



Industry voices:

What pharma marketers should watch for in 2022

Phreesia

Life Sciences

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Introduction

As the healthcare world prepares to move into the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus's impact on patient behavior is undeniable.

On one hand, health awareness is high. “Everyone is trying to take better care of themselves,” says Daphne Earley, Senior Director of Multi-Channel Marketing at ViiV Healthcare. “No matter what your beliefs are, it’s kind of hard to ignore your health when this many people are impacted by it.”

But on the other hand, taking better care of oneself isn’t necessarily easy, considering COVID’s negative effects on the healthcare system. Staffing shortages have created appointment, treatment and diagnosis delays and as a result, “I think we’re seeing a sicker population over time,” observes Ari Schaefer, Co-President of Klick Health.

One shift is certain: The patient journey—and the ways brands use that journey to reach patients—have been interrupted, says Arielle Chavkin, Group Media Director at Heartbeat. “I think we’re still figuring out what that means as an industry, even as things are normalizing again.”

So what exactly can pharma marketers expect in 2022? Read on for expert predictions on emerging tactics, continuing trends and strategies to bear in mind this year.

Health equity

The pandemic has shone a light on the healthcare system's many inequities, and in 2022, "Marketers and healthcare brands are going to have to acknowledge that," Chavkin says. "We've really seen the ridiculous discrepancy in healthcare access and communication, specifically for communities of color in this country," they add, advising marketers to address that discrepancy with more sophisticated, authentic and respectful multicultural marketing.

There are myriad ways that marketers can begin combating inequity, from more copay assistance to more on-the-ground community building and elevating key opinion leaders of color, Chavkin notes. But marketers also need to make sure they're reaching underserved populations with tailored messaging.

"Going into 2022, there is a need to really evaluate how marketers are grounding their efforts to understand, 'Are we reaching our individual target audiences in a way that resonates and educates?'" says Yesenia Bautista, Director of Point-of-Care Media at Publicis Health Media.

"We need a greater focus on creating content that speaks to those communities directly instead of using a one-size-fits-all approach," agrees Danielle Lynch, VP of Client Experience at Phreesia Life Sciences.

Chavkin predicts that "we're going to see a shift in patient preference to brands that show a commitment to certain social values like medication affordability, privacy adherence, and lifting and prioritizing the healthcare of at-risk communities. My hope is that 2022 is the year of healthcare democratization."



Spotlight on: Empathetic messaging

From her point of view, it's not just patient behavior that has changed over the past two years of the pandemic, says Yesenia Bautista, director of point-of-care media at Publicis Health Media. The right approach to engaging those patients has changed for pharma marketers, too.

"The last two years, there was definitely a sense of fear largely felt nationwide, and it was a stress level that really came through to a lot of consumers," Bautista says. But at the end of the pandemic's second year, "There's a newfound resilience to how patients are feeling."

Marketers need to take that shift into account, she contends. "As marketers build out their messaging to patients, that messaging should really resonate and have a message of positivity, empathy and also empowerment."

Danielle Lynch, VP of client experience at Phreesia Life Sciences, agrees. "Everybody's a patient, and while we're in the business of healthcare marketing, we're also on the receiving end of what we're doing. Marketing shouldn't be transactional, and not getting lost in the business aspect of it is really important."



Yesenia Bautista
Director of
Point-of-Care Media
Publicis Health Media

Telehealth

After surging in popularity during 2020's initial pandemic lockdown, telehealth use declined over the course of that year as patients returned to in-person clinical visits. But since then, telehealth use has remained consistent, comprising about 4.4% of medical visits, Phreesia data shows. And Raphael Rivilla, partner, media and connections planning at Marcus Thomas LLC, expects that percentage to stay the same this year.

“People got used to it, and with omicron coming up and people not wanting to go out as much, I think telehealth is going to keep being an important channel for us to invest in.”

