




# Overcoming 7 Top Challenges of Commercial Leaders

*Practical Strategies for Addressing Persistent Issues*







**As the life sciences industry becomes increasingly competitive, digital, and complex, commercial leaders are turning to comprehensive, centralized omnichannel approaches grounded in data, advanced analytics, and deep domain expertise.**

A recent report assessing industry advertising budgets found that pharma ad spend continues to grow, marking a year-over-year increase of 12 percent—with most of those new dollars spent on digital activities.<sup>1</sup> While, in theory, these investments can support improved personalization and commercial effectiveness, many marketers have yet to observe a significant measurable impact.

1. <https://www.standardmediaindex.com/insights/u-s-smi-core-release-note-september-2022/>

A survey of 130 biopharma executives conducted by Industry Dive set out to pinpoint what's causing this disconnect. Seven key factors emerged, including organizational silos, data exchange problems, and a lack of tech integration. In this playbook, with the help of biopharma experts, we're exploring practical solutions pharma leaders can use to navigate and overcome them.

The pages that follow summarize the survey findings and offer actionable recommendations on overcoming each key challenge grounded in expert perspectives.

# Challenge 1: Interdepartmental silos



*of biopharma leaders struggle to break down silos between departments*

“It’s unsurprising that the top challenge leaders experience is organizational silos,” says Pooja Jain, Global Director of Orchestrated Analytics at IQVIA. “Not only is this causing major operational inefficiency, but it has a significant impact on brand performance due to outreach programs lacking true omnichannel personalized engagement for each and every HCP.”

For instance, MSAs and reps might independently develop their own engagement strategies such that it creates a duplication of efforts and more touchpoints than HCPs care to have, she said. This can lead to HCP disengagement, which, in turn, will affect prescribing behavior.

Therefore, leaders across departments not only benefit from shared visibility of everyone’s upcoming engagement plans but also meaningful, data-informed coordination of those activities from pre- to post-launch.

“A ‘360 viewpoint’ can provide a deep, near real-time understanding of your targets, which can inform a team-coordinated engagement approach built around high-value HCP segments,” Jain said. “Moreover, embedding AI/ML for more accurate, transparent, and predictive engagement insights can further support coordination. The key is to make sure everything is linked to business objectives and that the outcomes are measurable. This can help motivate teams to work together as they see the benefits of teamwork.”

However, Jain also points out that breaking down these silos requires an institutional and cultural shift that focuses on holistic collaboration. In response, some commercial teams are experimenting with radically new ways to collaborate and improve change management, adds Marco Ferrazoli, a commercial consultant who has worked with Pfizer, Merck, and other top pharma companies.

“Instead of a single weekly meeting where that’s the only facetime you have with colleagues, I’ve increasingly been recommending immersive rotations where we bring people from different departments to work with us on a specific project during a three-month assignment basis,” he said. “It can help bring people together so that they understand our unique pain points and needs from them, and vice versa.”

Of course, you still need ongoing leadership support to ensure those silos don’t redevelop after the three months are over, Ferrazoli adds.

“Sponsorship is critical to ensure that everyone makes collaboration a sustaining priority,” he said. “That can take the form of a dedicated project manager whose only job is to foster coordination, or it can be more informal depending on team resources. But it’s a necessary role that someone needs to play.”

## Challenge 2: Data access and insights generation



83%

*of biopharma leaders struggle to efficiently share data across the organization to generate useful insights*

Data silos go hand-in-hand with organizational silos. As the data ecosystem grows, it's becoming harder than ever to make that data compatible with other systems and universally usable for other teams. Still, that's the goal: Many biopharma leaders see a future where data can fluidly move across the organization, adds Katie Laughlin, Senior Director of Global Enterprise Information Management at IQVIA.

"We're seeing a rapid acceleration of data sharing within large pharma, which is prompting large centralization initiatives aimed at helping overcome data silos," Laughlin said. "But many aren't there just yet. Teams still make copies of data they're accessing, which complicates the challenge even more."

Modern cloud platforms such as Snowflake and Databricks can have a transformative effect. By housing assets centrally, users can access the same data in the same location for different purposes. But no matter how sophisticated the software, technology still requires a cultural framework to support it.

"You need an overarching strategy inclusive of a strong data catalog, governance presence, change management, and leadership support to centralize and appropriately utilize the data resources being built," Laughlin said. "Over the next several years, companies that are able to execute on that centralized strategy with proper governance and adoption will be much more effective at utilizing the technical benefits of modern data sharing."

