

Conference Highlight Reprint # 411-02

DocCheck: Das Portal

By John Mack

Pharmaceutical marketing is alive and well in Europe. European physician and patient portals, which offer pharmaceutical marketing services, are thriving despite—or because of—the ban on direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising. This was evident from the enthusiastic interaction between speakers and attendees at the recent European Medical Portal Meeting 2005 that was recently held in Berlin, Germany. The meeting was organized by DocCheck, an Internet-based healthcare professional portal that brings together pharmaceutical companies and their clients (physicians, pharmacists, etc.). I attended the meeting and spoke on health web site ethics.

This article describes what European portals—specifically DocCheck, a German healthcare professional portal site—have to offer pharmaceutical marketers interested in reaching health professionals and consumers in Europe.

Day of the Portals

The first day of the meeting (“Portal Day”) was held at the upscale, but hard to find, Hotel Q!, winner of the Travel & Leisure’s Design Award 2005 (Best Design Hotel) and located a few steps from Kurfürstendamm, Berlin’s famous shopping mile packed with boutiques, restaurants, bars and galleries. The goal of “Portal Day” sessions was to help portal managers learn about portals in Europe and how they make money.

When I arrived at the meeting, Frank Antwerpes, M.D., CEO of DocCheck, was in the process of handing out aprons and colored clay to the portal managers in preparation for an afternoon workshop. Participants were broken down into several groups and asked to envision what the “killer” health portal application would look like in the year 2030. Each group had to make a clay model of its concept and present it to the whole group afterward.



Frank Antwerpes, M.D., DocCheck CEO, addresses the audience at the Villa Elisabeth; John Mack (right) and Franz Goss, M.D., cardiology portal manager (left) wait to speak.

I found myself with portal managers from the UK and Germany. I am proud to say that my “MD Avatar” concept, which solves the problem of not having enough time to consult with your own physician, won the competition (see BOX, next page). My presentation, however, was less than stellar—my team’s intricate clay model collapsed during the presentation.

DocCheck

“DocCheck has the largest panel of medical professionals in Germany and one of the largest in the world,” according to Antwerpes. DocCheck was launched in 1996 and currently has 370,000 registered users, 200,000 of whom subscribe to its biweekly medical e-news-letter. DocCheck’s newsletters include sponsored articles and ads from pharmaceutical companies.

Universal Physician Password

DocCheck offers a variety of services to its members besides the newsletter. A key part of its business is supplying physicians with universal passwords that allow them access to over 1,020 closed (physician-only) German and 117 international medical Web sites, including pharmaceutical sites.

The universal physician password system works in Europe—whereas it failed as a business model in the US—because it is illegal for European pharma companies to provide public access to promotional (advertising) information intended only for physicians. In the US, however, there is no law preventing pharmaceutical companies and medical publishers from allowing consumers to access physician-only areas of their Web sites. At the most, these sites merely ask the user to confirm that he/she is a physician.

DocCheck benefits from its password service, which is free to physicians and websites, by

knowing a lot about its registered physician users and what medical sites they visit using their passwords. DocCheck collects actual usage data showing what pharma sites the doctors are visiting. DocCheck sells these data back to their pharma clients. "We can benchmark different companies regarding the use of their web sites by professionals," says Antwerpes. Access data can be combined with demographic data such as physician age, specialty, region of practice, etc.

Of course, physicians in Germany and other European countries often visit health sites—including US-based sites—that do not require passwords.

eDetailing in Europe

Brad Wilson, founder and CEO of OnMedica, a UK-based healthcare professional portal, presented his company's experience with eDetailing, which he defined as "a multimedia interactive presentation that has a clinical information bias and is centred on a pharmaceutical product."

OnMedica is one of the leading providers of eDetailing in the UK and is currently working with 12 different pharmaceutical companies on 16 different products. OnMedica's goal is to see the "e" channel as a significant part of the total pharma marketing mix—at least 15% to 25% of sales/marketing spend. "When that happens," says Wilson, "we know we have a real place at the table" rather than "fighting for the scraps."

Wilson presented convincing IMS ROI data showing the effectiveness of e-Detailing. In spite of the fact that Pharma asks for proof of the value of e-Detailing, it remains a difficult "sell" as many Pharma executives are wedded to the old and trusted promotion paradigm. "This will change", says Wilson, "as pressure on sales and promotion budgets tightens". This sounds similar to the situation in the U.S. (see, for example, ["eDetailing: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow"](#)).