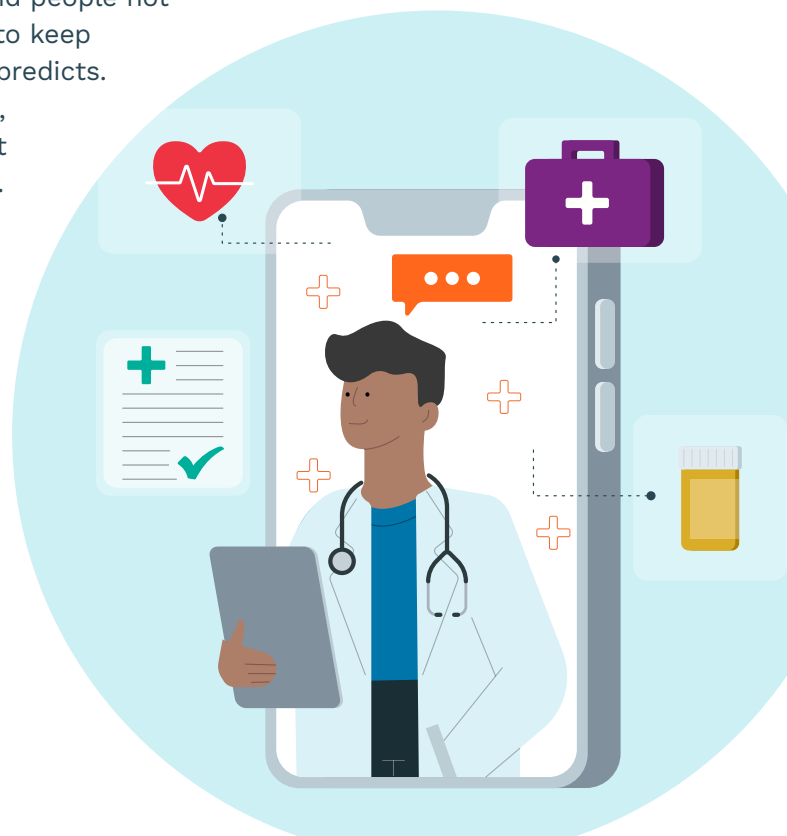


Raphael Rivilla
Partner for Media and Connections Planning
Marcus Thomas

“People got used to it, and with omicron coming up and people not wanting to go out as much, I think telehealth is going to keep being an important channel for us to invest in,” Rivilla predicts. Telehealth platforms have strong targeting capabilities, he notes, and they’re also trackable, which means that companies can see the impact of their dollars at work.

“Telehealth isn’t going anywhere,” agrees Lynch. “I think it continues to remain a channel to watch, and we’ll see continued innovation around how to use it to reach patients at critical moments in their healthcare journey.”

Of course, telehealth also has its limits, which is why a solid in-office, point-of-care strategy also is important. “Some conditions, chronic or acute, can’t be properly diagnosed without physicians laying hands on patients,” Schaefer says. “While telemedicine will continue to be a rising trend for the industry, the focus of thinking about telemedicine’s limitations will also be a trend that I think continues into the next year.”





Spotlight on: Narrative medicine

If there's one trend that Sparkle Fisher, associate director of direct-to-consumer marketing at Biogen, hopes to see come to the forefront in 2022, it's narrative medicine—the practice of using storytelling to uncover patients' health conditions and diseases.

“It really is about how that HCP is engaging with that patient in those conversations to uncover that story of what's going on with their health, to really be able to help and understand that experience and journey, and get them where they need to be—both to the right product, as well as adherence,” she explains.

Eventually, Fisher hopes to see a progression to transmedia storytelling, or using storytelling across different platforms to create a universe—à la Star Wars or Marvel—for engagement and education.

“I would love to see it really leveraged and pulled through in building that sort of education entertainment aspect in the therapeutic journey for patients,” she says.



Sparkle Fisher
Associate Director of
DTC Marketing
Biogen

Remote monitoring and testing

Telehealth, however, is just one part of a broader trend toward remote health management that some experts think will take hold in 2022.

“There's going to be a growing pace of remote monitoring, and there's going to be an uptick in patients accepting and embracing the kind of wearable devices that can serve as a tool to help [them] take a stronger hold of their own health,” Bautista predicts.

Consumers have already seen “a lot of novel little pieces” like the Apple Watch that generate health data, Earley adds. “Now we're going to get to the point where we're generally able to use [that data] better.”

Thanks to rapid COVID-19 testing, patients also have grown more comfortable administering diagnostic tests at home, Schaefer notes. “Being able to actually manage and monitor their own results becomes an exponential change in access ... and a tremendous opportunity for the marketing of products,” he says.

