



Empowered Healthcare Intelligence

# Annual Healthcare Professional Communication Report 2016:

Insights on the Information  
Professionals Crave



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Email Remains the Preferred Contact Method	3
Communications Should Provide Value	4
Pharmaceutical Companies Must Build Trust	6
The Increasingly Complex Payer-Provider Relationship	7
Data Drives Long-Term Connections	9



As medical practitioners' needs, demographics and challenges change, businesses operating in the health sciences realm must be more thoughtful of their communication content and delivery. This is especially the case as millennials under the age of 35 become a more prominent generation within the healthcare industry. Medical Economics cited data that found 15 percent of all physicians are under age 35 while 25 percent of the American Academy of Family Physicians' membership is younger than 39.

One of the key characteristics that differentiates millennials from their predecessors is their familiarity with, and even dependence on, technology, as well as their general understanding of how personal data is shared and used. What this translates to is higher expectations from healthcare professionals regarding tech-savviness and relevant communications.

Moreover, medical professionals face new challenges moving into 2016 thanks to legislation and trends leading to greater complexity. Chris Sloan, manager at Avalere Health, told Medical Economics roughly 13 million people have gained Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act's expansion of eligibility rules, meaning many new patients for healthcare professionals. Additionally, many of the major insurance carriers have proposed mergers, which may make the contractual process easier, but further complicate payment processes.

This year's Healthcare Professional Communication Survey conducted by HealthLink Dimensions asked 760 physicians and nurse practitioners about their preferred communication methods. The majority of physicians polled specialized in internal medicine, family practice and pediatrics. Responses were also recorded from physicians practicing in general surgery and specialties such as obstetrics & gynecology, cardiology, neurology and dermatology. This survey is a broad look at healthcare providers' communication behaviors, and should help marketers gain an in-depth understanding of how to communicate best with practitioners.



## Email Remains the Preferred Contact Method

The survey results indicate email remains the most relevant choice for reaching medical practitioners. In fact, HealthLink Dimensions found roughly 68 percent of respondents prefer to be contacted through email, followed by direct mail (11 percent) and in-person visits from company representatives (11 percent).

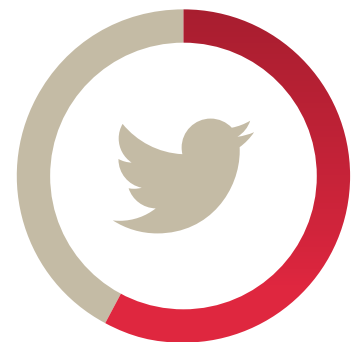
The inclination toward email as the most preferred method of communication continues to grow each year. In 2014, HealthLink Dimensions found 66 percent of healthcare professionals preferred email, while 65 percent of practitioners chose this channel in 2013.

While email is important to providers, more are realizing the role social media can play in healthcare communications, and this trend is likely to increase as more millennials enter the medical field. While data found only about 3 percent of healthcare professionals interact with medical device and pharmaceutical manufacturers through social media, 58 percent see value in this channel and plan to participate in the future. Healthcare marketers should begin considering the best possible ways to engage with these individuals on social channels in the future.

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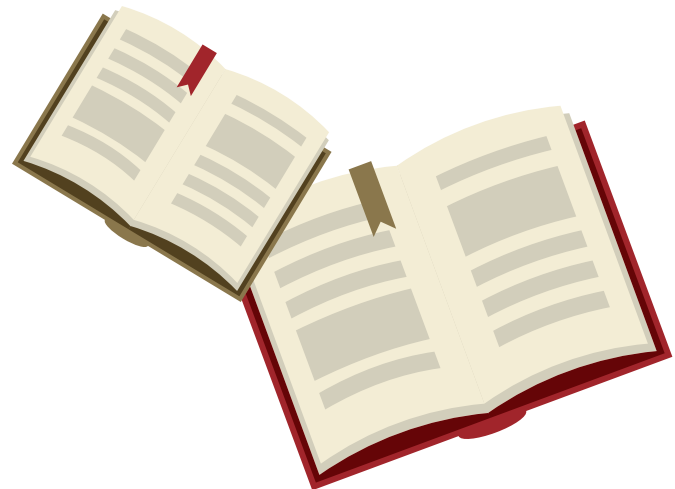
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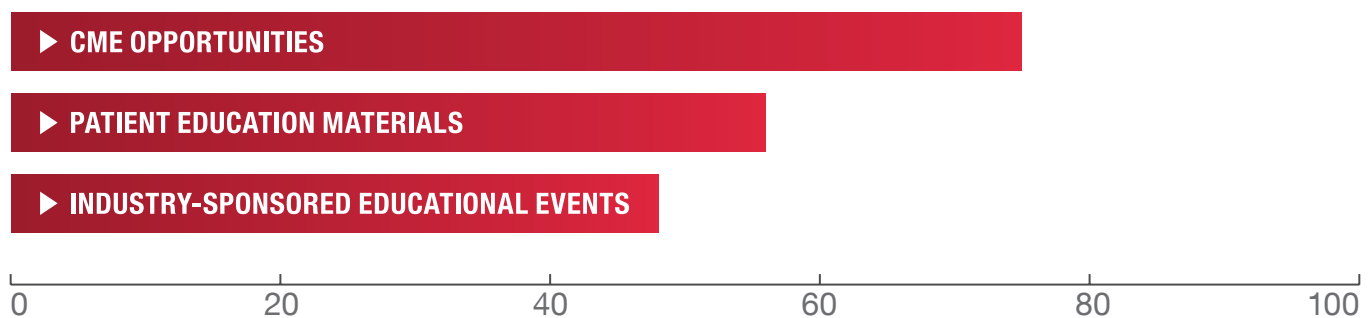
## Communications Should Provide Value

