

Insight Brief

Medical Information Goes Digital

The move to digital-first for medical information offers life sciences companies a way to exceed customer expectations with technology that enables real-time, faster and more satisfying interactions.

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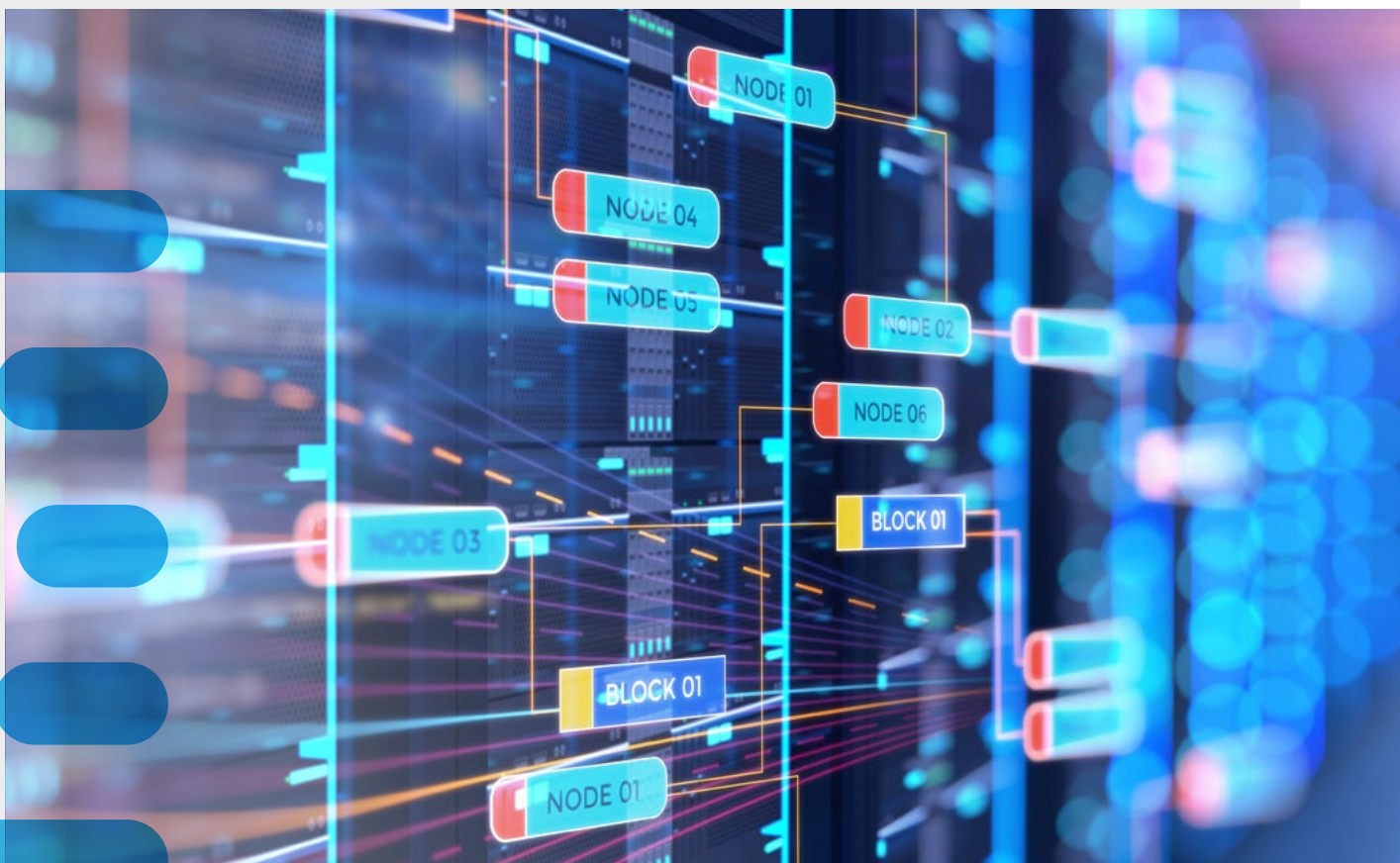


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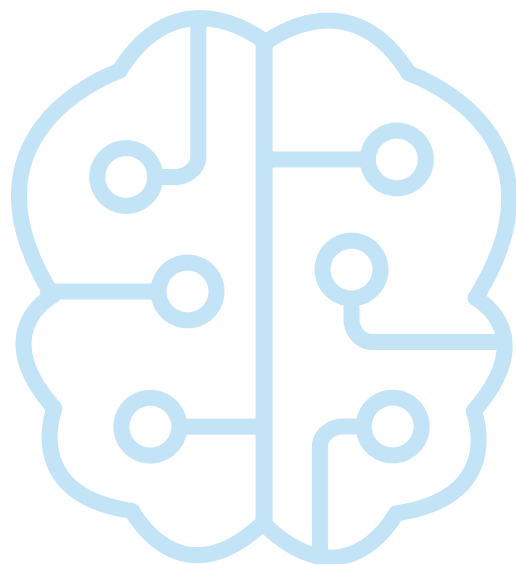
Introduction

Demand for medical information (MI) is soaring, and the growing volume of requests is putting pressure on life sciences companies. It is no longer feasible to promptly respond to every request with a human service representative. Immediacy is what customers want.

