

How to Make Omnichannel Less of a Struggle for Pharma Marketers

October 2023

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Abstract

Data drives everything we do today. At first glance, one would think more data is a good thing; the more insight you have into something, the better the decisions you can craft. But that isn't always the case. Too much information has proven overwhelming for many organizations, especially pharma companies and their marketing teams. The rise of omnichannel marketing, where multiple avenues of reaching a consumer have been intertwined and now rely on each other, has only exacerbated the abundance of data. Therefore, we present several essential considerations for pharma marketing teams that will help them navigate omnichannel—and make it less of a struggle.

Introduction

More channels and more data are available to us now than ever. While that can be a boon to data analysts, it can become cumbersome for marketers, whose primary functions include reporting on the successes and stumbles of campaigns and projects. In this white paper, we identify the problems created by too much data and ask two key questions:

- How can a team of analysts make omnichannel concepts and projects relevant to brand marketing teams?
- What can we do to communicate more effectively with business and marketing counterparts who may think in a silo or approach tasks differently than analytics and IT stakeholders?

We've used our experience with hundreds of projects for our life sciences clients to develop clear answers to these questions. This hardened knowledge was garnered from the valuable input of our esteemed colleagues, who are experts in the industry.

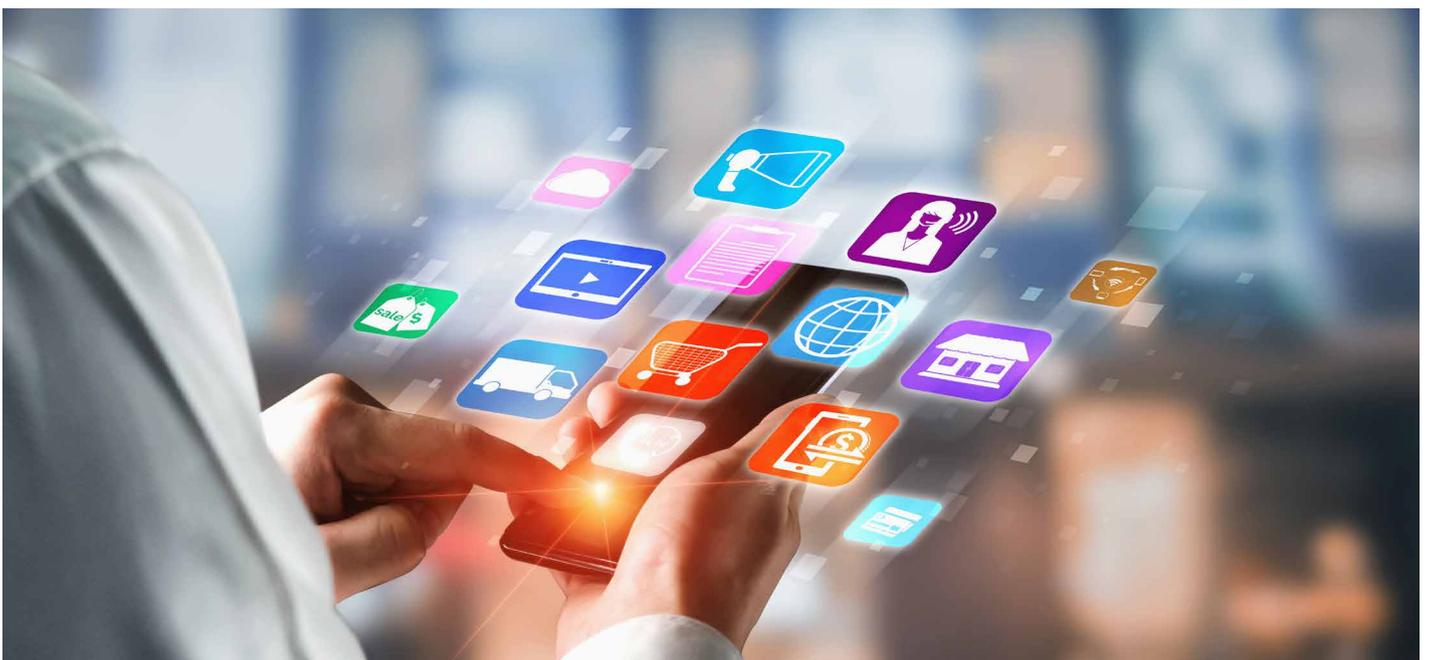
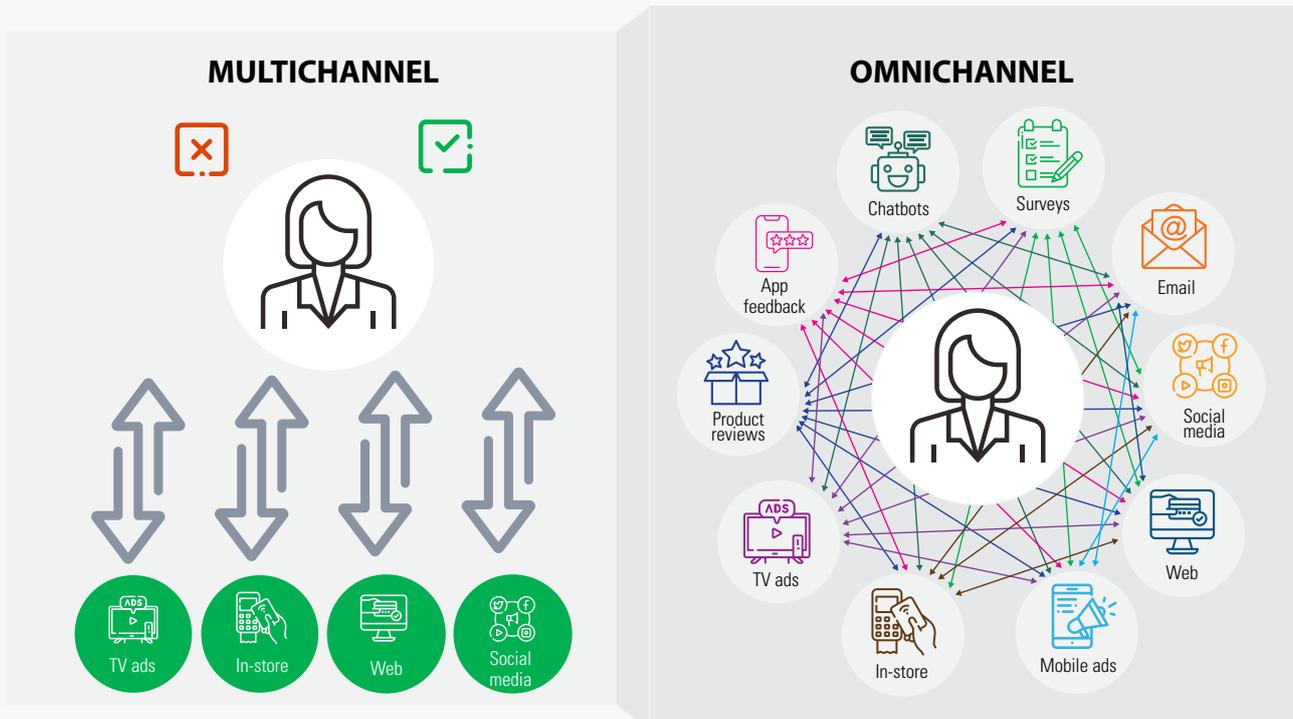