Ferrazoli agrees, noting the value of not just software or governance, but also data science expertise that helps make insights more actionable and less abstract.

"As commercial teams, we often find ourselves flooded in data analytics, but at the end of the day, when we squeeze that data in an attempt to get something useful out of it, that can be incredibly challenging," he said. "You need people with the right skills to interpret that data and derive actionable information from it. It's at that point when data sharing can deliver in a big way for an organization."

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*— Katie Laughlin, Senior Director of Global Enterprise Information Management at IQVIA*

## Challenge 3: Seller effectiveness

81%

*of biopharma leaders struggle to maximize seller effectiveness*

### Maximizing seller effectiveness should account for two key considerations:

1. Delivering intelligence to each user on how to engage with HCP targets
2. Delivering a personalized user experience that motivates uptake and maximizes ROI

Jain says that the latter is a key missed opportunity that should be addressed immediately given the growing market pressures surrounding brand performance. Despite significant investments in business intelligence tools, organizations aren't realizing high ROI due to:

- Insights lacking user specificity
- Content being static and outdated
- Intelligence not being embedded into daily workflow tools so that they are more actionable.

A modern business intelligence program should provide one source of truth across all tools and surface prioritized prescriptive insights (or personalized intelligence) to each user.

This all requires a next-generation user experience that enables users to immediately take the next best action with no training required. Capabilities such as smart assistants, preconfigured insights, and embeddable intelligence within workflow tools such as email and texts can drive trust and effect behavioral change organization-wide.

Teams can further foster that change by linking to a sales incentives program that promotes the right behavior—such as adopting digital channels beyond traditional face-to-face channels and driving long-term customer satisfaction over short-term sales goals. All of these feed into a superior HCP experience and can significantly improve prescription uptake.



## Challenge 4: Market sizing and targeting

79%

*of biopharma  
leaders struggle to  
optimize market  
sizing and targeting*

Defining the contours of a shifting market can be hard for even the most sophisticated commercial teams, given that nearly 8 in 10 leaders still struggle to optimize sizing and targeting despite the bounty of insights, technologies, and other resources available today. Laughlin attributes those barriers and their negative impact on launch effectiveness to an incomplete data picture.

“Companies spend a lot of time doing market sizing by focusing on epidemiology and disease prevalence, only to overestimate the market by 50 to 70 percent,” she said. “That’s such a missed opportunity to account for a broader stroke of data, including pricing, access, affordability, and abandonment. You have to go beyond epidemiology to look into longitudinal claims, reimbursement data, and other third-party data that’s out there.”

Widening the aperture of data inputs is just one piece of the puzzle. The other piece is around how to use that aggregated data to optimize targeting. And for that, Jain adds that AI/ML solutions can significantly add value to organizations by:

- Analyzing complex HCP journeys and making targeting recommendations
- Using various AI-based scoring methods to do market-relevant audience micro-segmentation

With frequently refreshed data, organizations gain confidence that they’re focusing on the highest-value HCPs by working off of the latest insights. However, it’s also important to consider differences across markets. For this reason, fine-tuning the strategy with local expertise is also critical to ensuring business questions are answered and commercial impact is realized.

“Given growing market pressures, adaptability is key to maximizing the ROI from your budgets and meeting business objectives,” Jain said. “As you execute the strategy, if you’re not realizing the intended impact, you should be able to pivot immediately not just in six months. That absolutely requires having access to ongoing, refreshed data and the guidance of smart analysis and recommendations to identify where the program should head next.”

## Challenge 5: Budget allocation

78%

*of biopharma  
leaders struggle to  
determine how to  
best allocate budget*

Budget allocation used to be more straightforward. You'd put money into radio, print, or TV...and that was that. But with the breadth of new channels and broader economic uncertainty, the budgeting landscape has evolved into one that's much more nuanced and complex.

Life sciences organizations understandably want to maximize bang for their buck, a goal that Ferrazoli says requires more strategy from the outset. Instead of earmarking certain dollars to this or that, he often recommends that commercial teams take a step back and focus first on broader objectives, and then on how various touchpoint allotments can map back to those.

"For example, many companies see digital as a tactic, and not as a strategy, which is perhaps a shortsighted way to think about it," he said. "If you encapsulate and consolidate all efforts within a unified and measurable goal, you're in a much better position to allocate budget appropriately."

In turn, advanced data platforms enabled by predictive AI help support that strategy by consolidating data such as pharmacy-level data, sales data, and competitor data in one place and then providing insights on the cost to reach an audience segment by channel. Plus, team coordination can be an underestimated area of opportunity when it comes to budget allocation, Jain adds.