If healthcare communications don't provide value to medical professionals, even the most highly targeted medical email campaigns will be futile. As practitioners face the challenge of educating their patients in an oversaturated market of information and medicines, health sciences organizations should play an active role in making healthcare providers' lives easier. Successful companies seek to find solutions that solve their customers' problems. In the case of healthcare professionals, education may be the solution rather than a new product or service.



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When asked "What type of information do you prefer to receive from pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers?" healthcare professionals overwhelmingly responded with the answer of education. The top three responses were forms of education that either support the healthcare provider or inform their patient. The majority (75 percent) of medical providers want to receive information about continuing medical education opportunities from both pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers, followed by patient education materials (56 percent) and industry-sponsored educational events (48 percent).

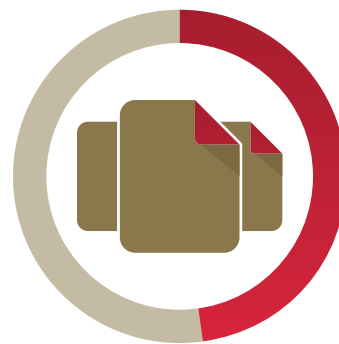




As the HealthLink Dimensions survey revealed, approximately 79 percent of healthcare professionals utilize patient education and support materials provided by healthcare companies and patient advocacy organizations. The type of patient educational materials that are most needed are disease state educational materials and prescription and medical device educational resources. Additionally, 48 percent prefer to receive these materials in print form delivered to their offices.



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Not only do these printed materials assist healthcare professionals in their jobs, they add to the quality of the patient experience. By going beyond straightforward marketing and assisting with the education of the patient health sciences organizations can establish their own relevance and role as a partner in patient-centered care.







## Pharmaceutical Companies Must Build Trust

As more medical practitioners come to expect health sciences organizations to be valuable partners throughout the process of patient care, trust will emerge as a main metric to define the effectiveness of marketing. In fact, Econsultancy shared data from Deloitte that showed there is a lack of trust between pharmaceutical companies and people working in healthcare. More specifically, the data revealed 75 percent of physicians do not trust the information provided to them by pharmaceutical companies.

The AMA announced through a statement in November 2015 that it voted to support a ban on direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising. Responses from healthcare providers on this topic support the idea that pharmaceutical companies may need to evaluate the way they communicate with patients.

### According to the results of the HealthLink Dimensions survey:

-  Roughly 55 percent of healthcare professionals believe direct-to-consumer advertising leads to over-prescribing and rising prescription prices.
-  Nearly 52 percent believe DTC advertising from pharmaceutical companies is misleading to patients and the primary purpose is to increase drug demand.
-  Approximately 40 percent think DTC advertising should be illegal.
-  Only 18 percent expressed appreciation that DTC advertising helps to inform patients about available drug options.

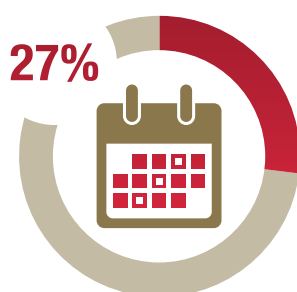


Another perspective offered on this topic was that the “fair balance” safety information which is required in DTC campaigns actually scares patients about rare side effects and the physician has to spend time making the patient comfortable about their decision to prescribe the drug for them.

