

# Going “Live” in the Digital Age

## Why Technology Has Increased the Need for Social Interaction in Pharmaceutical Marketing

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**A**n often asked question is whether the popularity of “going digital” — beaming images across the Internet — will spell the end of live presentations in the pharmaceutical industry. The answer, in a word, is “no.” Using digital media can enhance a speakers’ bureau — literally amplifying its effect and reaching many more people — but will never replace the need for human contact. Success in communications requires the use of multiple channels, both online and off.

We are social beings. And the more isolated we become — glued to our computer screens, typing e-mails instead of making phone calls or talking to colleagues — the more we crave human contact.

### Cocoon versus Contact

According to a recent Wall Street Journal report (“Social Networking in the Digital Age” by L. Gordon Crovitz, June 2), there is a real correlation between the tendency for busy people to wrap themselves in cocoons and the urge to get out and attend conferences. In fact, the number of professionals attending conferences is rising, despite the availability of information online and the considerable cost of travel.

for new products and specialty drugs that require a deeper level of understanding.

Physicians today are demanding clinical data and insights that are current within the pharmaceutical landscape. The best way for the industry to meet that need is to have an acknowledged authority — someone who is a trusted leader in the field — impart the information. That is why physicians continue to give up their limited personal time to attend industry-sponsored events.

### Adding a New Dimension

Digital communication has had a welcome impact on speakers’ bureaus. Historically, the pharmaceutical industry has depended on dinner meetings, holding thousands of them each year. Today, it is recommended that companies conduct only those events that offer high-quality content and that appeal to their demanding audiences. Technology allows for matching the right speaker and topic to the appropriate audience. When done right, this kind of event can be a powerful medium.

Many speakers’ bureaus have incorporated digital elements into their

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Healthcare professionals are among the most enthusiastic of conference-goers. Practicing physicians are life-time learners. They learn through practice and study, particularly when surrounded by trusted colleagues. Most of all, they learn from each other.

In the medical world, one of the most popular events is the small meeting, often referred to as a speakers’ bureau. A pharmaceutical company — through its field representative — invites local healthcare providers to a lecture conducted by a respected local or national leader in the field. The event allows the participants to see and hear the expert while simultaneously seeing and hearing those around them. This exchange of ideas allows the professionals to learn from one another.

The excitement created by collective dialogue can energize the room, transforming a “talk” into a dynamic discussion. This is particularly important

services. Live meetings in major cities can be simulcast to local events and taped for future web casts to broaden the reach of the program. For most products, a mix of live and digital is perfect, allowing for a range of educational discussions.

In medicine, good patient care requires on-going learning, and learning requires focus and engagement. A physician looking at a screen is easily distracted or may tune out. Not so in a live presentation, where doctors engage more deeply. A follow-up online presentation can provide reminders. The goal is to help clients use a combination of live and online speakers to their best possible advantage.

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