

Agile marketing: how to innovate faster, better & cheaper – Event report

Industry and agency experts gathered on the 26th of November 2019 at the Royal Society of Medicine. The meeting organised by the PM Society focused on how we can implement Agile Marketing within the pharmaceutical industry to increase innovation, productivity and teamwork.



Colin Williams, Global Product Manager at GSK & Digital Interest Group Lead at PM Society, and James Harper, Managing Director & Founder at twentyeightb, introduced the event by explaining the concept of Agile marketing. Taking its inspiration from Agile software development, Agile marketing is a methodology that manages and improves the way a team works by improving the speed, efficiency, adaptability and transparency of work. It achieves this by focusing on frequent releases, experimentation and streamlining team structure, communication and workflows to maximize efficiency without sacrificing quality. Both

Colin and James were advocates of this style of working, emphasising that Agile marketing can lead to very successful outcomes for a company, and this change all starts by altering the mindset of the team.



Hazel Jones, Healthcare Technology Consultant and ex Director of NHS Apps and Wearables, opened with a talk about “Agile in a regulatory culture”, discussing the lessons learnt from working in digital transformation for the NHS. Following a brief introduction about how previous digital transformation projects for the NHS had been unsuccessful, Hazel shared a step-by-step account of how she and her team implemented an Agile way of working into the public health institution, in order to improve their outputs and deliver more successful projects.

When Hazel started working at the NHS in 2017, she noticed that a digital mindset and team of experienced digital resources was noticeably missing. This was also reflected in “Fit for 2020” capability review, published by NHS Digital in summer of 2017 [Full report: https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/transforming-health-and-care-through-technology/fit-for-2020-report-from-the-nhs-digital-capability-review](https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/transforming-health-and-care-through-technology/fit-for-2020-report-from-the-nhs-digital-capability-review)

At the time, the Apps & Wearables programme was just a list of ‘approved Apps’ that wasn’t integrated with NHS choices, for which there was no vision or strategy and no service design. The ways of working weren’t set up for innovation.

In addition to the internal challenges to adapt and adopt digital practices such as Agile, the public sector brings the additional challenges of being a public body. Political groups, interest groups and members of the public have high expectations of the NHS, meaning that scrutiny exists at a much more intense level than most private transformations.

The transformation to implement Agile methodology was achieved by:

- Hiring a Chief Digital Officer to be at the top advocating and overseeing the whole change
- Creating a Leadership Team who had a wealth of experience working in technology and digital transformation to inspire the rest of the team
- Focusing on getting the team to understand and be inspired by the idea of changing their way of working
- Creating a mindset that places the customer, not the business as the central priority
- Using a 'test and learn' approach to release; in regulated culture, the use of 'alpha' and 'beta' gives permission to launch public services using the MVP (minimal viable product) approach. From a senior level, this means the benefits can be achieved quicker, and at a team level it means that they deliver results in shorter timeframes and more frequently – feeding learnings, whether internal or external, into future releases

The new Apps catalogue was launched in Beta twice: first for a set of specific stakeholders, then to the public, but always stating it was Beta, to manage expectations. By focusing on frequent releases, Agile created value for users and project sponsors much more quickly than the more traditional 'waterfall' approach. This 'test and learn' mindset, using external interest, concerns and even objections to refine and enhance offering allowed for quick refinement of feedback and helped to convert the press into allies. The new mindset that a 'product is never finished', was difficult to communicate to most people but once people had become accustomed to the new method of working, Agile enhanced teamwork, collaboration and innovation, and ultimately led to a successful digital transformation project in the NHS.



In the second presentation, **Chris Bartley, Managing Director and Chief Innovation Officer at Havas Life Medicom**, guided the audience through the value of Agile in pharma marketing. Chris used his agency experience to talk about two award-winning Agile marketing case studies that used customer reactions to ensure messages and content were optimised near real time.

The first case study explored how Chris and his team were asked to improve a company in the diabetes space social media influence at a diabetes conference. Social media in a pharma setting can be difficult; the content has to be topical and reflect the themes of the day, however it also takes a very long time for even a single tweet to be approved by a pharmaceutical company, meaning that it is difficult to produce high-quality, relevant content. They managed to overcome this difficulty by analysing the content and format of the highest engagement diabetes tweets, pre-approving 60 tweets before the event based on this content and then tweeting and promoting the content that connected most to what was being talked about at the conference that day.

This proved to be a very successful strategy:

- Overall, the pharma company's 35 tweets received 4,961 likes and generated over 875,000 impressions
- They posted fewer tweets than other pharmaceutical companies but had significantly more engagement and share of voice; on average they had the highest level of engagement per tweet of any congress commentator

- They were identified by a competitor agency as an example of best practice and as the company with the highest engagement

This agile approach to social media allowed them to respond in real time to what was going on live, and the high engagement rate was a quantifiable measure of this success.