But as Sparkle Fisher, associate director of direct-to-consumer marketing at Biogen, points out, pharma has yet to clearly define its role in remote care.

“How do we go about figuring out what our opportunity is in that space—beyond an ad—to really engage and be part of that omnichannel care solution and delivery?” she asks. “That's not who we are today.”

AI and chatbots

Beyond telehealth, artificial intelligence (AI) and chatbots also will enhance the digital patient experience and generate key data for marketers. For example, a chatbot can walk a patient through a series of questions that helps determine which product is right for him or her, Rivilla says. “By the time you click on the ad and go to the website, you pretty much are in the right place,” he explains.

AI also can help optimize chatbot conversations and extract data from those conversations for use across platforms.

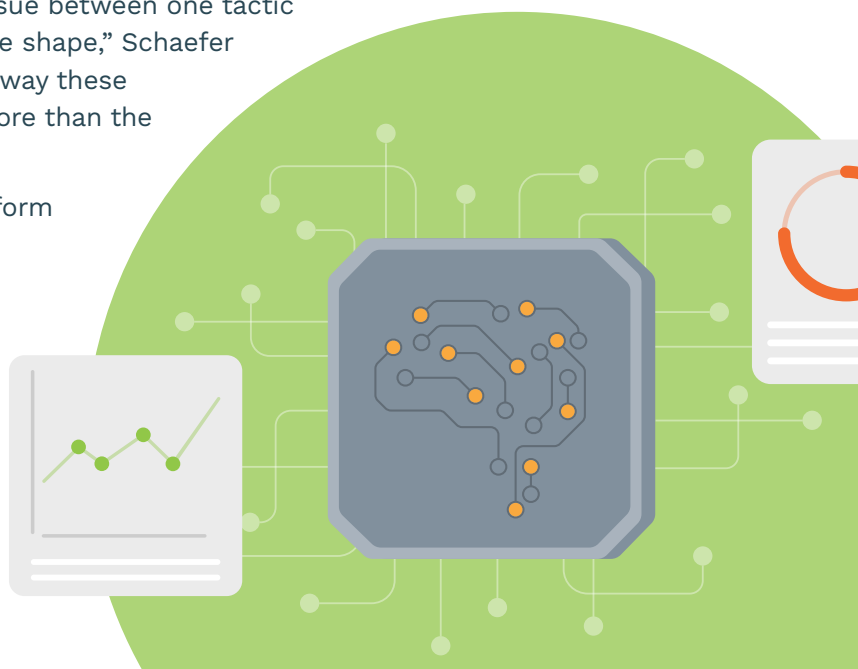
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Ari Schaefer
Co-President
Klick Health

“The interoperability of tactics is really the name of the game going forward—being able to actually leverage the connective tissue between one tactic and another as ecosystems of tactics start to take shape,” Schaefer says. “It’s an emergent way of thinking about the way these tactics connect to each other. They become ... more than the sum of their parts.”

Fisher also expects to see marketers use AI to inform their own decision-making. “At least from a marketing insights and data perspective, I don’t think it’s been fully utilized,” she says. “I think that we will see more and more companies begin to dip their toes deeper into it.”



Healthcare consumerism

The healthcare industry’s pandemic response and the technological advancements it necessitated additionally launched a healthcare consumerism trend that some predict is here to stay. Patients now expect healthcare to deliver the kind of flexibility, personalization and tech-enabled experiences they rely on in other areas of their lives.

“As a healthcare brand, it’s no longer enough to say, ‘We have something that treats what you need treated.’ Patients are looking for more personalized and technologically advanced healthcare experiences that fit into their daily lives.”



Arielle Chavkin
Group Media Director
Heartbeat

“As a healthcare brand, it’s no longer enough to say, ‘We have something that treats what you need treated,’” Chavkin says. “Patients are looking for more personalized and technologically advanced healthcare experiences that fit into their daily lives.”

Those expectations could translate to a personalized health system portal through which patients could access their lab results, schedule appointments and get medical advice on the go through two-way messaging. Patients “don’t want to go into an office and wait 20 minutes to be seen by whatever doctor is available, or wait two weeks to be contacted by a nameless healthcare provider with lab results,” Chavkin explains.

