

How digital technology is proving to be a game-changer in healthcare

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Digital health is here to stay and will continue to play an increasingly critical role in improving healthcare. The boost announced by the Government of India will also provide pharma companies an impetus to invest in new and innovative media, especially in the digital space that has emerged as a powerful medium for both the pharma brands and the doctor fraternity to engage with their audience.

Traditionally, the India pharmaceutical industry has always been conservative in their approach as they depended a lot on their field force to reach out to their doctors for promoting their brands. But the pandemic restricted the field force from meeting the doctors face to face. Similarly, the patients who are always at ease and comfort to meet the doctors face to face and seek his/her advice from time to time could not do so. All this has led to the new way of approaching the challenges, which today has made many healthcare companies to embrace digital technology.

Digital has made deep inroads into Healthcare

Digital has become a new way of thinking as social distancing, WFH and lockdown forced people to stay indoors. Telemedicine became a new way for patients to contact their doctors. E-Pharmacy has stepped up its operations and more companies are launching these services to mitigate the hardships of the patients. There was approximately 2.5x growth (about 8.8 million) in the number of households using E-pharmacy services during the lockdown period. There was a higher representation from the non-metro cities, compared to pre-COVID-19 households, according to a FICCI report. Today, the e-

pharmacy companies are aggressively promoting their brands and services through high decibel advertising on television channels.

Digital is the need of the hour

According to some industry reports, disruptions in the healthcare provider operations have become the rule rather than the exception. Digital transformation efforts will need to continue during these unprecedented times. Healthcare providers, CIOs and CTOs should gear up themselves to take some key strategic decisions to embrace digital technology to not only grow the business, but also bring in pathbreaking innovations in technology that will help the healthcare sector to accelerate and adjust to the new behavioural changes which have come in as a result of the pandemic. The growth and reach of the Internet and rising consumption of data, especially through mobile phones, will only fuel the growth. Today, people are hungry for information when it comes to health, which will now be more easily accessible with the use of digital technology backed by strong and credible content.

Digital transformation in the healthcare sector has made rapid progress in the last one year. With everyone adapting to the new normal and bringing in the use of digital and technology to their organisations, there are also multiple challenges that the organisations are facing. To get a clear perspective, Adgully spoke to some industry experts and thought leaders from the healthcare sector.



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KG ANANDAKRISHNAN

Director General, OPPI

Expressing his views and observation on behalf of the pharma body, **KG Anandakrishnan, Director General, OPPI**, said “Digital transformation in healthcare and pharma industry is helping organisations to have greater access to healthcare professionals, transparency, better patient interaction, improved drug development, cost-effectiveness, enhanced production processes, improved supply chain efficiency among other advantages.”

The groundwork for digital is already operational with healthcare providers, pharma companies and medical R&D centres deploying predictive analytics and big data in critical decision-making. There are many supply chain start-ups that saw an opportunity to provide blockchain-enabled supply chain solutions to improve efficiencies and reduce costs. Accessing data remotely is perhaps the biggest advantage that cloud storage of data offers. The amalgamation of cloud computing with healthcare has the potential to improve healthcare-related functions such as telemedicine, post-hospitalisation care and virtual medication adherence and follow through. Despite a few challenges, digital technology can be a game-changer in healthcare.



Salil Kallianpur, Founder & MD, Arks Knowledge Consulting, added here, “It is heartening to see that Pharma marketers have finally decided to include digital into their marketing mix. Even if catalysed by COVID-19, this is good news. Evan Schwartz called it “digital darwinism” – a phenomenon that caused technology to evolve faster than the society which adopts it.”

He further said, “Gartner had predicted in 2014 that 75% of all businesses (not just pharma) would eventually become or prepare to become digital businesses by 2020. There is no way, they could have seen COVID-19 catalyse the change, and yet their prediction came true. This eventually means that >90% of customers are already online, since businesses merely follow customers and rarely blaze a new path. The forced shutdown since March helped us realise this in the best possible manner.”

Here’s hoping that Indian pharma is soon full of digital experts who have their intent honed well, content aligned with customer context, constantly upgrading skills and thinking of how their strategy can serve at a scale.



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RAJEEV SIBAL

President & Head - India Region Formulations, Lupin

Commenting on how pharma companies are moving with digital and bringing in changes, **Rajeev Sibal, President & Head - India Region Formulations, Lupin Ltd**, remarked, “Digital has played a vital role of a catalyst in enhancing stakeholder engagements for Pharma companies. It has enabled and unlocked value through adoption of alternate channels which provide faster, wider, and focused reach to pharma companies.”

“Pharma companies who were yesterday's laggards are today's front runners in leveraging digital and technology across all their business functions. Personalising scientific communication to HCPs, providing online platforms to HCPs for engaging with patients, generating health awareness amongst patients and creating an integrated digital health eco-system are major focus areas for engaging with audiences. Digital is also used to bring efficiency across the supply chain and distribution to ensure the availability of medicines to remote locations. Internally, pharma companies are using digital to drive their data and analytics practice to understand the behavioural aspects of stakeholders and sharpen their communication,” Sibal added.



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ANJANI KUMAR

Chief Information Officer, Strides Pharma Science

Anjani Kumar, Chief Information Officer, Strides Pharma Science Ltd, noted “If we compare Pharma industry to other industries like Telecom, Finance, Consumer products from the digital scale point of view, Pharma is still in catch-up state globally. India is no

different. I would say that the last two years have been a golden period of sorts for digital transformation in the Indian pharma industry.”

He further said, “Given the vast amounts of digitisation, data harvesting has been the next logical step in pharma as in any other industry. The COVID-19 pandemic has definitely accelerated it. Cybersecurity, as we know, has been in the spotlight during this pandemic. Most companies have stepped up greatly in this area now. Many pharma companies have turned to AR/VR (Augmented Reality/ Virtual Reality) powered virtual sales solutions. Virtual interactions with doctors have increased. Investigations are throwing up insights with analytics model when NLP (Natural Language processing) is used in the right way. Usage of cloud-based solutions is increasing in almost every pharma company and particularly in a ‘multi-tenant hybrid cloud’ way.”