



# Tips for the Tech-Enabled Sales Force

How Best to Use **Tablet PCs** and Other Advanced Technologies While Interacting with Physicians

**Do Physicians Want Tech-Enabled Reps?**

**Closing the Loop... Without Tightening the Noose**

**Learning from Your Competitors: Points to Consider**

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## Introduction

One of the key debates around conference tables and water coolers in most pharmaceutical companies today is that of the technology-enabled sales force: Is the company ready for reps armed with Tablet PCs or another handheld technology? If so, how would that technology impact the sales force? Will reps be resistant to the technology? Are the physicians amenable to device-toting reps? And what does closed-loop promotion really mean? What are the best practices for a company to follow when implementing a truly closed-loop architecture?

Before examining some of the conventional wisdom surrounding this debate, it's useful to think about how things work in other industries today. In most brick and mortar retail stores, the cashier at the front register is seamlessly integrated with the same database that the customer sees when logging into the store's website, or that an operator would see if the customer were to call the company's toll-free number. For many retail stores, purchases made online or over the phone can be returned or exchanged in the store, or vice versa. Travelers purchase plane tickets online, and can even select seats, check in or request standby status without ever talking to a human being. Likewise, for many consumers today, a bank without online banking or ATMs would be unthinkable.

In most industries, the "online" and the "offline" worlds are seamlessly merged, allowing consumers to choose how to interact with the company based on what is most convenient for that consumer. This may not seem like such an outlandish concept, yet if you consider a similar situation that a physician might face in trying to interact with a pharmaceutical company through the rep, phone or online, the outcome is likely to be more convoluted than convenient.

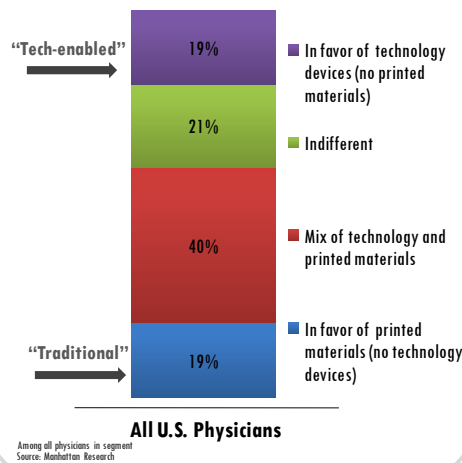


## Do Physicians Want Tech-Enabled Reps?

An estimated 386,500 physicians in the U.S.\* have had a rep armed with a Tablet PC in their office, so the technology is becoming more and more familiar to today's physicians. While this may seem like a radical leap into the future for

sales reps and technology, it is important to remember that almost every rep has used, or continues to use, a laptop as a professional resource. In many ways, the Tablet PC format — and future iterations to come — are driven by continued software and hardware innovation. While technology-enabled reps are nothing new, the degree to which technology informs and changes the nature of the rep-physician relationship is the key area of inquiry for many companies today.

Physician, how would you describe your interest in having pharmaceutical reps use technology devices (such as a laptop, Tablet PC, PDA, or Smartphone) for conversations in your office?



For the most part, physicians are not against tech-enabled reps, but they're not categorically in favor of them either. In essence, the physician wants a meaningful and efficient interaction with the rep, and to the degree that the Tablet PC might allow him to do so, physicians are in favor of it. But today's physicians are too busy to wait for a document to load, or to be taken through a presentation just because the rep knows his every keystroke on that device is being tracked by a sales manager. The Tablet PC should be used only inasmuch as it is a benefit to the interaction with the physician and should not be required for the sake of it. For instance, while only 19% of all physicians report they would prefer the rep use only printed materials (see chart), this number varies widely across the 25 specialties covered in the research. In fact, some specialties are nearly twice as likely to prefer traditional detail aids as compared to all physicians. It is critical to

understand these elements of physician behavior and preference in order to develop a strategy that is in line with the market realities for the target specialty.

Most companies today have used the Tablet PC for a relatively limited set of activities. Obtaining an electronic signature is by far the most common use for the Tablet PC among reps today, as are interactive presentations of the detail aid information. These scripted and transactional encounters are just the beginning of the potential for the Tablet PC. In fact, physicians see the real potential for these devices lies in a broader realm.

Some of the activities physicians are interested in seeing reps conduct on the Tablet PC are far more interactive and representative of the device's true potential. Reps could access journal articles; email the physician a link to a downloadable patient education brochure; or send the doctor information about upcoming events or clinical trials. These types of activities are less scripted in nature and would need to be ready on the fly for easy access depending on the conversation.

In an ideal world, the Tablet PC would be an easy-to-use, portable office for the rep to use to provide the physician with real time access to the full range of resources and information that the company has to offer. However, most companies today have not progressed to this stage yet, and are using the technology for relatively straightforward interactions.



