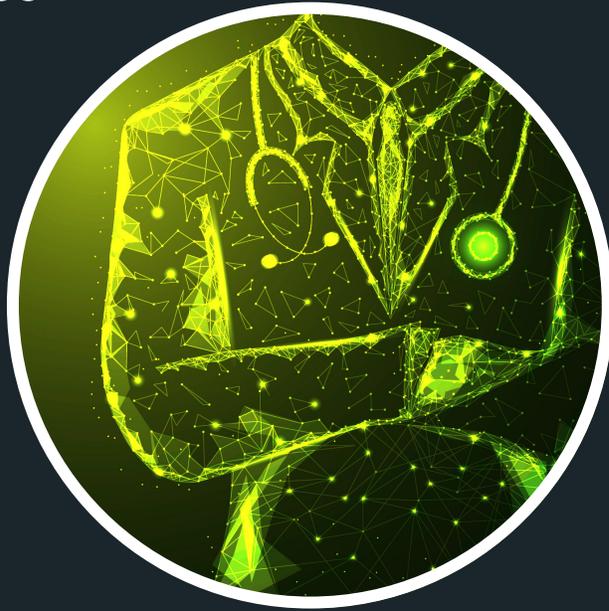




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# Discovering the unique power of DOLs

*Are you harnessing the power  
of pharma's new educators?*



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# Discovering the unique power of DOLs

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By Akarsh Sakalaspur

**A** new breed of key opinion leaders (KOL) has arisen. We call them digital opinion leaders, or DOLs. These are healthcare professionals (HCPs) on social media and other digital channels inviting peers, patients, and others into their daily professional lives. Since platforms allow for instant content creation, thousands of other HCPs often review, comment, and respond. What they say may affect HCP behaviour as much as or more than the opinions of traditional KOLs. They have a different reach, use different channels, and speak in a very different voice. When COVID-19 limited in-person activities for HCPs, these trustworthy online experts and educators kept others abreast of developments in a more efficient manner. It's critical to integrate DOLs into your online strategy. They are already out there communicating with and educating your brand's prescribers in real time, most likely

without any interaction from your team. The very least you can do is listen and learn what impact these digital conversations are having.

Here are some important factors when engaging DOLs:

## **Identification, profiling, and monitoring**

Build an integrated team of social media experts who interface with medical directors and strategists who know your content and brand. Together, they will digest the flow of digital conversations, identify relevant keywords and discover which content has the biggest influence.

Identify a broad group of DOLs, then recognise an individual's specialty, reach, relevance and quality of content. In the end, you should end up with a ranked list of DOLs. ▶

## Your voice, their influence

*Share a common passion.* The most effective DOL relationship will happen when you select a topic where both parties strongly share a common purpose, allowing you to speak in one harmonious voice. If that voice is authentic and credible, it will deeply resonate not only with your following, but also with the audience of the DOL.

*Proactively communicate.* Many brand teams discover influential DOLs but then just sit back and watch. Too often their first interaction is to correct a data point or a misrepresentation of a study. Not good optics for someone who may have a significant impact on your success.

*Reach out, just like you do with traditional KOLs.* Build a two-way connection so they feel comfortable coming to you for information. Invite them to join communications advisory boards. After all, their audience is also your brand's audience.

*Build a relationship of co-creation.* Work directly with your DOL to co-create content that will resonate, leveraging their expertise and knowledge of their audience. Each influencer is a bit different, so let his or her perspective drive the partnership. Then take advantage of the DOL's unique reach by pushing content to his or her audience. Just like KOLs, these relationships need to be formalised, contracted and sometimes compensated. Transparency is king here. Remember, the right DOL can give validation that you can't provide. Their voice is offering a perspective from the needs of their network and community. It's often said that 'word of mouth' advertising is the most effective. The same rules apply here.

*The gold standard for a DOL relationship is cocreating and distributing sponsored educational content.* This is a big step for a DOL, a transition from advisor on content to a formal association with your brand. On camera. Forever.

(Everything on the Web is forever.) At risk is an audience whose trust may have been earned over several years. If the content doesn't sync with your expert's voice and personality, it will feel out of place. The DOL won't want to use it, and the audience won't react favourably to it. From content outline to finished product, it has to be one unified voice.

## Success is a beautiful thing

DOL engagement isn't a one-trick pony. We recently created multiple Twitter livestreams with high-profile DOLs for a virtual oncology launch. It resulted in 62,900 live views, and more than 1.8 million live and on-demand. We added a DOL to a rheumatology campaign and in one month it boosted page views by 50%, YouTube views increased 154%, and banner ad impressions were up 44%.

Much of the attention of these campaigns was through existing DOL networks. These were not commercial-style productions. Just expert HCPs providing information that the audience was looking for.

## The DOL model is here to stay

Our experience tells us that HCPs are clearly looking for this kind of engagement. We've conducted educational video series, surveys, MoA overviews, short-form, long-form and everything in between. Basically, we've done everything that marries the DOL's passion with the brand's educational needs. Which brings us to possibly the most important word in this entire article: passion. The right DOLs will inject their passion into your brand, allowing it to speak with a louder, more powerful and authoritative voice than ever before. ●



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### Healthcare Consultancy Group

Healthcare Consultancy Group (HCG) is a global leader in medical communications – 8 agencies united in a common vision. To accelerate product understanding and acceptance, bringing clients' medicines closer to the patients who need them.

With global offices approaching 1,000 staff spanning North America, Europe and Asia, HCG is an incubator for the relentlessly curious. Our appetite for creating strategies that lead to better patient outcomes is never satisfied.

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