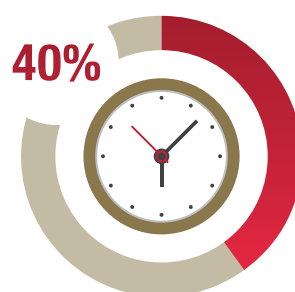
Moving into a new year, pharmaceutical companies must focus more on educating and empowering providers to help their patients make the best decisions. However, some respondents even indicated that DTC advertising actually makes their jobs more difficult. Pharmaceutical and Medical Device companies can increase trust through transparency as well as consistent and relevant communication with practitioners.

## The Increasingly Complex Payer-Provider Relationship

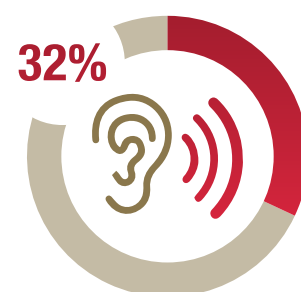
As more patients gain access to coverage, insurance carriers need to do a better job of nurturing their relationships with providers. As the HealthLink Dimensions survey illustrated, only around 27 percent of healthcare professionals said they receive regular updates from insurance carriers, PPO networks and Pharmacy Benefits Manager plans, while 40 percent want communications to be more timely and 32 percent rarely hear from these organizations at all.



Regular Updates



More Timely



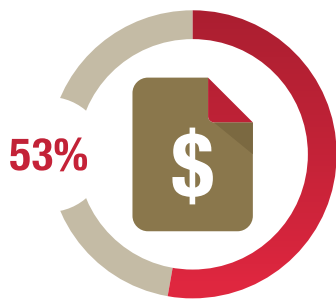
Rarely Hear





Moreover, healthcare professionals showed high levels of dissatisfaction with insurance provider communications regarding a handful of important topics:

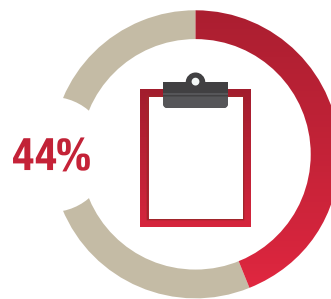
- Reimbursement fee schedules (53 percent).
- Drug formulary coverage and copay schedules (53 percent).
- Procedures for claims and processing (44 percent).
- Physician members within their referral network (39 percent).



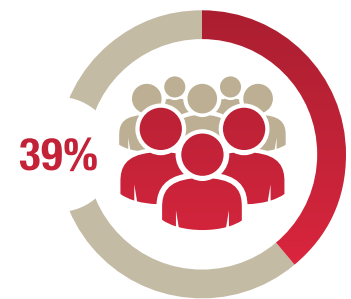
Reimbursement fee schedules



Drug formulary coverage and copay schedules



Procedures for claims and processing



Physician members within their referral network

To be successful in the face of changing provider, patient and regulatory expectations, carriers must work to nurture their relationships with healthcare practitioners even after prospects have moved through the sales funnel.



## Data Drives Long-Term Connections

Understanding healthcare professionals' needs is key to forming meaningful, beneficial relationships with them. However, marketers need to start with clean data and thorough research. Unfortunately, collecting sound data to develop relevant campaigns is more of a challenge than it might seem. In fact, the HealthLink Dimensions survey revealed 63 percent of providers have not contacted the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to update their contact information since initially filing for their National Provider Identifier. Furthermore, the majority (68 percent) have not reviewed the accuracy of their practice listing within the online directories of the insurance plans with which they participate. This information reveals that data sources often referenced by life science organizations such as government data are prone to data decay and can have a high degree of inaccurate data.



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Accurate Data is necessary for health science organizations that hope to give medical professionals what they need: targeted email campaigns, valuable communications, transparent relationships with manufacturers and service companies and consistent contact with insurance carriers. To build stronger relationships, healthcare marketers must begin with sound data and use that information to execute strategic, relevant campaigns.



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2 Concourse Parkway, NE  
Suite 300  
Atlanta, Georgia 30328-5581  
404.250.3900

1. <http://medicaleconomics.modernmedicine.com/medical-economics/news/top-10-challenges-facing-physicians-2016?page=0,5>
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3. <https://econsultancy.com/blog/67131-pharma-s-mobile-social-efforts-arent-as-healthy-as-they-should-be/>
4. The 2015 Healthcare Professional Communication Survey conducted by HealthLink Dimensions