain message consistency**
- ✓ **Personalize communication**
- ✓ **Increase brand loyalty and advocacy**
- ✓ **Increase engagement**



In addition to the benefits of delivering a more consistent and personalized brand experience to HCPs, omnichannel marketing also benefits field sales reps. Omnichannel marketing has been proven to build brand trust, loyalty, and affinity among HCPs. Establishing these sentiments with HCPs provides a strong foundation upon which a sales rep can build a personal relationship. Omnichannel marketing can open doors that were previously closed to field reps.

In addition, the data collected by Marketing with the NBA data can help a rep target the right HCP, with the right message, at the right time. Such data is helping reps be smarter about when and how they show up, which leads to more impactful F2F interactions. Conversely, if the rep is not aware of HCP omnichannel engagement, they could deliver an uninformed message to the HCP that doesn't land right. On the flip side, if Marketing does not have visibility into rep activity and progress with an HCP, their outreach could be counterproductive.

This inextricable link has resulted in a strengthened relationship between Sales and Marketing in the Life Sciences industry. With the HCP at the center of all activity, ensuring strategic alignment and two-way visibility into Sales and Marketing outreach and response is critical. With collaboration, the commercial whole can be greater than the sum of its parts.

**“In our hyperconnected world, the essence of a brand must be consistent for all customers, wherever they are.”<sup>2</sup>**

**Footnotes:**

1 Navigating Generational Differences in HCP Marketing

2 The History of Pharma Marketing

# THE “WILD CARD” IN OMNICHANNEL MARKETING



Pharma Sales and Marketing are working more closely than ever to surround HCPs with relevant and personalized messages to impact engagement, preference, and ultimately, brand performance. Typical channels in the omnichannel approach to HCP marketing are:

- Advertising
- Social Media
- Brand microsites and apps
- KOL/Speaker Bureaus
- Medical Media Websites
- Digital Marketing
- Medical Conferences

In all of these channels, Marketing crafts the messaging and measures the impact of specific campaigns and programs in each channel. Messaging and branding are accurate, consistent, and approved – in other words, “controlled.” Results are tracked, monitored, and reported on a frequent and regular basis, and insight is gathered so that strategy can be shifted to optimize efforts. In other words, results are “measurable.” Brand leaders can rest assured that everything is being controlled and measured, and the brand strategy is being executed as planned.

“ Our KPIs measure share of voice, coverage, and frequency. We don’t have KPIs to measure the quality of the relationships we build, or the value we bring to the HCPs. ”

