



ZS ASSOCIATES

SALES & MARKETING INSIGHTS

ZS Interview: Mobile Technology Is a Game Changer for Pharmaceutical Sales Forces— but Only if They Actually Use It

Participants: Mahmood Majeed

Mobile technology can fundamentally improve how pharmaceutical reps work. The potential for mobility is enormous, and companies are spending millions on applications and mobile enablement.

However, potential doesn't automatically mean user adoption.

Whether it's for planning routes, performing administrative tasks, getting real-time information for a video chat, mobile devices not only make a rep more efficient and effective, but can bring real-time, close-loop marketing that much closer to reality.

Given all of its benefits, why don't some pharmaceutical reps take advantage of mobility? Sometimes, the mobile apps and platform are too complicated, too ineffective or simply aren't what reps need. Perhaps more troublesome: Nobody bothered to ask them what it was they needed.

ZS Principal Mahmood Majeed, who leads ZS's Mobility practice, says knowing what the actual end-users need to become more effective and efficient is key to building a mobile application that reps will embrace. Mahmood talks about the importance of getting reps' perspectives in mobility, the obstacles that pharmaceutical companies face in mobile technology and what's at stake for getting mobility right.

About the Expert

Mahmood
Majeed,
Principal

ZS Associates,
Evanston, Ill.



Mahmood is a Principal at ZS Associates and leads ZS's Mobility practice. For the past 15 years, he has worked with clients in numerous industries, including pharmaceuticals, biotech, medical products and services, and high tech. Mahmood's expertise includes commercial technology transformation, with a specialized focus on enterprise mobility marketing analytics, and implementing business intelligence at Fortune 500 companies.

Why are end-users' perspectives important in mobility?

MAHMOOD MAJEED: It's the end-users who really drive adoption of mobile devices and apps—if companies buy iPads for their reps, for instance, they can't make them use the iPads if the reps don't want to do so. It needs to come naturally, and thankfully, with technology like the iPad, sales forces want to use it. We've found that customers engage better with sales reps when they see a technology and interface that's familiar and user friendly, so reps want that type of technology so they can establish a connection with the customer.

When technology is forced on users, it's often a long-term failure, or at least a slow adoption curve. Take CRM systems—sales reps were asked to dramatically “structure” their process around the technology, so adoption has lagged. The cost of this failure can be significant.

Besides the systems themselves, what are the costs?

MAHMOOD: Not only does the cost include the development, deployment and ongoing administration of mobile applications, but includes the additional effort required to manage the change, because it's a new way of working for a lot of people. Additionally, iPads, like any other medium, are conduits to deliver content, but the content requires effort, too, and that's where a big portion of the ongoing costs lie.

If you don't have the right content or way to deliver it, you risk the loss of credibility with customers, and reps lose the value of understanding customers better. The value of their analytics, for instance, is lost because the medium isn't effective at delivering it.

What do you mean, specifically, by taking an “end-user perspective” in mobile technology?

MAHMOOD: Pharma sales reps will use mobile apps and technology most readily when they naturally fit how reps work and provide excellent benefits. It should be a seamless extension of their natural routine, with value that's immediately apparent. For instance, take a mobile app that mimics reps preparing for their calls—they view their historical call notes with a provider, look up the sales reports on the physician, such as prescription trends for their own product and a competitor's, and also view any additional company interactions that may have happened with that physician to help the rep maintain continuity in the conversation.

If you embed all this information in a mobile app that's readily available with a seamless user experience, reps will use it because it results in better interactions with customers and increases rep's productivity.

How do pharma reps use mobile technology in their day-to-day routine?

MAHMOOD: Reps' routines are different every day, but their activities are basically the same. They need a routing app to plan their day that is fully integrated with GPS and customer database. Inevitably, they'll have cancellations, so they need the routing app to find the next best targets within the same area—these targets aren't necessarily the closest, but those physicians who are of the greatest value and will help the rep meet his or her goals.

While on the road, a rep might receive a formulary alert that affects a physician that the rep was planning to call later in the day. Or he or she might receive an alert that the same physician has started a new patient. This is vital information—delivered when the rep needs it—that allows him or her to have a more engaging and meaningful interaction with physicians.

While in the office, the mobile device and apps show promotion content to physicians and answer questions, as well as perform tasks such as material orders for the physician, capturing their signatures and various other administrative tasks.

Do pharma IT departments have a good handle on the variety of salespeople they serve?

MAHMOOD: While there's the perception of a singular "sales force," there isn't anything so monolithic. Sales forces are built of many different types of users with different levels of technological savvy, from those still using pen and paper to those who update their Facebook feeds as frequently as they check calendars or e-mail. User adoption and needs vary within the same sales force. Recognizing and leveraging this is a key to driving adoption.

Those needs are constantly evolving, so the challenge is to be nimble enough to let information consumers get what they need when they need it, while not building a system where interaction is slow or is hard to use.

So what are some common sales force needs for mobility?

MAHMOOD: The sales force's underlying motivations and needs from mobility are no different than any other technology. They want increased convenience, they want to be more efficient at their jobs and want to have better engagement with the customers. Having better interaction means reps need to be able to answer doctors' questions on the spot. For example, some pharma companies provide rapid accessibility with MSLs via videoconference, or provide apps that can build a case study on the fly.

In turn, getting all these things to the rep means mobility must have intuitive interfaces that are simple to use and fast. They need access to information as they need it, when they need it. And all of this information, apps and interfaces has to be fully integrated.

What's keeping some pharma companies from taking an end-user perspective on mobile technology for reps?

MAHMOOD: It's more of a cultural and technical issue than anything. Costs can be deferred over time, but the other issues are less straightforward.

Being user focused doesn't come naturally to IT departments—they may have a “Field of Dreams” mentality to technology: They think, if you build it, they will come. That's because IT has evolved as a support function in the organization, a siloed entity, rather than integrated into the rest of the company. Successful companies integrate their IT teams with the rest of the organizations rather than “throw solutions over the wall” and hope they're adopted.

There are also technological hurdles in a user-centric approach. You have to link complex data sources in a way that generates deep insights in real-time, and that's extremely difficult to do—it often is a mix of rules, heuristics and analysis that does not easily codify in a data flow. If they're not focused on end-users, companies may end up delivering suboptimal solutions or taking shortcuts.

About ZS Associates

ZS Associates is a global consulting, outsourcing, technology and software solutions firm focused on commercial strategy and implementation. For almost 30 years, ZS has helped businesses across a range of industries address market challenges and optimize performance. From 20 offices around the world, ZS experts use analytics and deep expertise to help companies make smart decisions quickly and cost-effectively. ZS comprises multiple affiliated legal entities. Learn more at www.zsassociates.com.



ZS Associates

www.zsassociates.com

+1 855.972.4769

© 2013 ZS Associates, Inc.

4-13

All Rights Reserved

All trademarks within this document are either the property of ZS Associates or their licensors.