"Team coordination can potentially reduce the number of activities while still providing coverage across the high-value HCP segments," she said. "It's not the number of touchpoints with HCPs that matter, it's the value that every interaction brings to support HCPs in their brand engagement journey that leads to improved clinical outcomes for their patients."

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## Challenge 6: Vendor management and tech integration

77%

*of biopharma leaders struggle to integrate disparate vendor systems and platform*

As the universe of drug development technologies expands, the growing pains of that transformation almost always include integration barriers. Reliance on multiple systems that are not always compatible with one another can exacerbate silos and create difficulties in implementing, optimizing, and measuring omnichannel efforts.

In response, some organizations aspire toward all-in-one solutions that purport to be and do everything, without the need for point-to-point integration at all. But that model rarely works out well, cautions Laughlin. The ecosystem of potential solutions has grown too big and can shift too fast.

“At IQVIA, we have the same challenges as our customers,” she said. “We’ve deployed a lot of new and innovative tools and technologies that serve diverse purposes for various teams across our organization, and new use cases are growing by the day. It’s not practical to consolidate down to a single platform for every problem. Instead, we focus on the right tool for the job—in building modular and interoperable solutions that can integrate and flex with what we have, using APIs and leveraging data sharing.”

For those that haven’t yet developed a total system architecture, Jain recommends a global strategy that accounts for both short- and long-term needs.

“Consider what you need in the near term, and then also explore what your long-term objectives might be so that you can invest in something that is built to last and can scale accordingly,” she said. “More and more, we are noticing life science customers investing in a platform for a few years, only to realize it doesn’t meet near-term needs or can’t scale to other markets. It’s important to ask vendors about their experiences and their knowledge of the domain and technology trends so you can find the right vendor who can also be a strategic partner.”

“Pilots that deliver a measurable outcome are much easier to deploy today, and this can be a great way to mitigate risks before going all-in,” she added.

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*— Katie Laughlin, Senior Director of Global Enterprise Information Management at IQVIA*



## Challenge 7: Measuring promotional results



77%

*of biopharma leaders struggle to measure the impact of promotional efforts*

With omnichannel outreach dispersed across multiple touchpoints, measurement of efficacy continues to be a sticking point for organizations. How do you measure the effectiveness of single channels as well as the aggregate all of them—especially when patient journeys can be long and complex?

It starts with an institutional shift in how teams are approaching measurement, suggests Ferrazoli. Teams often regard one-off metrics such as social media likes or views as sacred, for example. But it's important to focus on metrics that tie back to ROI and underlying business objectives.

"There's sometimes a lack of alignment between those surface-level digital metrics and the greater business goals," he said. "What I like to challenge leaders to do is to approach every campaign with an ROI mindset—to force commercial teams to measure every single outreach activity through a sales lens. That's a very complex mindset change, but it's a critical one."

Along with that cultural shift in the measurement ethos, a robust data platform that calculates channel-specific impact can help measurement strategies come to life. In addition, Jain also points to the impact of benchmarking and simulation to contextualize that impact, see how it evolves over time, and try out new things before greenlighting a specific campaign.

"You should be benchmarking your promotional efforts before or after a change, such as moving from face-to-face to virtual engagement, to see how campaign performance evolves she said. "It's not just about benchmarking against yourself, though. You should also be benchmarking industry-wide, including looking at competitors to see how your efforts are stacking up to theirs. With that benchmark data, you can then utilize simulation to compare multiple different scenarios before finalizing a promotional recommendation plan. This helps you make better decisions with a lot more confidence."

"And now, these capabilities are often available as a packaged solution where aggregated data, benchmarking, visualization, and simulation tools come in one easy-to-use platform, thus accelerating strategic planning and execution," she added.



## A path forward

The omnichannel ecosystem offers new promise for today's commercial leaders. And yet, the increasingly competitive, digital, and complex nature of that ecosystem invites many new challenges. With increasing media spend but low confidence in whether those dollars are working, many biopharma executives worry that forces like business silos, limited data exchange, and disparate technologies are holding them back.

Indeed, maybe they are — but every challenge presents an opportunity. By approaching commercial plans more strategically and collaboratively, leaders can overcome these barriers with more resilience than ever before. And trusted partners like IQVIA can help by providing actionable insights and expert consultation. **To learn more about how IQVIA can support your commercial strategy or request a one-on-one conversation with an expert on the team, please visit: [iqvia.com/solutions/commercialization](https://iqvia.com/solutions/commercialization).**



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