Figure 1: A representation of marketing data points. Multichannel approaches gather data on interactions between the customer and various touchpoints. Omnichannel approaches track how touchpoints interact with each other while reaching the customer. This opens the door to more advanced insights but increases data collection exponentially.



Source: Axtria Inc.

The Complexity of the Current Landscape: Advantages and Challenges

With the abundance of channels and data available today, there are copious opportunities to engage with many customer segments. More than ever before, we need to analyze this data to extract meaningful insights effectively. Analytics tools may allow us to plan actions for many customer segments simultaneously, revealing more insights, but they also create a more complicated story. The intricacy of managing multiple channels and large amounts of data can be overwhelming.

The importance of clear communication rises with the complexity of the canvas.

The Frequency of Touchpoints: Adding to the “Noise”

When it comes to omnichannel orchestration, the frequency of suggestions and updates adds a significant level of complexity. The process may become harder to understand and more difficult to implement – but the rewards are worth it.

Today’s pharma marketers are comfortable with yearly or quarterly orchestration planning. **Axtria has been pushing the industry to adopt a more real-time orchestration and optimization approach.** We advocate for daily triggered emails and next best action suggestions, weekly campaign KPI reporting, and monthly A/B testing and dynamic call plans.

This increased frequency can complicate a marketer's life in several ways:

- **Increased competition.** Today, with every pharma company having more opportunities to reach its target audience, there is more competition for customers' attention than ever before. That makes it more challenging and expensive for marketing campaigns to earn a share of the audience's voice and engagement.
- **Comfort in adopting a dynamic approach to strategy setting.** The era of "setting and forgetting" a strategy is long gone. Flexibility is essential in today's ecosystem. Marketers must be trained on channel-specific strategies and data-driven approaches and be ready to pivot in midstream. As with anything, practice provides experience and comfort, so marketing teams are starting to embrace the dynamic approach. They bake it into their plans and embrace frequent feedback and ongoing optimization.
- **Personalization.** Customers now expect personalized experiences across all digital channels. To deliver that at scale, marketers must have a deep understanding of each customer and create targeted messages relevant to their needs and preferences. Our industry has touted "the right message in the right channel at the right time," but for many years, this was more aspirational than realistic. Today, we can deliver this approach across the entire spectrum—from sales ops to non-personal promotion across multiple digital channels and some traditional ones. One common challenge we see is the ongoing need for more content fragments, which provide added flexibility in personalization.
- **Data overload.** Marketers can be crushed by the abundance of data they need to manage and analyze. Increased frequency means more data points coming out of every channel. When marketers are overwhelmed, the data loses its value and becomes just "noise." Marketers need the right tools and expertise to extract meaningful insights from this ocean of data and make informed decisions.