Healthcare professionals (HCPs), patients and consumers have grown increasingly comfortable with digital interaction and are happily taking advantage of self-service channels that allow them to gather the information they need with little or no human contact. This is creating opportunities for life sciences companies to accommodate increased MI demands with the same or smaller teams — but only if they adopt agile digital solutions that are purpose-built for the life sciences industry to provide consistent, reliable information in an easy-to-use format.

Smart, virtual conversation agents use AI/ML to provide fast, accurate information in a format and style that meets customer needs and expectations.

To explore this topic, IQVIA's Senior Vice President Ronan Brown and leading experts Richard Marcil from conversationHEALTH, Simon Johns from IQVIA Medical Information and an expert from a key sponsor company, recently hosted a panel discussion on employing automated virtual agents to enhance traditional human-only approaches. These conversational AI agents use artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) to deliver the right answers to MI questions using language that makes the customer feel like they are chatting with a human.



Get smart about MI

Increasingly, HCPs, patients and consumers are using search tools and chat features to find the information they need on their own. However, life sciences companies aren't willing to sacrifice rich customer experiences as a trade-off. When a website is difficult to navigate, and the chat has limited or poor functionality, visitors will quickly abandon their search and turn to human reps or other sources for information.

If life sciences companies want customers to further adopt self-service options, they need to reimagine the site and technology to ensure highly satisfying customer experiences within a virtual setting. This is about more than offering a pharma-specific search engine or FAQ. It is about bringing true innovation to customer engagement, in a manner that feels as close to a human engagement as possible — not just digitizing or optimizing current, mostly analog processes.

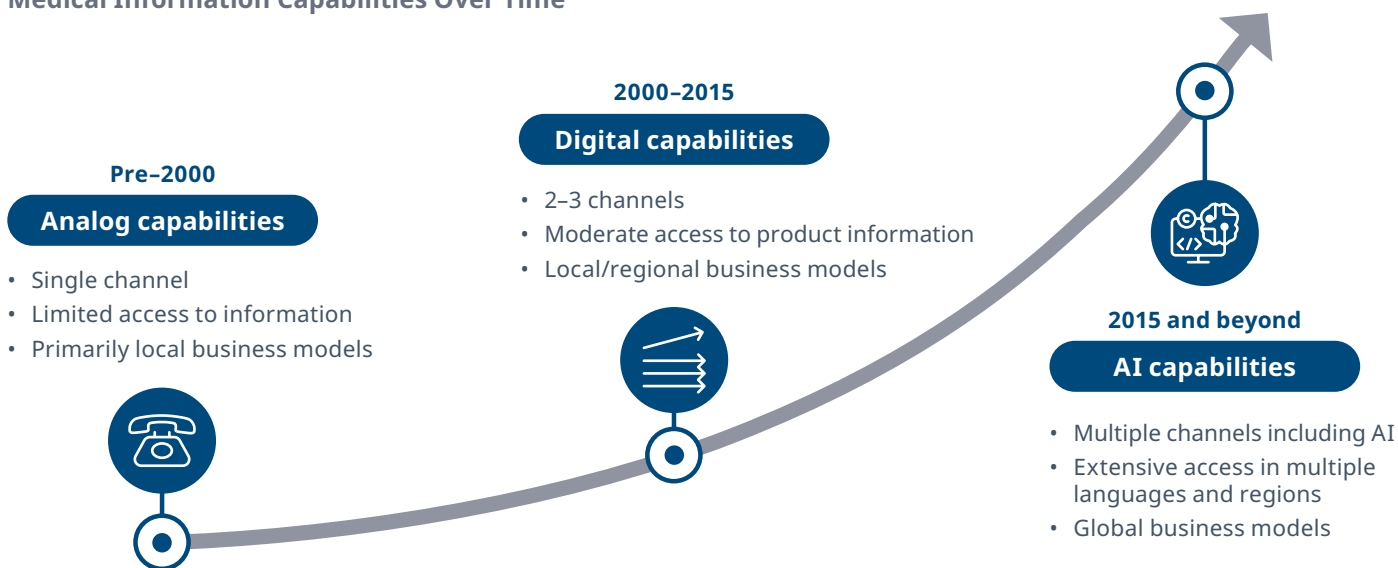
Conversational AI agents can easily handle the bulk of simple/common requests.

Today's customers want fast access via a branded portal that acts as a gateway to the organization where they can quickly find relevant answers to their questions. For many companies, this transition includes the adoption of smart, virtual conversation agents that use AI/ML to provide fast, accurate information in a format and style that meets customer needs and expectations.

Intelligent conversational AI agents aren't meant to replace human MI reps. Rather, they give life sciences companies the flexibility to handle more MI requests in less time, around the clock and across the globe, while accommodating user preferences. Conversational AI agents can easily handle the bulk of simple/common requests with pre-vetted content, which frees human MI experts to focus on more complex requests and data insight activities. And, if the digital agent can't resolve an issue, customers can also request access to a human medical expert through a seamless handover.

