

Forum Lurking

Sales Reps Debate Their Value

As Heard on CafePharma

By John Mack

I wanted to know what pharmaceutical sales representatives had to say about the proposition I posed in the previous article; namely, "Are Sales Reps Necessary?" So I posted the question in the "The Darkened Sample Closet" discussion board on the CafePharma Web site. For those of you who do not know about CaféPharma, it is a site for pharmaceutical sales representatives to chat, carry on online discussions, access resource and to network.

The Darkened Sample Closet discussion board is a place to get together with other drug reps and discuss the industry. Anonymous posting is allowed. This is both a positive and a negative. It is positive because it allows people to say exactly what's on their minds without fear of recriminations. But it also leads to "flame wars," bad manners and "potty" mouth postings.

Anyway, here are some of the responses—including the good, the bad, and the ugly—to my question "Are Sales Reps Necessary?" For more on that topic see the previous article in this issue.

Walking Eagle, a "CafePharma Fixture" and self-proclaimed Senior Executive Sales Rep with 30+ years in pharma, sales, training, and management provided the following sarcastic comment, which nevertheless makes a good case against reps if you read between the lines.

"Sales reps are totally NOT needed. I will never understand why pharma and med sales companies began hiring sales people. No other companies have sales reps. the world gets along just great without them. Don't need one to buy a new car. Don't need them to tell engineering firms about chemicals--they just read those spec sheets and decide which ones they need. Oil and gas firms don't need them. If you can't look at a picture of a valve or switch and read the spec sheet to figure out how well they work, what the hell could a salesman possible do for you? All the electronic/ computer stores

Banished from CafePharma!

Sorry, but you won't find this thread on CafePharma. Shortly after I posted my question, that site's administrator deleted the thread because I linked out to Pharma Marketing Blog where I discussed the issue in more depth. This violated their policy about promoting a business or service. If you are interested in posting comments on this topic, you can find a thread on the Pharma Marketing Network Forums in the "[Pharmaceutical Sales](#)" board. There, you *can* link out to your blog if you want!

just have check out clerks because sales reps are not needed. Copier companies? Just read the trade journals and pick one, right? There is certainly no need to get any sort of demonstration or direct comparison to other products. Farm and ranch? Just buy some seeds and fertilizer and get the hell after it.

"See? Salesmen are not needed for anything." -- Walking Eagle

These days, it IS possible to buy a new car online without a salesperson and many technology companies, such as Dell Computer, do very well without sales people, at least in the consumer market.

Docs Don't Need Reps

"The doctors don't need us, the companies do. Good sales people make companies lots of money." -- Anonymous

"Yes. Doctors don't have time to read thanks to HMO's cutting into their profits hence, more pts. They like it short and sweet from knowledgeable reps. Skip the BS and just give them the facts and honestly answer any questions they may have." -- Anonymous

"I am a doc who wandered onto this site. Our practice "banned" reps from our office several years ago. Why? because most of the "info" from pharm reps was company-made glossy garbage. When I asked pointed questions beyond the glossy garbage, I would get the clueless glazed over barbie look and the "I'll get back to you on that" (usually they didn't). In this day of "Journalwatch" and other like publications there is no excuse for docs not reading peer-reviewed info (and they should be reading NEJM or AIM anyway's or like journals for their specialties). The simple fact is all board-certified docs have to get re-certified every 10 years. You have to stay up in your field...period. If a doc is truly relying on pharm reps to stay up in his specialty, then God help his/her patient's.

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Reps Banned – Samples Be Damned!

“One last comment about drug samples. Many of the drugs given out as samples are simply the latest and newest “me-too” drugs. The plan is clear. When the samples run out the doc will write for the same thing from his pad. In those patient's with clear specific drug needs and lack of insurance or financial hardship, I am more than willing to go to the company directly and fill out the need forms from their free drug financial hardship programs (which are excellent programs that also give pharm companies much needed PR). Sorry guys but since you have banned from my group practice I have seen no negatives (except the staff being initially PO'd about the lack of free lunches) and I sleep better at night. Now flame away.” – Anonymous

Plea to Open Your Doors

“No flaming necessary. Most good sales reps would agree with you that the majority of reps out there do nothing but parrot the standard marketing message and freeze up when asked a real question. I would encourage you, though, to review your policy. Although rare, there are some great reps out there that can provide valuable information to you about their products - like when you have a patient with a rare side effect that isn't in the PI, or some late breaking clinical information.