For more on this, see Axtria's publication:

[Omnichannel Engagement: Why Isn't Pharma There Yet?](#)

Addressing the Issues

Now that we've identified the most pressing issues and roadblocks, let's look at the solutions and best practices that allow pharma marketing teams to embrace the benefits of an omnichannel ecosystem.

Manage Expectations

There's a reason why managing expectations appears first on the list—it may be one of the easiest ways to win the

omnichannel battle! Analysts working on omnichannel data analysis projects expect the marketing team to be as involved as they are. However, having a similar interest level is rarely the reality, especially when working across disciplines. We cannot expect the same level of involvement, time, and effort from marketers as from data analysts. Of course, this is not because they do not care but because they must balance their commitments when multiple project priorities are in play.

The key is to realize this early on. Managing expectations has been paramount in Axtria's staff training and implementation projects. Once ingrained in the teams' approaches, it is easier to craft communications with marketers' needs in mind.

Education

We find that the best customer is an educated customer.

We focus on educating the marketers from the analytics company's perspective and take them along with us on the journey of discovery.

To best inform marketers on data analysis projects, we employ a mix of the following steps:

- **Define the project's goals and objectives.** It is essential to understand what the data analysis project intends to achieve.
- **Provide training on dashboards where relevant.** Make the training readily available for repeated access.
- **Identify the relevant data sources.** Make sure the data being analyzed is appropriate for the project. This step is taken within the analytics team but requires validation and input from marketing.
- **Demonstrate the data analysis process.** Taking marketers through the data analysis process step-by-step, from data collection to the interpretation of results, will help them understand how the project is progressing and identify areas for improvement.

A word of caution: this should not be a three-hour-long session. It is a simplified, high-level exercise focused on familiarizing the audience with the approach and methodologies to give them confidence in our abilities. It is not intended to turn marketers into analysts.

- **Provide examples of successful data analysis projects.** Real-life examples can help inspire and motivate marketers. Case studies that illustrate how analytics can impact marketing optimization are extremely powerful. Marketers can learn from the experiences of others and gain insight into how data analysis can help them achieve their business objectives.



- **Encourage collaboration.** Marketers and data analysts working in concert can be beneficial for both parties. Each can learn from the other while ensuring the project moves in the right direction and achieves the desired outcomes.

Education on data analysis projects should be a continuous process, and we keep this in mind when preparing our communications.

Communication

So, how should those communications look? We apply some tried-and-true principles to this part of our efforts. These practices guide the way we craft our agendas and meetings to help our marketing stakeholders along the way.

- Limit your responses to the critical insight(s) that answers the business question.
- Show only the most compelling supporting data.
- Connect with your audience at the emotional level; share your audience’s excitement or pain.
- Provide clear, actionable recommendations. If you recommend a change, provide a compelling case of “Why you need to change” before getting into the “how.”
- Keep it simple. Less is more. Communicating with simplicity takes a lot of effort. Learn to edit down. Keep asking, “So what?” until you find what matters.

- Use the “Three Rules of Three” from Alan Alda¹ to convey complex ideas:

1. Only make three important points,
2. Say it in three different ways (for not-so-simple ideas),
3. Repeat the points three times throughout the presentation.

Clarity

Clarity in communication is vital. But it’s not just analysts communicating to marketers; **it’s a two-way street.** Clearly formed questions from marketing result in clearly crafted answers from analytics. “KBOs define KPIs.” That is, key business questions will determine which key performance indicators should be tracked.

Content

Content is king, and marketers understand this concept very well. Omnichannel starts by focusing on channels, tactics, and actions. Analyzing a content layer for insights makes it relevant and actionable to the marketing team – and we strive to bring in this layer early on.

Continuity

Omnichannel teams work on projects that last multiple years, but their marketing counterparts can move between several initiatives in that time. It is critical to ensure that the newcomers are educated about the entire project from its beginning, not just given a status update on the current state. The ability to answer the question ‘Why are we doing this?’—and provide materials that support your answer—is essential for ongoing support of these long-term initiatives. The answer to this simple question offers pivotal benefits:

- **Clarity** – Helps everyone start on the same page and understand the crucial priorities.
- **Alignment** – Helps avoid mindset silos and confusion, ensuring everyone works toward the same goals.
- **Focus** – Keeps everyone centered on what is important and helps avoid distractions, guaranteeing that ongoing projects get the necessary resources.
- **Accountability** – Continuity in communication and education helps establish accountability and clear lines of sight.
- **Agility** – Continuing education and keeping the lines of communication between the analytics and marketing teams open helps confirm that the analytics project can be flexible and respond swiftly to changing market conditions.