The second case study involved a skincare campaign, designed to traffic content to specialists with the aim to:

- Reach at least 25% of target specialists
- Achieve at least a 50% 'aim for clear' message recall
- Increase the specialists 'aiming for clear' from 12% to 24%

The team employed Agile marketing to their work by developing multiple variants for email subject lines, banner ads, and landing pages to optimize open rates, click throughs, and message recall. They created multiple versions of the videos with different speakers and tweaked stories to optimise view time and recall. The campaign was a bit longer in the planning phase but could be optimised at 24 hours' notice to maximise effectiveness, responding to the preferences of the audience in near real time.

The campaign was a huge success, attracting 5,000,000 campaign impressions, generating 390 pieces of online news coverage and increasing the specialists 'aiming for clear' from 12% to 49% across just 4 countries. The message was endorsed by HCPs, patients, PAGs and others and was ultimately successful at changing mindset and behaviour; when surveyed, 78% of specialists recalled the message 'Aim for clear' and 77% of specialists recognised the need to change practice.

Both of these case studies allow for a quantifiable measure of success and are an example of how agency and industry can work together to be agile in a digital and social media setting. Chris closed the presentation by reiterating his view that agile marketing is about planning, not speed, and in order to get everyone into the agile mindset, it is important to focus on:

- Starting with the quality of end customer interaction in mind
- Ensuring there are multiple options available
- Staying focused on maximising the effectiveness of content
- Optimising the best way to deliver a message based on data



The following presentation, 'Agile compliance- paradox or necessity?' was delivered by **Dr Nick Broughton, Founding Partner of Ethos Pharmaceutical Ethics and Compliance Limited**. Nick challenged the perception that thinking in a flexible way about compliance issues is in some way paradoxical, that compliance is rigid and immovable and cannot be part of the creative process. He argued that iterative and flexible thinking is indeed an essential part of compliance, as is personal accountability and that without these in place compliance as a concept is flawed and may even be unethical.

The ABPI sets standards for the promotion of medicines to health professionals and other relevant decision makers in the UK. Although everyone can agree on the code's principles, Nick argued that there is still room for discussion; that maybe we should start asking 'is this a lie?' or 'is this promotion

to the public?'. There is a certain element of fear around the ABPI code, resulting in people being less willing to try something new in case of breaching the code leading to inertia and encouraging bland messages that mean nothing to no one. Having a discussion around compliance can increase enthusiasm and help shift people's mindset; compliance is necessary and also dynamic. It is important to remember that we are bringing benefit to people, instead of focusing on the company benefit, we need to start writing down how each activity will bring benefit to patients and society.

The distance between medical and commercial teams has grown bigger in recent years, meaning that they are often misaligned on the common goal- to bring help to patients. Because of this divide within a pharmaceutical company, it often means that the commercial side of the business misunderstands compliance, seeing it as 'the thing that gets in the way' rather than something that is there to help guide you.

He identified the need for agile compliance in:

- Listening to each other and increasing cross-department interactions
- Spending more time understanding the patient and customer and the impact our communication on individuals
- Understanding that we don't need to agree about every aspect of compliance, that having discussions about what is compliant can be useful for companies

In order to be Agile in compliance, it is also important to strengthen the relationship between industry and agencies, in order to align creative and compliant concepts. Often, pharma companies don't trust in agencies when it comes to compliance, but this can also be changed. Involving the agency earlier in a project can help them understand compliance better and align that with creative concepts, ultimately saving time and increasing trust between both parties.

Nick finished the talk by asking some rhetorical 'what ifs';

- What if we talked about ethics more?
- What if we worked hard on the health of the commercial and compliance team, collaborating rather than sticking to distinct roles?
- What if we required the compliance team to deliver a commercial initiative every year and the commercial team to train out an SOP?
- What if there was no compliance team? Wouldn't we regulate ourselves according to what is right?
- What if compliance gives alternatives instead of just saying no?
- What if we started rejoicing in the grey of compliance instead of seeing it as black and white?
- What if marketeers read the code themselves and elevate the conversation?



After the break, the next topic covered 'Agility in ensuring digital communications comply with the ABPI Code'. **Rina Newton, Managing Director, CompliMed** and **Debbie Young, ex-Head of Channels, AstraZeneca** explored how a tried-and-tested agile approval process can be applied to complex and innovative digital communications and technology.

Debbie Young started by talking about her own experiences at AstraZeneca, where they were involved in a breach of the Code due to some of their websites containing information that was no longer correct. The sites had been live for a long time and no one

had accountability over them, meaning that there was no one to periodically monitor them. As a result, AstraZeneca were forced to take the websites down, but this also gave them the opportunity to relaunch, using a new Agile way of working.