– Mehrnaz Campbell  
Author, *The Omni Advantage*

**Perfect, right?**

**Not quite.**

**What about the F2F field sales rep channel?**

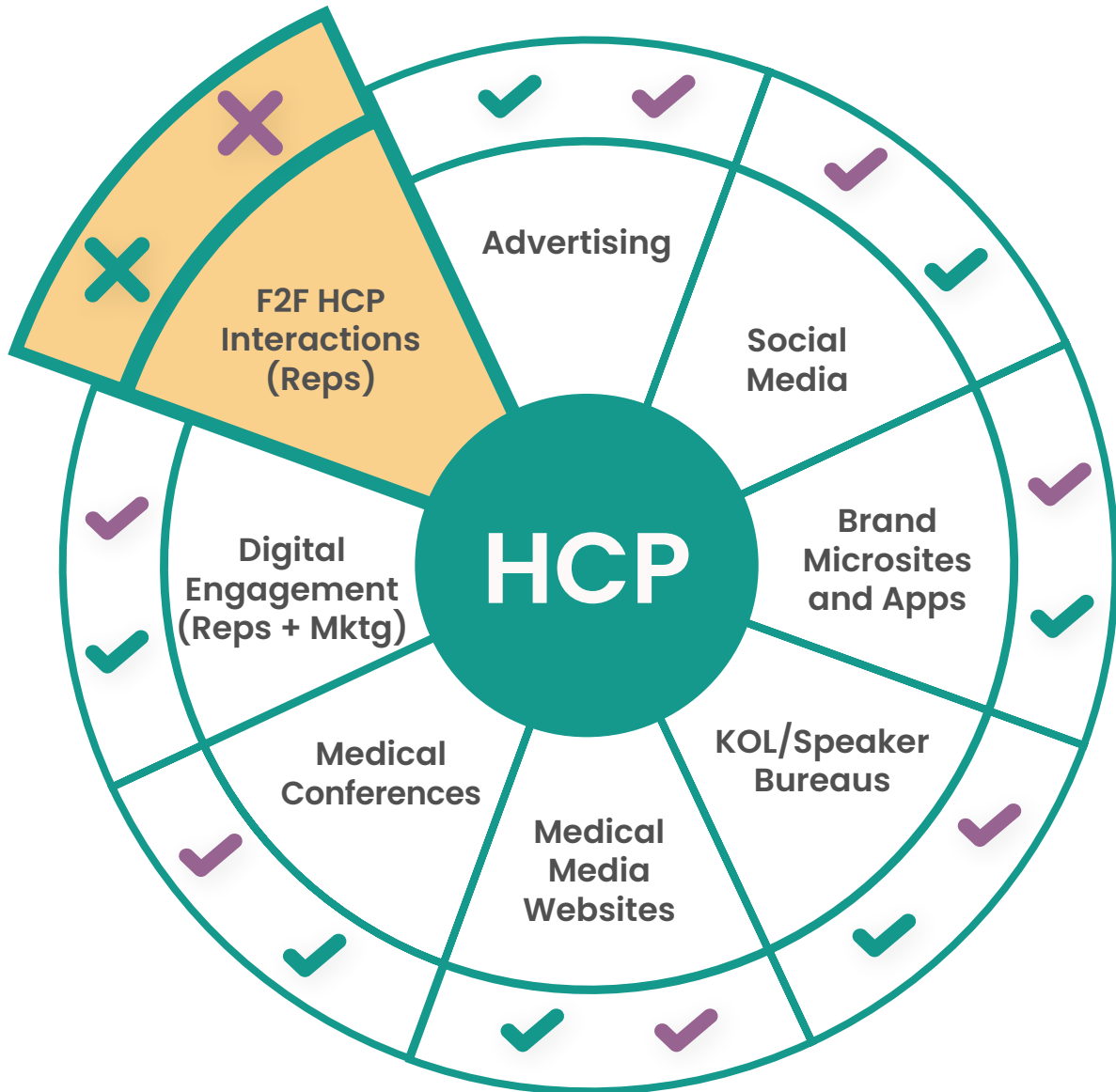
Yes, field reps have been trained and certified on the brand messaging, the clinical evidence story, and everything else they need to know to communicate accurately and effectively with HCPs through New Hire Onboarding,

National Sales Meetings, Product Launches, and many other efforts. But “The Forgetting Curve” is real – **humans typically forget 60% of what they learn within 20 minutes of learning it**, and forget 75% of it within two days. <sup>1</sup>

And, yes, the field has been equipped with a library of sleek Medical, Legal, and Regulatory (MLR)-approved marketing collateral and sales aids to guide and support their live HCP interactions. But, in a 2022 analysis of 600 million HCP interactions across more than 80% of biopharmas worldwide, it was found that **even though biopharmas created 20% more content over the previous year, 77% of that content is rarely or never used by field teams.** <sup>2</sup>

And finally, yes – territory managers are measuring field rep performance via call quotas, territory reach and frequency, and monthly ride-alongs to assess and coach through observation. **But can they really control and measure what comes out of a sales rep’s mouth during F2F HCP interactions?**

The most important slice of the biopharma omnichannel customer engagement model is a **WILD CARD**.

