

# FROM INSTINCT TO INSIGHTS

## How data are transforming medical communications

In an era where HCPs face an ever-expanding volume of medical literature and research findings, the difference between effective and ineffective medical communications isn't just about having the right message—it's about having the right insights to deliver the message with precision and impact.

Despite the advancements in medical communications strategies, many still seem to depend heavily on experience, intuition, and long-standing industry conventions. With growing market pressures to achieve more with fewer resources, demonstrating value and impact has become more crucial than ever.

### The data paradox in medical communications

There is an abundance of data available to healthcare communicators that extends far beyond clinical trial results. These data can include:

- > **Behavioral intelligence:** How HCPs consume information, their content preferences, and digital engagement patterns across different channels

- > **Clinical intelligence:** Prescriptions, procedures, claims, diagnoses, and the patient journey
- > **Understanding preferences:** What HCPs tell us they want, need, or believe
- > **Social listening:** Real-time conversations happening in professional forums, in patient communities, and on social media platforms
- > **Metrics and impact:** Data on what has and hasn't worked before and how to optimize and refine

However, despite this wealth of information, these data often are not used effectively. This represents a significant missed opportunity—not just for more effective communications, but for meaningful impact on patient outcomes.

### Insights drive action

Clearly, the answer can't just be "more data." Often, the reason more decisions are not made based on data comes down to accessibility. Data may exist in silos and be difficult for Medical Affairs and Commercial teams and their agency partners to access. Or where it is available, the resources and expertise required to dive into dense, nonprioritized data sets to extract relevant actionable insights from the data are lacking.



Part of the solution lies in adopting an "Insight-First Mindset"—a fundamental shift in approach to medical communications. This doesn't mean abandoning expertise or experience; rather, it means building on that experience using data to validate, enhance, and optimize strategic thinking through integration of actionable insights. It means testing or challenging whether the data support conventional assumptions and ultimately measuring outcomes qualitatively and quantitatively.

An Insight-First Mindset begins with a simple but powerful question: "What data could help generate key insights that can inform my thinking, shape my approach, or validate my recommendations?"

Getting to insights from data is both an art and a science. There is science in analysing the data and identifying potentially interesting signals within the data. And there is art in decoding those signals, filtering out what is not relevant, not within our power to influence or not aligned to the strategic goals, and then generating an actionable insight or two. Often, the biggest signal may not be the most important—when a trained eye looks through the data, a small but important difference can become the cornerstone of a strategic approach.

### Integration is essential

Generating actionable insights is only the beginning. The insights need to be integrated into communication strategies and tactics to be effective.

Embedding Data & Insight Champions across the organization helps bridge the gap between medical strategy experts—who bring deep knowledge of past successes, direct HCP experience, and strong clinical and therapy area expertise—and large-scale behavioral, market, and preference data that reveal current trends and needs.

Combining expertise helps contextualize the data, ensuring that insights are not just statistically significant, but clinically and commercially relevant.

Perhaps most importantly, effective data utilization in medical communications requires integration throughout the entire project lifecycle. Embedding expertise in every team helps ensure insights are not used only during the planning phase; they become a living part of the process, woven throughout strategy development, content creation, channel optimization, and impact measurement. Uncovering insights throughout allows us to make real-time adjustments to content to ensure insights are actioned and not just reported.

### Data aren't just for marketing

Much of the conversation around data in medical communications revolves around digital marketing campaigns, but much of the work in medical communications falls outside of digital marketing. Adopting an Insight-First Mindset across all interactions between pharma and HCPs helps ensure that these interactions are more valuable to both parties.

For example, examining treatment sequencing claims data in diabetic macular edema patients uncovered treatment patterns that challenged conventional assumptions that switch usually occurs after long-term fatigue and nonresponse. The data actually showed that the majority of treatment changes were occurring much sooner—which prompted a change in direction for the communication strategy.

Also, consider Key Opinion Leader (KOL) or expert identification. Traditionally, this process relied heavily on existing relationships, personal experience, conference speakers, and publication authors (essentially a scaled-up networking approach). However, this may mean that everyone is fishing in the same pool. Adopting a data-driven approach layers multiple data sources: publications, clinical trials, social media influence, patient treatment patterns, industry interactions, society memberships, and geographic location. Prevalence and diagnosis data can also be layered



on to identify experts who serve communities with a specific need (e.g., high prevalence of comorbidities). This approach allows identification of not just academic experts, but the clinicians treating target patient populations where the greatest clinical need exists.

## Measuring what matters

No discussion about data is complete without addressing measurement. Metrics are an essential part of a data-driven approach, not only to optimize and measure success but also to contribute to a growing repository of first-party data on what works and what doesn't for future reference. Importantly, measurement goes beyond metrics; it also considers the downstream impact, such as changes in the patient journey, diagnosis, and clinical practice. Understanding how to measure impact can seem daunting in medical communications, but often the data used to guide the strategic approach indicate what should be measured to understand impact. For example, if data on diagnosis and biomarker testing rates lead to a particular communications approach, then measuring changes in those rates over time should be part of the impact measurement plan, alongside traditional metrics and KPIs.

For more on impact in medical communications, [read our viewpoint here](#).

## Humanizing the data

None of this suggests that data should replace human expertise and intuition. The most effective medical communications emerge from the synergy between analytical insights and empathy. Data tell us what is happening and help predict what might happen; empathy interprets why it's happening and what it means for patients and healthcare providers at a human level.

The goal isn't to eliminate judgment from medical communications, rather to make that judgement more empathetic, more precise, and more effective.

As artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities continue to advance, the potential for data-driven medical communications will only grow,

moving us toward a future where communications can be personalized, not just to therapeutic areas or specialties but to individual healthcare providers and their specific patient populations.

## How to Adopt an Insight-First Mindset

Organizations ready to embrace data-driven medical communications should consider several foundational steps:

1. **Audit existing data sources:** Identify what data are currently available—whether held by another department or function or found externally
2. **Work with the right partners:** Ensure that you partner with teams who integrate data and insights into everything they do
3. **Embed Data & Insights Champions:** Integrate insights-focused individuals within strategic teams
4. **Implement measurement frameworks:** Establish metrics that capture both immediate engagement and downstream impact

Incorporating data need not be daunting: start small by reviewing what you have available (market research, HCP preferences data, metrics) and grow from there. If you would like to learn more about how we have adopted an Insight-First Mindset, take a look at our **Future Impact Thought Leadership** [articles](#), or [reach out](#) to find out how we can help you incorporate data into your medical communications strategies. ■



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