## Closing the Loop... without Tightening the Noose

Truly closed-loop promotion is the holy grail of a successful Tablet PC implementation. If realized, such an infrastructure would yield a sales force that is as informed and up-to-date about the activities and behavior of the physician to whom they are talking as possible. Your bank shows you the same detailed information about your accounts whether you're looking at your account online, at the ATM, or talking to someone on the phone — so why shouldn't all of the silos within the pharma/physician relationship be united?

In an ideal world, the Tablet PC could serve as this unifier, bringing data and information

\* Source: Manhattan Research, ePharma Physician@ v7.0

together to help improve the interaction of the rep with customer. A rep could walk into a physician's office knowing which edetails the physician had conducted, which information he or she downloaded from the company's customer service portal, and the questions the physician asked at the booth at a recent conference. This information could be used by the rep to target the conversation, so the physician isn't hearing the same thing from the rep that she read in an edetail the previous week.

That said, it's critical to avoid the "creepy factor" of the reps knowing too much about the physician's behavior — and telling them so. There is a fine line between being attentive and being intrusive, and guidelines should be carefully established to avoid crossing that line.

And speaking of "tightening the noose," all of this valuable data can, of course, flow two ways: Namely, to report back on the rep, rather than the physician. Many companies have used the data-gathering capabilities of the Tablet PC to closely monitor the duration and content of sales rep calls with a physician, much to the chagrin of the sales force. A quick search on the CafePharma messageboards will yield plenty of feedback from reps frustrated with managers who scrutinize the slides used during calls or the types of information presented.

Many companies evaluating a potential Tablet PC strategy are giving careful consideration before going ahead with such an Orwellian strategy. The sales process is an overwhelmingly fluid and instinctual one. In many cases, putting strictly monitored guidelines on how calls should be conducted yields nothing but frustration, for the reps and physicians.



## Learning from Your Competitors: Points to Consider

Companies in the early-to-mid stages of launching a Tablet PC platform can reap the benefits of following others who blazed the trail before them. So what can these companies learn from the experiences of their

competitors? First and foremost, the importance of thoroughly testing the technology prior to a broad roll-out cannot be overstated. As much as it sounds like common sense, simple and avoidable software problems have led to countless frustrations with crashing devices.

Another point to consider is whether the device will be Internet enabled, and if so, through what type of provider? One of the key benefits of the Tablet PC device can be the ability to email a physician information in real time, or show him a website or article online. The rep needs easy access to an Internet connection during the sales call to make this happen. Internet access through mobile phone networks is one of the best options today, but as the telecom marketplace evolves, it will be critical for companies to stay aware of what's available.

On that note, it is also critical for companies to re-evaluate their policies regarding reps' ability to email physicians. This is important to consider, as it can be a key piece in creating a truly closed-loop interaction. Companies who allow reps to email physicians have strict guidelines in place for the correspondence, but those guidelines are generally sufficiently permissive to allow the email exchange to be a valuable one.

Finally, another point to consider is the degree to which you will use the sales force (and the Tablet PC technology) to opt physicians in to programs or databases through the tech-enabled reps. Examples include opting physicians in to an email newsletter or database for updates; or creating a login for the company's customer service portal. The Tablet PC allows the rep to become an empowered link to the full body of resources the company has for that physician.

## Conclusion

Tech-enabled reps are a critical next step for pharma to catch up with the level of customer service that today's consumers — physicians included — have come to expect. Sales reps are the face of the company, and yet in many cases, they are unable to access the full breadth of information, tools, and resources they would need to provide physicians with a

truly seamless experience. A well-planned Tablet PC strategy can go a long way toward closing that loop.

That said, it is critical that companies learn from the experience of those who have piloted such programs before them and give careful consideration to how the technology will be used. Is it really necessary to critique the sales force on the duration and content of their calls? To what degree can calls be scripted, before the guidelines remove the spontaneity that is inherent (and necessary) in a brief conversation with the physician?

Finally, it's important to remember that at the end of the day, it's about keeping the customer happy. What do today's busy physicians want from a rep? They want the rep to be informed. They want tools and resources that help them better serve their patients. They want the information to be relevant and on point, but concise. Perhaps above all — they want it to be quick. Any technology implementation should keep these goals at the forefront of the objectives for the project.



**ePharma Physician®** is a syndicated multi-client research study and advisory service focused on physician information technology adoption. Specifically, the study examines how technology is leveraged by pharmaceutical, biotech, and device companies to improve relationships with physicians.

**ePharma Physician®v7.0** was fielded in 2007 among 1,438 practicing U.S. physicians using an in-depth online interview.

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