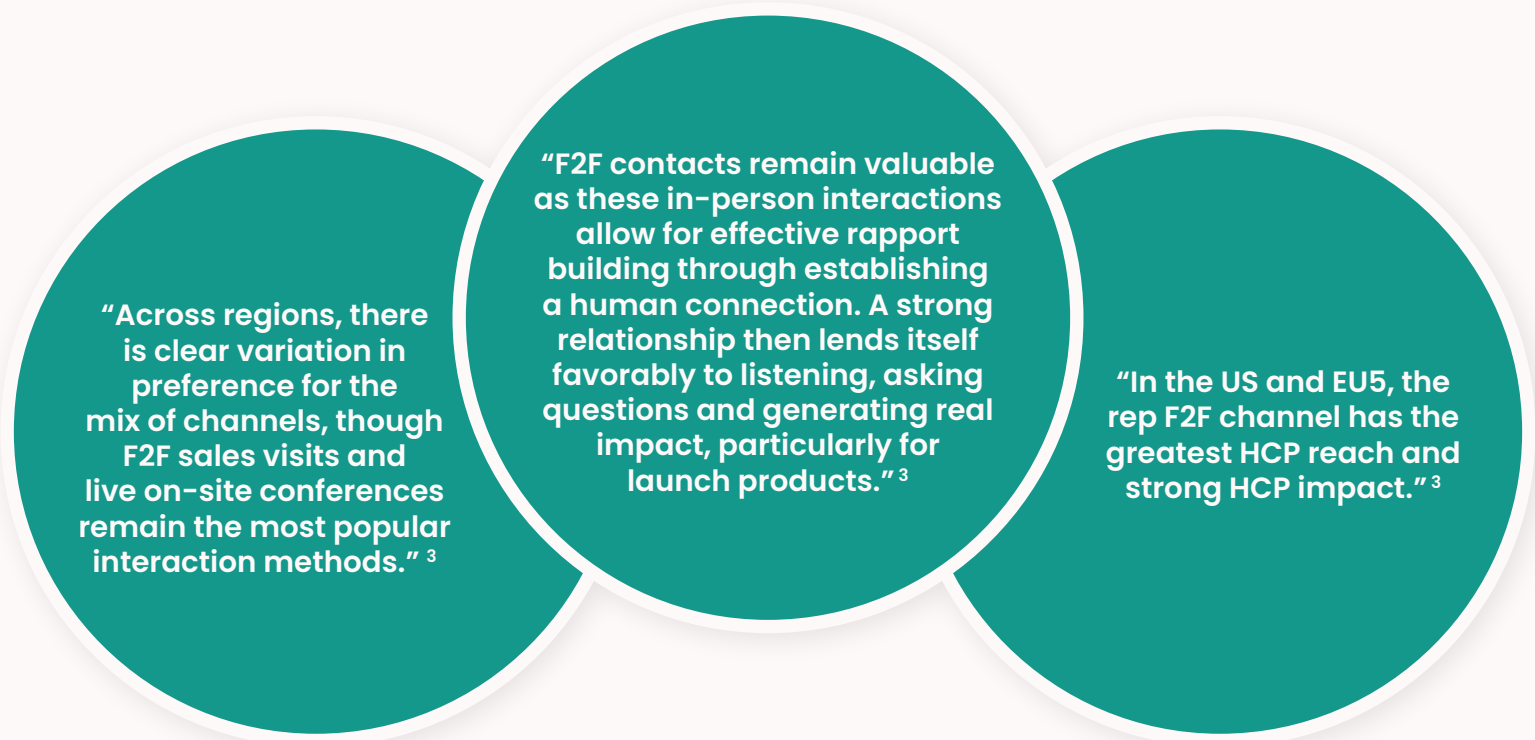


Controllable Message?

