Just in Time:
How Automated Analytics and Alerts Will Transform Pharma Detailing

by John Bienko and Michael Howes, ZS Associates

P harma sales reps have access to unprecedented amounts of data about physician prescribing trends, patient treatment patterns, promotional programs and much more. But does all this data improve sales effectiveness?

After working on data systems and issues with numerous pharmaceutical companies, we've found that data itself does not confer a competitive advantage—it's what you do with that data that makes an impact.

The key is in turning the data into insight, delivered when sales reps need it. This entails a system that automatically gleans insights from the data, prioritizes what's important and delivers critical information to reps moments before they walk into a doctor or hospital administrator's office. We see such a system being crucial to maintain and expand sales. Reps will get real-time insights that give them a competitive advantage, and help companies optimize their sales resources.

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John has
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Restrictions on physician access are perhaps the top reason for companies to deliver real-time insights to reps. According to ZS's annual AccessMonitor report, only 55% of physicians were considered "accessible" in 2013, compared with 65% in 2012 and 77% in 2008. Fully 12% of physicians "severely" limit access, and few physicians allow reps to call on them more than 24 times a year.

These access limits impose a steep cost: Pharma companies waste between $1 billion and $1.5 billion annually on "infeasible" calls not worth undertaking, according to AccessMonitor. Underlying that investment, reps receive 30 to 50 different types of metrics for each doctor and have on average less than 90 seconds per call.

And access restrictions are not the only challenge making automated alerts necessary; consider the patent cliff, for instance, or the increase of nonphysician stakeholders in prescribing decisions.

Beyond mere data

Today, reps preparing for a sales call can consult a data repository about the physician they're detailing, and answer basic questions: *Is the doctor consistently using my company's brand? Or is she writing fewer prescriptions for it?*

But deeper findings can reveal a wealth of competitive insight. Insights such as determining a doctor's response to recent formulary changes and if a monthly change in market share was an aberration or indicative of a behavioral shift. And if a rep cannot see the doctor, he or she should be able to determine which, if any, alternate promotional channels to pursue.

A automated alert system can identify hidden insights and unique knowledge about doctors, identifying changes in their practice, how they like to receive messages, what kinds of messages they open and the Web sites they visit.

Perhaps more important, an automated alert system needs to deliver *only* messages that are essential to a specific detail, including recommendations for specific actions for the rep (see Figure 1).

These messages might also include broader information and advice for a rep's entire customer base.

Figure 1. Reps need messages most essential to a specific detail, not extraneous data or noise.
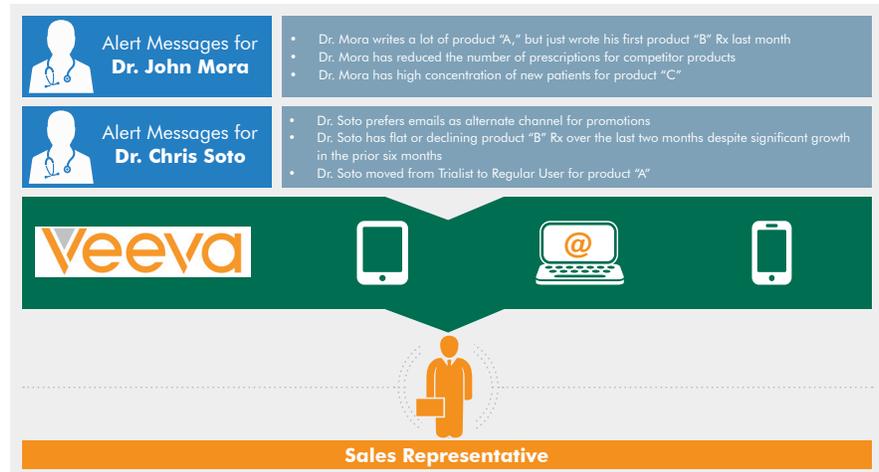
The three essential elements for rep alerts

Through our work with pharma companies, we've identified three essential elements in constructing an automated rep advisor system:

1. Analysis that reveals important changes in customer behavior

Separating signals from noise in data is exceedingly tricky. The best systems account for natural shifts in prescribing (for instance, seasonal trends with allergy medications), filter out noise in the data and compare current information with historical trends to spot true behavioral change.

Doing this requires not only the ability to design and automate sophisticated statistical analyses but also a deep understanding of how pharmaceutical markets work.

2. A prioritization algorithm that delivers the most relevant insights only

Physician data can uncover dozens of insights ranging from relative prescription volumes to brand-switching patterns to identifying new patients in a physician practice. Reps could attempt to determine the most relevant insights, but they generally lack the time and expertise to

do so. Prioritization needs to be done automatically with information that changes each month, week or even day.

ZS's RepAdvisor, for instance, determines the most relevant insights and recommendations, such as a real change in prescribing (which reps can address by providing the physician with recent clinical trial data). These insights are prioritized based on the client's business objectives and delivered to handheld devices automatically, resulting in focused alerts about truly relevant issues.

3. Analyzes data in real time

All human behavior fluctuates, and market conditions constantly evolve as well. Pharmaceutical products, for example, are subject to formulary decisions, which affect price and patient access. We have found that it's not enough to have a system that can spot changes, but it must also do so *as they occur*, and inform reps of these insights before meeting with a customer affected by them.

Generating a competitive advantage

The trends affecting pharmaceutical companies' sales forces—restricted clinician access, the patent cliff and the rise of nonphysician stakeholders in prescribing decisions—are becoming more pronounced over time. Accessing data that spans all of these dynamics is a crucial first step in arming sales forces to cope. But having the data, and even generating insights from the data, is not enough.

Instead, automated rep advisor capabilities (courtesy of advanced analytic and business intelligence capabilities) can generate a competitive advantage. This system combines pharma industry knowledge, a rigorous methodology for determining priorities, and experience in delivering insights to the field necessary for developing a customized advisory system.

Systems like RepAdvisor deliver the most relevant information when reps most need it, alerting them to urgent and long-term trends, while advising how to turn what appears to be a problem into an opportunity.

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 21 offices around the world, ZS experts use analytics and deep expertise to help companies make smart decisions quickly and cost-effectively. ZS compromises multiple affiliated legal entities. Learn more at www.zsassociates.com.

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