Such a hybrid approach gives customers the freedom to choose their mode of engagement, while lowering the cost and burden of meeting their MI needs, as well as providing an 'always on' service capability. This enables life sciences companies to be able to provide best-in-class customer support, best representing their products and brands to their markets.

Medical Information Capabilities Over Time



However, to achieve this balance of human and automated interactions, MI teams need to be confident that the technology they deploy can be trained to safely handle sometimes complex pharmaceutical topics, and to interpret and respond to all manner of questions from HCPs and patients or consumers alike — along with identifying and handling adverse events and product quality issues that come in through these channels.

This kind of offering requires technology that can adapt its responses for its audience, whether it be HCPs, patients or consumers, and predict what types of information they will need based on the questions they ask. It also requires customization for varying regions, especially for local language and product requirements.

This starts with a powerful technology platform, one that's likely verticalized for life sciences. Then teams develop bite-sized, pre-approved content that can then be customized by regional teams to meet the unique needs, regulations, and expectations of local customers. Local teams typically also personalize the interaction using authentication to ensure that the right content

is delivered to the customer in both real time and as a follow-up.

When life sciences companies combine powerful AI technology with people and process innovation — true innovation — they provide exceptional, memorable and efficient customer experiences that breed brand loyalty while reducing the burden of providing MI support via human-only approaches.

How to do it

Most current life sciences customer service portals don't provide this level of accessible, relevant content and ease of use, which is why adoption and utilization have sometimes been low. However, companies that update their processes and systems with AI-driven conversational agents, and train them to respond succinctly to the most common questions, will often see a large segment of requests shift quickly to digital self-service, to align with the evolving demands and expectations of inquirers.

How to Achieve Success Through a Hybrid Approach



Naming conventions

Use a simple, somewhat standard naming convention that acts as the MI storefront and ties back to the company — e.g., AskCompany.com or CompanyMedical.com — giving customers easy access to such digital channels.



Traffic drivers

Create compliant traffic drivers for HCPs to readily access the most accurate and robust medical and clinical content about products.



Self-service capabilities

Build rich self-service capabilities beyond a traditional call center, including personalization, AI-to-human escalation, and access to Medical Science Liaisons when necessary. All of which are better than an internet search!

Conclusion

In summary, recent trends including the pandemic may have accelerated the shift to a digital-first mentality, but we are never going back. Today's customers expect to be able to find the information they need without asking for help and life sciences companies need to adapt to meet these new and changing expectations. It can seem like a daunting process — if it isn't done with the right internal

and external partners — but once they have the right digital and AI/ML technology in place, and conversational content has been developed, and customer engagement has been reimagined, it will benefit the organization in terms of medical information access and productivity, efficiency and customer satisfaction.



About the authors



RONAN BROWN, PH.D.
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Ronan oversees the strategy and operational implementation of solutions across safety, regulatory, quality and commercial operations on a global basis. Previously, he headed up IQVIA's Global Project Leadership group, with responsibility for global project delivery of Phase I-III clinical trials across all therapeutic areas.

Ronan joined IQVIA (formerly Quintiles) in 1999 and, before joining Clinical Operations in 2015, was the co-leader of IQVIA's Large Biopharma segment within the Customer Solutions Management Group, overseeing project delivery and customer relations for key large biopharmaceutical accounts. He also led the West-coast development activities of NovaQuest (Quintiles' corporate development team), positioning IQVIA as a strategic ally by bringing intellectual capital, operational management and financial capital to apply to the challenges facing life sciences companies.

Ronan began his career in roles within clinical research, project management and medical affairs, conducting studies in oncology, rheumatology, diabetes and cardiology. Before joining IQVIA, he worked on the respiratory clinical development and international medical affairs teams at GlaxoWellcome.

Educated in the UK, Ronan has an undergraduate degree in biochemistry and physiology from the University of Southampton and a Ph.D. in clinical biochemistry from the University of London.



RICHARD MARCIL
Chief Customer Officer,
conversationHEALTH

Richard is a C-level executive with 20 years of building brands and businesses in startup and multinational organizations, both in North America and globally. Prior to conversationHEALTH, Richard led a North American strategy agency focused on brand innovation and digital transformation, working with companies like Salesforce and Alphabet. At heart, however, Richard is an industry insider. He was a founding executive at Silicon Valley-based biotech companies and prior to that held a number of leadership roles across Johnson & Johnson businesses.



SIMON JOHNS
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Simon Johns has over 23 years of experience managing customer projects across all stages of drug development and the product lifecycle. As Director of Medical Information (MI) and Marketed Product Safety, he has been managing global MI projects focused on process optimization and technology enablement that drive enhanced efficiency and customer engagement. Simon is a member of the European DIA Medical Information and Communications Training Team, advising pharmaceutical companies on best industry practices, innovation and automation. He speaks regularly on topics ranging from the benefits of integrating pharmacovigilance and MI to increase compliance and product value to recent PV changes and challenges in Emerging Markets such as Russia and ex-Soviet countries.



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