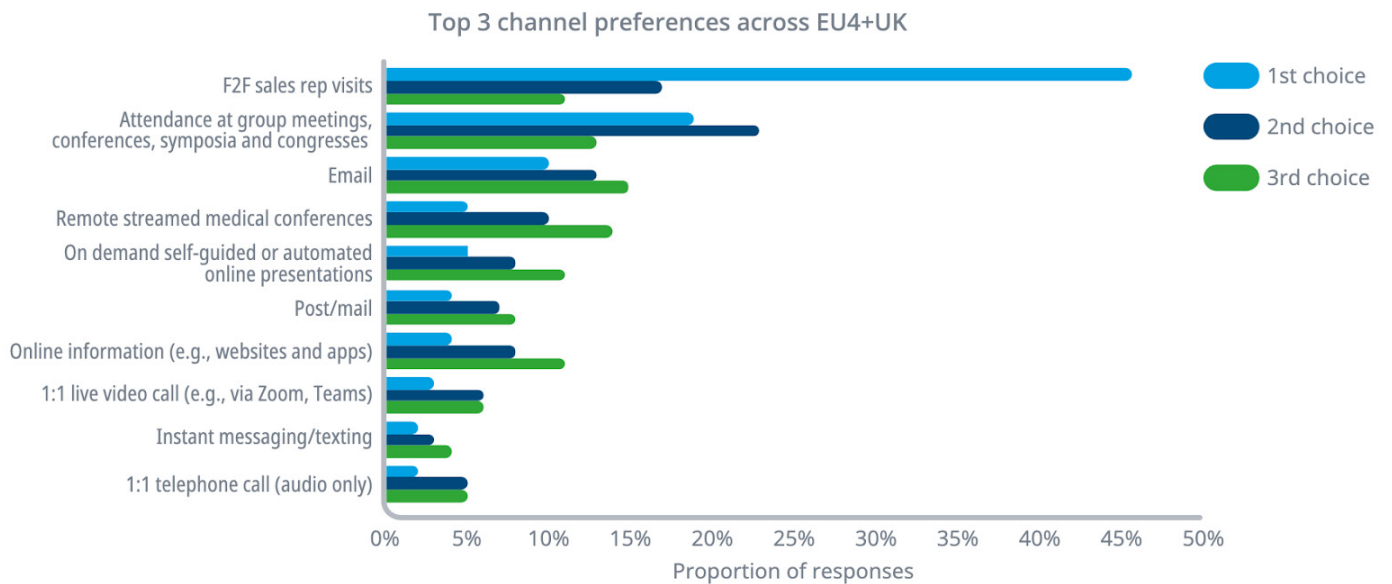


Measurable Impact?

What makes this a critical gap in omnichannel marketing is that the pharma field rep F2F interaction is still the most effective and preferred channel with HCPs.



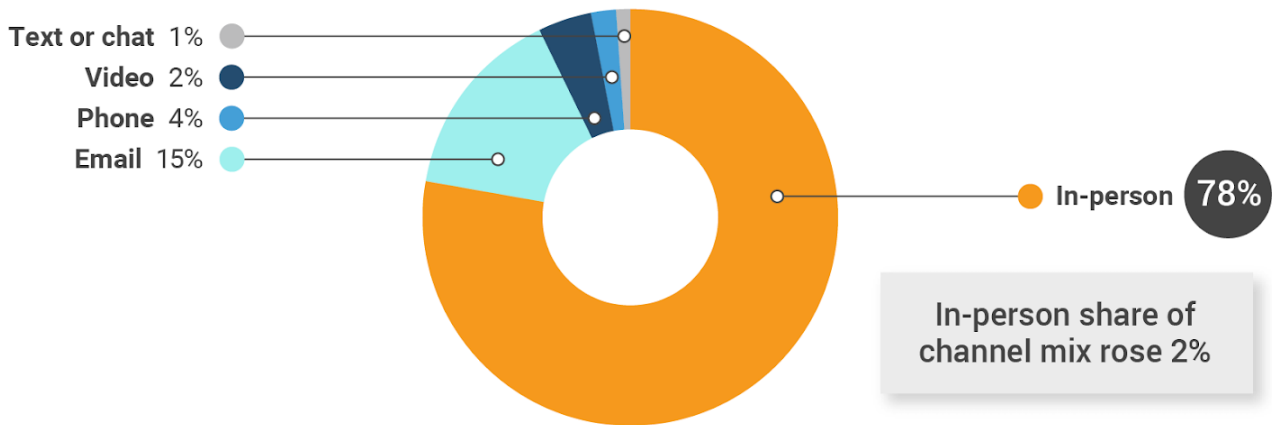
**Figure 7: IQVIA channel preference survey question showing how HCPs would most like to be interacted with, giving their top 3 choices**



Source: IQVIA ChannelDynamics™ Channel Preference Survey 2022

Recent data shows that in-person meetings are the dominant rep-HCP interaction channel, and are on the rise.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 2: Channel mix, global



Veeva Pulse data, October 2023–December 2023

Clearly, field rep F2F meetings with HCPs are the most desired, most effective, and most important channel in pharma’s omnichannel customer engagement model, yet they are the hardest to control and measure because they are live conversations. There is no way to know if the message was delivered accurately and with impact. Not only does this negatively affect brand and company performance, it can introduce risk in the form of misrepresenting the brand, going off-label, confusing and misleading the market, and regulatory and legal exposure.