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How European Physicians use the Internet

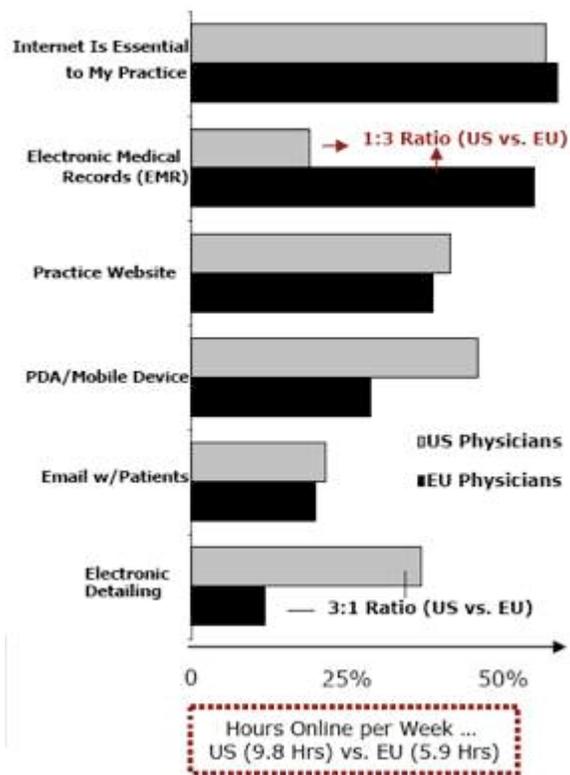
Manhattan Research recently released "Taking the Pulse@ Europe v5.0: Physicians and Emerging Information Technologies" -- a research study and advisory service focused on European physician information technology trends in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain and Italy.

The survey was conducted using random digit dial (RDD) telephone methodology with a representative sample of 1,001 practicing European physicians. According to the survey, sixty-five percent of practicing European physicians agree that access to the Internet is essential to their practice of medicine.

"We found that while the Internet plays a significant role in healthcare practices across all of the countries in the study," says Manhattan Research Vice President of Research Meredith Abreu. "One cannot lump all of Europe together as far as technology adoption is concerned. There are substantial differences between countries in terms of how physicians use technology in their practice and for professional education."

There are several differences between US and European physicians regarding their use of technology and the Internet (see CHART at right). "We found that US physicians were about three times as likely to participate in eDetailing than physicians in Europe," says Mark Bard, president of Manhattan Research. eDetailing was more prevalent in France than other European countries, according to Bard who suggested that the availability of vendors in different countries was the prime factor that determined how much eDetailing pharma companies did in that country.

**Technology Adoption ...
US Physicians vs. EU Physicians**

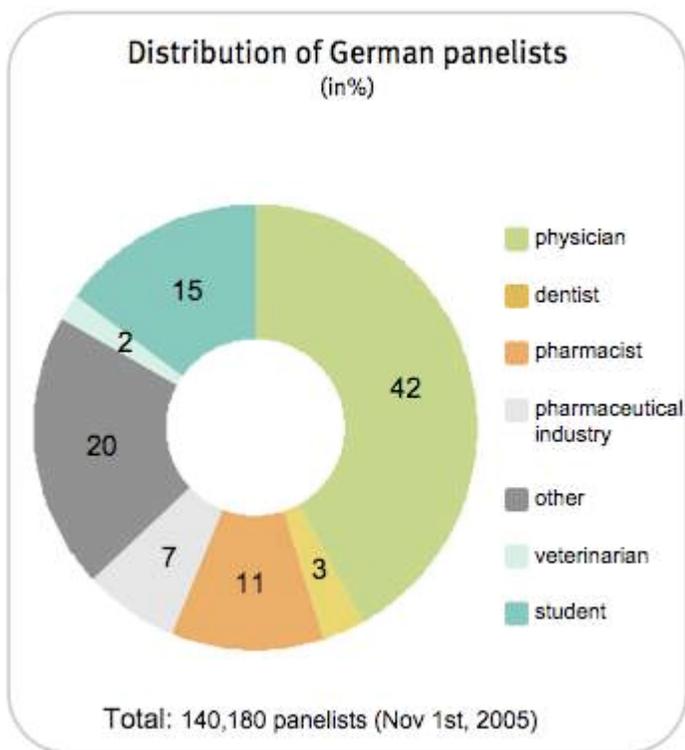


Technology Adoption: EU vs. US Physicians; courtesy of Manhattan Research

DocCheck e-Research

The second day of the conference—Industry Day—was a day of presentations to an audience of pharmaceutical executives who came to learn more about European portals. DocCheck's Daniel Goetz made a presentation about DocCheck B-to-B e-Research.

About 140,000 DocCheck members participate in DocCheck's online research MediAccess Pool. About 60,000 of these panelists are physicians and 14,000 are pharmacists (see CHART, below).



DocCheck MediAccess Pool

The principles that guide market research at DocCheck are:

- Valid depiction of target group
- Promptness
- Clean data
- Transparency
- Competitive price

Goetz used data on urologists to illustrate that there is no bias between DocCheck's online sample and classical offline market research. There are 4558 urologists in Germany and about 3600 are online. Of those, 1236 are in the

DocCheck online panel. "Our e-mail open rates," says Antwerpes, "ranges between 10% and 20%. Consequently, it is not a problem for us to obtain a statistically-significant sample of specialist survey respondents from the DocCheck panel." For urologists, the target of 120 respondents, therefore, is easily obtained to ensure valid research data.