And while personalization certainly supports convenience, it’s also about “adapting content to be meaningful to who that person is,” Lynch says. “To really resonate with a patient, it’s important to align with where that patient is on their healthcare journey.”

Rivilla agrees that personalization is “a big deal” heading into 2022. “We are talking about, ‘How do we ensure that our communications aren’t vanilla? How do we make sure we understand our audiences and create the right messaging?’” he says. Patients are “going to want to be spoken to [as if] we know them,” he adds, “and I think with the tech we have, we’re really able to do that now. It’s just up to us marketers to make sure we leverage those tools.”



Data privacy

Between the phaseout of third-party cookies and Apple’s tightening iOS restrictions, the past couple of years also have seen major shifts toward a privacy-first environment that affect how marketers should think about 2022.

These changes have not only impacted the ways marketers can track users across devices, they’ve also made privacy a top-of-mind concern for patients.

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Danielle Lynch
VP of Client Experience
Phreesia Life Sciences

“I think we will—and we should—see people choose avenues to reach patients that are much more transparent and upfront about how patient data is used,” Lynch predicts.

The industry also will see players begin to generate more of their own first-party data—and use it to create audiences—as they strive to become less reliant on third-party sources, Rivilla forecasts. And they’ll lean more on contextual targeting, rather than “putting all of our eggs in the third-party data basket,” he says.

Of course, recent privacy restrictions haven’t only affected tracking and targeting—measurement has been impacted, too. On that front, Rivilla predicts that “incrementality is going to be the buzzword for this upcoming year.”

Indeed, some companies already use exposed and control groups to quantify an ad’s true contribution toward a patient taking a desired action. So “within specific markets and within specific media, we’re going to be able to really understand the impact of media more accurately,” Rivilla says.





Spotlight on: Video

For Daphne Earley, senior director of multi-channel marketing at ViiV Healthcare, there's no doubt about it: "Video is going to continue to skyrocket" in 2022.

As proof, she points to YouTube—the world's second-most-used search engine after Google—which has recently seen its consumption increase 400%.

However, that trend is indicative of a much deeper one, she argues. With video, "our comfort level has changed," she says, in part because of video's expanded role in remote work and life.

"I think the way we interpret data and what we trust now has changed," Earley says. "Before, if you saw something on TV, you might be a little skeptical. But I think we've gotten to the point where we're not just comfortable with it; we're actually starting to seek it out—you've almost trained your brain to accept that."

Brands looking to capitalize on video's new popularity have their pick of avenues, too, Earley adds. "I like to say, 'It isn't your grandma's TV anymore' ... This is TikTok, YouTube, Instagram Reels—all of these different ways to deliver video that we hadn't conceived of even three years ago."



Daphne Earley
Senior Director of
Multi-Channel Marketing
ViiV Healthcare

Key takeaways

In 2022, as much as the world may be yearning to return to some version of pre-pandemic life, for pharma marketers, there's no going back.

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised patient expectations for greater convenience and personalization, brought remote monitoring and testing solutions to the forefront and exposed health inequities that have long been ignored—to name just a few of its many impacts.

At the end of the day, the past couple of years have shown that the healthcare industry was operating under "a foregone conclusion that was incorrect—that we can't move at an accelerated pace," Schaefer says.

Yet as significantly as some things have changed for pharma marketers, others haven't changed at all. Now more than ever, with so much noise in the market, "You've really got to make sure your message is on point, it's relevant, and it's updated frequently in ways that are really creative, interesting and engaging and that really touch people's hearts," Earley says.

Above all, patient centricity is key. "It does have to be reiterated: It's not about what you want to give [patients], it's about what they want," Fisher says. "Pay attention to the little things in the patient journey because a lot of times, those are most important."

About Phreesia Life Sciences

Phreesia empowers life sciences companies to connect meaningfully with clinically relevant patients, delivering targeted health content in a one-to-one setting. Our PatientConnect offering identifies and motivates the right patients to initiate meaningful brand conversations, and our PatientInsights product enables our clients to better understand their target patient populations.

Phreesia meets patients where they are, both virtually and in-person, and reaches them at multiple touchpoints throughout their healthcare journey.

To learn more about Phreesia Life Sciences, visit lifesciences.phreesia.com