“Open your doors to and then keep a list of those reps who have earned the right to your time based on the value they provide. As an oncology rep, I don't waste the doc's time since they are very busy. But when we do speak, it is for a purpose (not to check off a call). Calls often last 30 minutes or more. My busiest times are after SABCS, chemo foundation, or ASCO. As a 20+ year vet, I would hate to be banned based on your experience with the barbies who weren't even born when I started in this industry.” – Anonymous

Rep Eschews Detail Aid

“He's right and the doc is right. 99% of pharm reps are totally unnecessary and most can't or won't think for themselves anymore. I cringe when marketing sends me a glossy detail piece. I haven't pulled one out more than twice this last year, and that was at my manager's request because he wanted to reference something during a call. If I can't talk about updates with my drug (an injection) without a glossy detail aid, I'm screwed anyway. Most of my time is spent with the infusion nurses, they're the ones who actually touch and talk to the patients. Often they're the ones who make medicine change decisions.

“I'm racking my brain for what to do to get out of this industry, but for now I'm stuck. I am secretly hoping that there's some massive sweeping reform and

companies go back to doing business the way it was 10 or 15 years ago, minus all the afterhours entertaining and bribery.” – Anonymous

Visual Aids Needed

“The visual aid has nothing to do with your memory and/or knowledge of your product. I have no doubt that you know your product very well. Detail aids are made due to the fact that a large percentage of population you are “selling” to are highly visual learners. They remember things they see much better than things they are only told of. I know, because I am one of those kinds of people. It took me a long time to figure this out when I was studying in school. Once I figured it out, I could learn and remember things so much easier.” – Anonymous

Try Detailing Without Free Lunch and Samples

“Reps that just dump samples and catering (about 70-80%, I'd guess) aren't needed. Those that can promote drugs w/o samples and lunches and increase market share and sales are the good ones. I suggest that sampling be done through an internet supply company and orders come in from offices via documented orders for samples -reduced costs may allow for more of what they REALLY need. Slash lunch budgets by half or more. Pay reps a % of sales and take away base salaries and provide a small company car allowance. Supplement these reps with consumer directed mail and an 800 number staffed by medical professionals.” -- Anonymous

“Hate to agree, but most calls are sample deliveries. US Postal could do the same. Decisions on what drugs doctors use have already been made by pharmacists at managed care organizations. Drug industry could save big bucks by chopping reps, keeping managed care reps and hiring delivery people to drop off samples.” – Anonymous

Go Back to Good Old Days

“We don't need as many reps as we have. After PhRma guidelines cut all the after-hours entertaining, companies just dumped all that money into hiring more and more “pods” and partners. It's ridiculous. I'd much rather take a gamble that I might be laid off and go back to the days of one rep covering their own territory than what we have now. Doctors and patients would appreciate it, we wouldn't have to wait almost a year to get a lunch with an important office, etc. Slash and burn, I say!” – Anonymous

Ex-Pharma Rep Happy with New Job

“I've turned my back on pharma after 8 years (2 were selling glucometers) and I've never been happier. I am now working for a company that provides technology

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and distribution services to oncology clinics. I'm continuously amazed by the fact that I'm so welcomed into offices. I never bring lunch. I don't have to bring treats to the window pigs. I always have set appts to speak with the office/practice manager, who usually loops the docs in on the discussions. I'm asked something different each day and have never had a routine sales call. I'm truly seen as a resource to the office.

"Pharma was a good gig for me right out of school but I found myself as one of those persons who sat in his car for 45 mins before each call simply trying to get up the will to go in and pimp myself out in an office with another 4 reps waiting to get in. I received an 18k raise in base pay and stand to make 50% more in bonus than what I was making in pharm.

Working Harder, But Happier

"There is no doubt that I am working harder than ever before with a substantially larger territory. I never understood previous posts on this site in which people would reference their larger work load but went on to say that they're much happier now. I now find myself agreeing completely. For the first time in my professional life, I feel like I'm earning my paycheck.

"For any of you that want to respond to this with the "well, you're just not cut out for pharm...we bring a lot to the table...quit your whining and leave already...you're no better than a drug rep," spare me. There is value in drug sales. There are just far too many reps out there and it has become too much of a dog and pony show. To those of you who are happy just plodding along, having smoothie days, thinking up exciting blitz promotions, working on bridge statements, phoning in success stories, more power to you. To those of you looking to get out and do something rewarding, you owe it to yourself to find something that truly makes you happy. Get after it and good luck!" -- Anonymous

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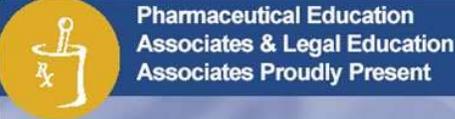
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