Continually educating marketing counterparts makes it far easier to get everyone working together to achieve the desired outcomes.

Prioritization

By now, you realize that communication is essential. But there is a subtle balance at play. We discussed this earlier, but it bears repeating: we cannot overwhelm stakeholders with non-essential information. We need to prioritize insights, right-size the number of KPIs we present, and apply the framework that makes the takeaways easy to digest (e.g., an activity that leads to engagement that leads to impact). Not every metric is a KPI. A best practice here is to focus on selecting two to three lagging KPIs, two to three leading KPIs, and one or two *levers* (the KPIs or insights that are actionable and impactful).

Why Does it Matter?

Once we’ve identified our most impactful points, we put on the “So what?” hat when talking to the marketing team. Whether the insights are simply notable or they end up being

a game-changer, we must spend time making them **relevant** to this client, **actionable**, and easy to understand. **Easy-to-own** insights and a feeling of ownership only come from deep understanding and a relevant story.

Collaboration

Of course, when we create a solution, the goal is to create one that is best-in-class. It must make sense to the stakeholders and fit the company’s priorities – but it cannot be developed in a vacuum. We must include the marketing team to ensure their needs and priorities align with the solution. That means working with them on the storytelling side. Both teams should agree on the messages: What is the true signal in the noise? What metrics should we look at more frequently? How can we provide insights at the right time? How can we drive action and ensure adoption?

Reframing

Omnichannel reframes how marketing looks at channels and vendors. It is more of an “experience as a whole” versus the individual channels and tactic metrics. Omnichannel also presents the need for a mindset change: most successful teams adopt the “test and learn” approach when beginning an implementation.

Soft Skills

The soft skills of building bridges and bringing marketers along with us on this journey are as essential as the hard data science skills we already possess. Our client liaisons and principles focus on making this point to the analysts: connect the dots and do not forget the human factor in an artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML)-driven omnichannel universe, for **if there is no adoption, it doesn’t matter how brilliant the algorithms and models are.**

Allies (Friends, Not Foes)

For the ultimate success, work to ensure that your marketers are not intimidated by the analytics team but working with them as their best allies. We do this by breaking through the team-centric silos and combining our strongest creative, analytical, strategic, and tactical skill sets. We show marketing how to leverage the data insights from the omnichannel team’s data analysts, and marketing shows us which messaging and stories work, elevating the enterprise as a whole.



Roles

We are not just analysts. For the omnichannel approach to take hold, we must wear different hats: aggregators, modelers, analysts, and **interpreters**. That last hat, interpreters, becomes increasingly important as the data rises in complexity and volume.

Commitment

A genuinely successful omnichannel approach is not a quick win. It's a change in how we think, work, and market. That change takes time and a focused effort that includes helping with issues like change management or advice on explaining concepts to different leadership levels.

Holistic View

Another point is our ability to provide a holistic view of the marketing impact—not just email KPIs, total prescription increases, or any number of disconnected metrics that may seem impressive to an analyst—but a full view of the ecosystem. That includes end user engagement and progression along the journey. **This is where the true impact of omnichannel shines:** visibility and the ability to quickly optimize marketing efforts.

Trust

If we have made it this far in our journey—a relationship built on education, transparency, advice, and collaboration—we

now get to enjoy trust. The trust the marketers have in our omnichannel approach and their confidence in the insights and recommendations from the omni team. Trust takes time, change management, relationship building, creating a pilot together, and going through it from beginning to end as *partners*. But once you have that trust, the project is bound for success.

Conclusion

Through Axtria's collaborative analysis, we've identified the different aspects that come into play when breaking through omnichannel barriers. It is possible—if you make a concerted effort to employ these key takeaways. Communication is essential. If you keep your marketing team educated on the measures, they will have skin in the game and see themselves as part of the overall push to the end goal. Prioritize your information. Give the stakeholders what they need to know, and don't bog them down in the nitty-gritty details unless it is absolutely necessary.

Communication and brevity keep everyone on the same page, fostering effective collaboration. And when you have active cooperation, and the lines of communication are constantly buzzing, you will have earned everyone's trust—especially among those who “live” in a different space than analytics and IT stakeholders.



References

1. Alda A. 'The three rules of three' for communicating well. *Success*. October 5, 2017. Accessed October 6, 2023. <https://www.success.com/the-three-rules-of-three-for-communicating-well/>



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