**So, how should the industry address this critical issue affecting brand and company performance?**

Footnotes:

- 1 [The Forgetting Curve](#)
- 2 [Veeva Pulse Field Trends Report](#)
- 3 [From Surviving to Thriving Changing the Paradigm of HCP Interactions](#)

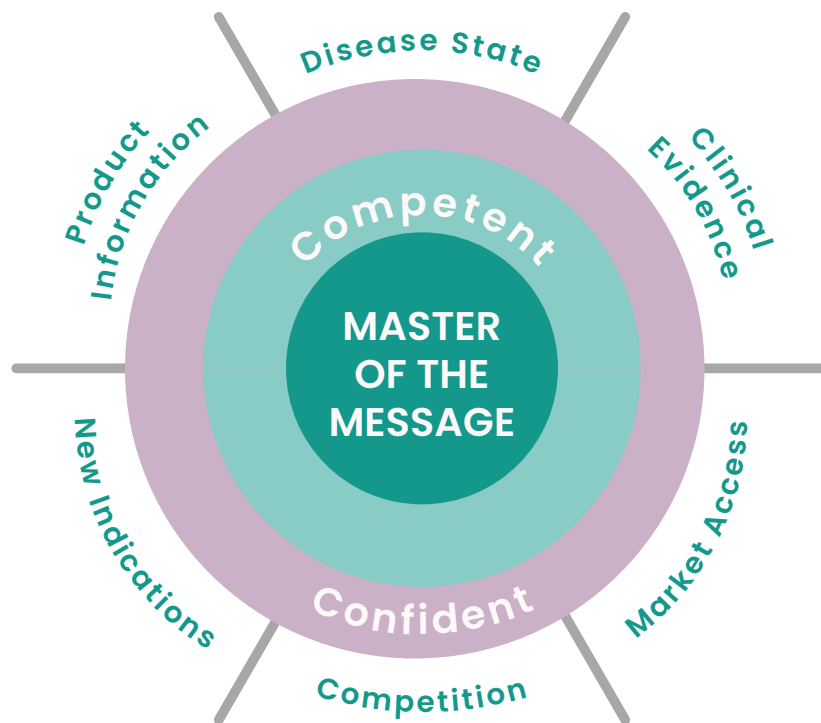
# FROM “WILD CARD” TO “MASTER OF THE MESSAGE”



To improve performance and reduce risk, biopharmaceutical companies need to transform their field reps from “Wild Cards” to “Masters of the Message.”

## But, what is a “Master of the Message”?

A “Master of the Message” in pharma sales is someone who is competent and confident in their knowledge of the most recent product, disease state, clinical evidence, market access, competition, and new indication information.



“Masters of the Message” are current and comfortable with the information HCPs need and want to make prescribing decisions. They are effective in their delivery of the information because they listen to the HCP’s questions and they know the answers. Because of their deep understanding of everything the HCP might want to discuss, “Masters of the Message” can be efficient and concise in conversation, which demonstrates respect for the HCPs’ busy schedule and limited time. With each interaction, “Masters of the Message” deliver value to the HCP, establishing them as a trusted advisor. This powerful blend of competence, confidence, credibility, and trust results in high-quality HCP relationships that can impact brand performance by converting interest into intent.

## What do HCP’s want from reps?

The industry has long surveyed HCPs to understand what they want from biopharma companies, and the results are clear and consistent: HCPs want to engage with “Masters of the Message.”

In a survey conducted in 2023<sup>1</sup>, over 2000 HCPs in the US, EU5, and APAC were asked to indicate what drives an optimal customer experience with biopharma. In a long list of options, the top three drivers, in priority rank order, were:

1. Knowledgeable staff
2. Easy to contact/engage with
3. Respects my time

All three of these top drivers are related to rep interactions. Reps can delight HCPs in all three areas if they are “Masters of the Message.”

The importance of rep relationships and the value they deliver in HCP interactions is also reflected in the following quotes from members of Veeva’s HCP Advisory Board in a recent report:<sup>2</sup>

“When reps come to the office, if there is time, I’ll go up front and talk to them for 30 seconds. The reps you have a relationship with, you give an extra 30 seconds. The reps you don’t, it becomes more like 20 seconds.”

