CASE STUDY: VERSO Brand Insights

Charting a New Data Direction

How an innovative data insights tool enabled global change on an individual scale

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– Andrew Pasfield, APEL

When you're facing a larger wave, it helps to have a better boat. For pharma companies, the higher volume of dynamic business data being collected can feel like that wave, requiring technology that both organizes and interprets that data for commercial teams. Artificial intelligence capabilities have proven successful in assisting commercial organizations to use this data for customer strategy and engagement, but only if accompanied by necessary behavioral change among the capability users. At Astellas Pharma Europe Limited (APEL), a multinational pharmaceutical company offering products across several therapeutic areas, the key to making this behavioral change stick was in providing an AI platform that more closely matches the way people consume information in their everyday lives.

The Problem

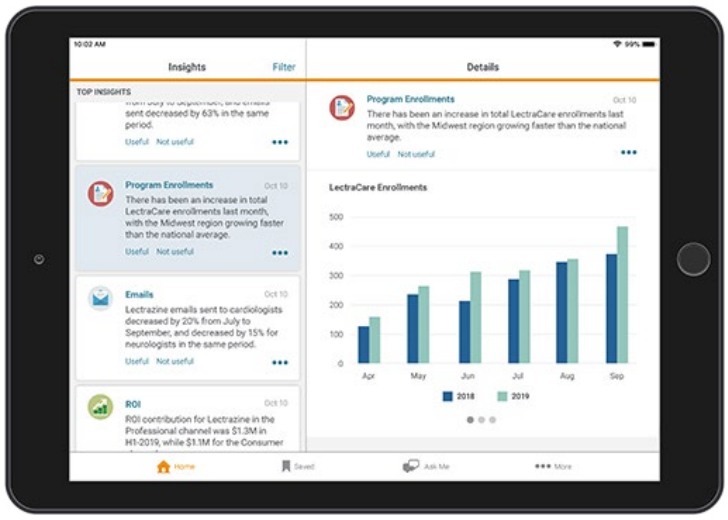
Traditional approaches to data reporting and analytics have placed significant challenges on commercial teams seeking to extract valuable insights from their customer data. Both field reps and brand managers are overloaded with information, but inflexible dashboards require users to click through several different views of the raw data and figure out connections for themselves. APEL leadership recognized that continued growth in its markets relied on solving this pain point for its own brand managers and achieving a more insights-driven mindset that would enhance their brand strategies.

"People are using information differently," said Andrew Pasfield, director of business intelligence and analytics at APEL. "They expect it to be more tailored to their individual experience, delivered at the right time and in a simple, mobile way. If we didn't move in a more insights-driven direction that better harnessed data and analytics [for our brand managers], we were going to miss an opportunity to leap ahead of our competition in the marketplace."

APEL needed a partner who understood the nuances of the pharma industry and who shared the organization's innovative mindset. By partnering with ZS, APEL intended to push the boundaries of what advanced analytics could offer to sales and marketing.

The Solution

From the earliest stages of its partnership, APEL showed an appetite to explore transformative options. An innovation prototype demonstration of ZS's emerging VERSO products inspired Mr. Pasfield to consider how they might be able to solve the organization's existing



business concerns around data and analytics and led to APEL signing on as one of ZS's charter VERSO clients. ZS's VERSO Brand Insights offered a scalable platform with the capacity to comb through millions of data points and provide accurate, organized insights that would answer specific business questions. Mr. Pasfield felt that such a platform could fundamentally improve the way that the organization leveraged its customer data.

"We have to be willing to innovate and take risks, to try to use data in different ways," Mr. Pasfield said. "We saw VERSO Brand Insights as a way to communicate [insights] quickly using AI and machine learning. When you see a product that has the potential to do that, why wouldn't you take that on?"

Similar to widely used consumer applications, VERSO Brand Insights uses AI and machine learning along with a user-friendly interface to deliver timely and relevant information via a distinctive newsfeed. The analytics engine generates personalized insights and suggestions from a variety of data by deploying algorithms that incorporate the company's overall business strategy and guidelines as well as configurable user preferences and behaviors. New insights about channel and campaign performance, such as email adoption rates and sentiment analysis, can then be delivered at the top of the user's newsfeed based on relevance and scheduled activities. By giving commercial teams the capacity to interact with a purposefully curated set of insights instead of a surplus of disorganized data, they are empowered to plan and execute more effective customer engagements.

Developing a platform geared toward optimal user experience comes with other unique challenges beyond data organization and delivery. One key goal of the project, for example, was to provide an app that felt less like a tool and more like a collaborative partner. To that end, the application included a conversational chatbot that was "trained" with a sophisticated bank of role-specific vocabulary. This enabled a natural-language interface that could easily translate complex queries, allowing the user to ask questions and receive pertinent answers.

"Requirements for a project like this can evolve over time, so the approach has to be agile and iterative," said ZS business process manager Pavan Sharma. "Give [stakeholders] a seat at the table to define the vision and keep on reviewing it throughout the process. Don't wait until the execution phase is complete." This level of contact was also critical for driving adoption of the platform. Cultivating an internal communications plan and a champion within APEL to advocate for the capability were essential components. Mr. Pasfield noted that a crucial concern during this process was remaining sensitive to internal business relationships.

"You have to be careful of the dynamic [within] different levels of the organization," Mr. Pasfield said. "How will somebody in a senior position feel now that somebody in a more junior position has more access to data than they did in the past? Since you're providing them with more information, it has the potential to impact relationships." This added complexity compelled both ZS and APEL to approach the change management with a high level of consideration and attentiveness to ensure the implementation succeeded.

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The Impact

User feedback from the pilot group, which included APEL brand managers working in several European regional markets, was very positive, with specific praise for the insight prioritization and accessibility. "The value I see in the app," said one brand manager, "is in having the information customized, ready to use and easy to forward to a colleague. I was able to forward [a report] to my manager while on the go." During the project, ZS had also employed the industry-standard System Usability Scale (SUS)—a survey that asks respondents to rate a product's user experience on a numeric scale across 10 criteria—as a basic metric of comparison between the legacy system and the new Brand Insights app. The results were very encouraging: VERSO Brand Insights augmented the legacy system to a degree that the upgraded platform achieved a SUS score of 87%, placing it in the top 1% per SUS standards.

"It was clear that in terms of usability and learning ability, the VERSO Brand Insights app was standing out across the board," said ZS Principal Iain Fratter. "We've also conducted one-on-one meetings where we asked two key questions: Would you like to continue using Brand Insights, and would you recommend this to your colleagues? For both questions, the answers have been yes."

Most importantly for APEL, the quality of the insights improves continuously over time based on app usage. The intuitive design of the app has motivated that usage and inspired brand managers to consider changes in their typical work routines. This has led to more valuable engagements within the field. "It's a new way of working that has an immediate impact," said Mr. Pasfield. "Our people bought into the fact that they could consume the analytics very quickly from a newsfeed on their mobile device."

APEL also sees strong potential for the solution to grow within the organization. The success of the Brand Insights capability at the manager level has opened the door to providing similar capabilities to APEL sales reps through the use of VERSO Field Insights. Mr. Pasfield added that the collaborative relationship between APEL and ZS has formed a solid foundation to pursue this innovation. "It's been a great partnership. We think of it as one team, and that same mentality remained throughout the project."

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For more information, please contact:

ZS
+1 855.972.4769
inquiry@ zs.com

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