Rina was called in to help the company comply with the Code. Often companies cite slow approval, different guidance, lack of time and a lack of digital understanding as main challenges to compliance. Rina encourages companies to apply an Agile approach to working, by giving the following approval solutions:

- SOP & education
- Concept meetings
- Prioritise & agree MVP
- Prepare for rapid iterations
- Experiment with customer centric approach
- Confidence with internal audit process, recall and monitoring
- Launch, measure and re-launch

With the help of CompliMed, AstraZeneca relaunched their websites using Agile. They introduced a campaign to direct traffic to their websites, and then recorded the activity, prioritising the information that was most viewed so it was easier to find. They continued using this customer centric approach on sites by releasing surveys, using chatbots and making the site more interactive and responsive. They also made sure to appoint someone to periodically check the content to ensure it was still compliant, making sure the links were still working and that the PI was up to date. These customer-focused changes allowed their websites to be Agile and actually resulted in quicker approval, without sacrificing quality.

The final part of the presentation focussed on social media in pharmaceutical companies. Currently, the ABPI Code does not have specific guidance on social media, giving the opportunity for creativity and interpretation. Arguably, social media should be a necessity, that if pharmaceutical companies are trying to benefit patients and the public then it is their duty to make sure they're being transparent and open. However, the reality is that many companies are scared of engaging on social media because they are hesitant about being public facing and worried about compliance. Even though social media is a very relevant form of communication, very few companies train their staff on how to use it, meaning that pharma's way of working is outdated. It is imperative that pharma implement an Agile methodology to social media. This can be done by:

- Training staff on how to use different channels
- Bringing in an agency to help with training, which would also help to strengthen the industry-agency relationship
- Brainstorming sessions to talk about what to post on social media and what should be avoided as well as how to respond to comments
- Pre-approving social media posts and responses to make sure they're compliant and also facilitating efficiency and speed
- Bringing in content creators to sign off posts and booking in time to incorporate social media into everyday working



The final session, 'Putting Agile into practice; lessons from an organisation's experience', was delivered by **Nick Williams, Head of Strategy & Value, Triducive** with **Ollie Roberts, Brand Manager** & **Theodora Montsenigou, Associate Brand Manager, Novartis Pharmaceuticals**. The talk focused on adopting Agile to accelerate focus on prioritising what's important and simplifying ways of working for greater patient impact, focusing on the promise, challenges and practical considerations of putting Agile into practice in the workplace.

In a world that is constantly on the move, it is vital for marketing to keep up to speed. However, a study from 2017 showed that it takes on average 8 months to deliver a marketing idea. Agile offers an alternative to this; instead of using a traditional 'plan, develop, launch' approach, Agile follows a 'plan, do, review and adapt' approach, focusing on data, frequent releases and streamlining the process of working.

Novartis were interested in testing an Agile approach to prioritise and simplify how their cross-functional teams work together and so, with the help of Triducive and Earthware, trialled an Agile methodology to build and launch an integrated email and promotional microsite.

They implemented Scrum, a process used by agile marketers to increase alignment with the business aims of the organization in order to improve communication, speed and responsiveness of marketing into the project. By focussing on experimentation, frequent releases and feedback and engaging the team, the pilot study was hugely successful, increasing the speed to market by 90%, reducing the project cost by 50% and increasing collaboration within the team.

Business Franchise Head, Novartis UK:

"We believe Agile can play a part in helping us **prioritise** what's important and further **simplify** how we work, which will enable us to have a **greater impact for patients**."

However, this journey also had its challenges; initially there was reluctance from the team to change their way of working. In order to get everyone to align they needed to implement leadership support in order to get people to buy into the value of working in an Agile way. Once everyone was aligned to frame their work around the values of the company, teamwork was greatly improved and commitment to the Agile team was greater than other non-Agile teams they were involved in. The speed of Agile implementation should not outweigh the extent of adoption, so in order for the transformation to work it is important to listen to the team's initial fears or hesitations and address them early on.

Novartis has now adopted Agile into many different teams and projects, leading to the delivery of complex work to time and budget, increasing team engagement and collaboration and team comfort to focus on 'MVP'.

From their own experiences, their main tips for implementing Agile were to:

- Break down job titles in order for people to align under a project to achieve outcomes for the customer
- Focus on the data
- Tailor Agile methods to individual teams
- Listen to customers

- Include agencies more
- Use the leadership team to create the right ecosystem for Agile to flourish

Their future aspiration is that teams will be organised with Agile in mind, giving them the ability to react to changing market conditions and helping to prioritise and simplify ways of working for greater patient impact.

Nick, Ollie & Theodora concluded their presentation by asserting that despite a lot of talk about digital, processes and tools; Agile is really about how people and teams think and work together to be responsive and maximise customer value

Event report written by Grace Revill, emotive

If you are interested to learn more about the PM Society's Digital Interest Group please contact [Alexandra Hankinson](mailto:Alexandra.Hankinson@pmsociety.org.uk), call 01403 264 898 or visit <https://pmsociety.org.uk/>