"Typically," says Goetz, "we can deliver results within 3 to 4 days. We recently ran a survey for general practitioners starting in the afternoon and by the next morning we had the desired 100 responses."

Each individual in DocCheck's database is verified as a health professional and each respondent to a survey can be identified. "We always know who participates in our surveys," says Goetz, "and we can invite only those professionals that we want to participate according to our clients' needs."

By transparency, DocCheck means that its clients always have real-time access to the data.

Recruiting Health Professionals

DocCheck's survey participants can be recruited so as to provide a randomized sample or the sample can be tailored according to profession (physician, pharmacist, dentist, etc.), specialty (surgeon, internist, urologist, etc.), practice type (office vs. clinic or hospital), age, and region. It's also possible to match customer lists provided by pharmaceutical clients.

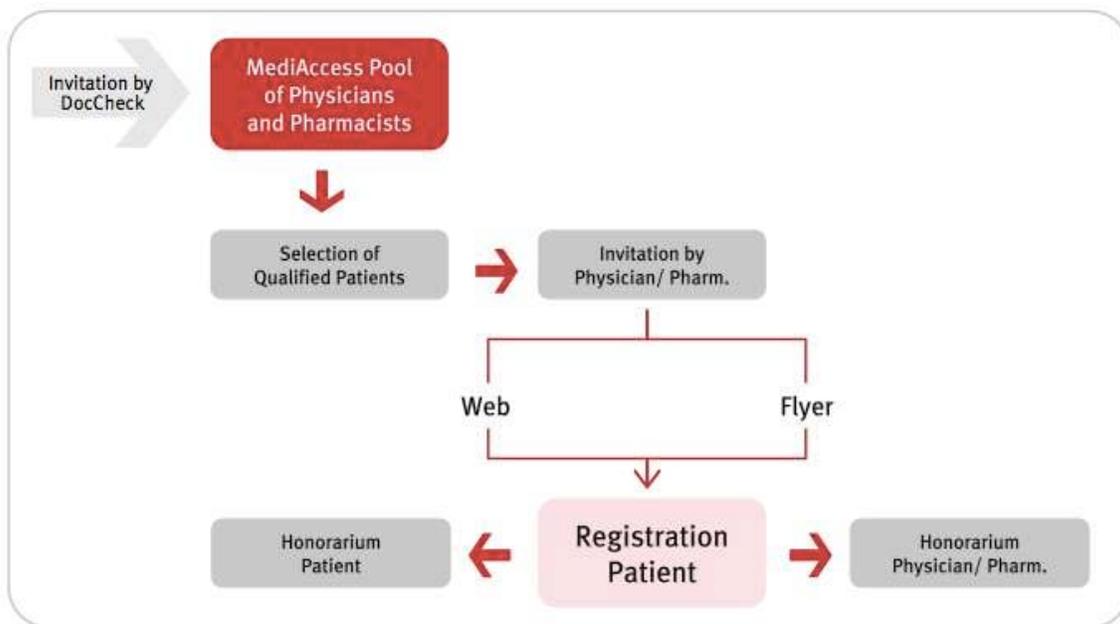
Panelists are invited solely via e-mail. Each invitation includes the topic of the survey, an estimate of the time required to complete the survey, a statement on data protection practices, contact information, and an explanation of the honoraria provided (usually 10 to 20 Euros per survey).

Patient Panel

DocCheck's "new baby" is a patient panel. The main problem with most patient panels, according to Goetz, is that "you can never be sure that the person answering your survey is really a patient or is just somebody that wants to claim the incentive whether it be cash or a chance to win a prize."

DocCheck uses physicians and pharmacists in its MediAccess Pool to invite qualified patients only (see CHART on next page). This assures that only patients with verified medical conditions can register for the survey. Invitation by health professionals increases patient trust, which makes it easier to get truthful and useful responses.

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Overview of how DocCheck recruits participants for its Patient Panels. DocCheck provides all the resources like Web forms and flyers that physicians can use to invite patients. Both the physician and the patient receive honoraria.

DocCheck can track which patients are recruited by which physicians, There is no conflict with European data protection laws because the physician never hands over his or her patient personal data to DocCheck. Patients voluntarily register to be on the DocCheck panel.

Permission-based e-Mail Marketing

Pharmaceutical clients can send sponsored e-mail promotions to DocCheck's MediMail database of 30,000 physicians who have opted in to receive such messages. "As a courtesy, we pay recipients 0.15 Euro for each e-mail message they receive

and open," says Antwerpes. "There is a quite good response rate depending on the offer or information provided," says Antwerpes.

Conclusion

European Medical Portal Meeting 2005 was the first meeting of its kind. DocCheck is already planning the 2006 meeting, which will be held in Barcelona, Spain. It will be multi-lingual and Antwerpes hopes that more portal representatives and pharma attendees from Spain, France, and Italy will attend.

Pharma Marketing News

Experts Cited In Article

The following experts were mentioned or consulted in the preparation of this article.

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