– Dr. Ashish Verma  
*Internal Medicine and Sleep Medicine*

“Reps who come in and just want to regurgitate a glossy are not really helpful to me.”

– Dr. John Panozzo  
*Family Medicine*

## So, how do you transform your pharma reps from “Wild Cards” to “Masters of the Message”?

Message mastery comes from understanding information, refreshing on it to stay sharp, practicing via verbalization, and getting feedback to continuously improve delivery. With this comes competence and confidence.

You don’t want to interfere with productivity by pulling reps out of the field, so you need to provide them with the tools and resources they need to make this transformation “on the job.”

“ 40% of MDs would like to receive more medical and scientific information from biopharma companies. ”<sup>3</sup>

## Three Ways to Turn “Wild Cards” into “Masters of the Message”

### Make sure learning doesn't end with training

#### Make it easy for reps to refer back to training resources

Provide them with concise micro-resources tagged by product, disease state, or therapeutic area so they can refresh their knowledge in a matter of minutes

#### Help reps identify and address knowledge gaps

Provide them with a way to quickly assess their knowledge, followed by intelligent, personalized learning paths that will strengthen their expertise

### Make sure reps are using sales aids

#### Make sales aids easily accessible for reps

Allow them to find sales aids with smart voice-enabled search, so they have the material they need in a matter of seconds in their moment of need

#### Help reps understand the sales aids

Provide them with quick, easy-to-digest “talk tracks” or context for each sales aid so they can speak to it with HCPs in an accurate and personalized manner

### Make sure managers are coaching for *impact versus compliance*

#### Make sure coaching is not a check-the-box exercise

Ride-alongs are a great opportunity to observe “Wild Card” behavior and coach to create “Masters of the Message,” but Field Coaching Reports (FCRs) must be treated as meaningful sales tools, not compliance requirements

#### Help reps by making FCRs actionable

Provide links to personalized reinforcement training, and videos of “what good looks like,” get feedback, and set goals to achieve message mastery

Finally, pharma reps live in their cars and operate off of smartphones and tablets. They are always on the go. So the tools you provide to support their transformation must be frictionless and optimized for this environment.

From a usability standpoint, this means tools must be:

- Mobile friendly
- Intuitive
- Voice-enabled
- Smart (AI powered)

By supporting your field reps in a way that is easy and non-disruptive, you increase the likelihood of truly changing behavior. With newly minted “Masters of the Message” in the field, you will see a lift in HCP engagement that leads to brand performance.

#### Footnotes:

1 Across Health: 2023 Global Trends Report

2 What HCPs Want: How Biopharmas can Deliver Better Support at the Moment-of-Need

3 Pharma Industry Changing Doctor Expectations

# CONCLUSION



The marketing and selling of biopharmaceutical products has had a complex and interesting journey. From being a totally unregulated industry 150 years ago to being one of the most highly-regulated industries today, shifts in priority around marketing directly to patients versus HCPs, and the dynamic rise of omnichannel marketing – it’s been a wild ride.

While an omnichannel approach to HCP marketing has many benefits including the ability control the message, personalize the delivery, and measure the impact, it has put a spotlight on the “Wild Card” nature of the field sales rep. How do you know what they are actually saying to HCPs out in the field? This is the critical gap in pharma omnichannel marketing. When thinking about the customer experience, commercial leaders must consider the field rep F2F interactions as a channel – the most important channel – in an omnichannel approach. Commercial leaders must ensure all of these channels work together in harmony to provide the HCP with a personalized, consistent, and relevant overall experience. Only then will a true omnichannel experience happen.

## ABOUT ACTO

ACTO is an AI-powered Intelligent Field Excellence (IFE) platform built for Life Sciences that helps Sales, Marketing, and Medical teams improve customer engagement and brand performance by turning field professionals into “Masters of the Message” who engage HCPs and their support teams with authority and impact. With ACTO, biopharma companies can ensure field professionals are always competent, confident, and credible, delivering the right message to HCPs in face-to-face interactions, while providing senior leaders and frontline managers with the insight they need to drive continuous field force effectiveness.

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