



WHITE PAPER: USING “KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION” TO MOTIVATE A PHARMA SALES TEAM

THE PROBLEM:

A national sales force of 90 experienced sales professionals promoting a previously market-leading product in the osteoarthritis field was experiencing a loss of market share and reduced access to target customers — primarily orthopedic surgeons, rheumatologists and sports medicine physicians. In addition to the challenge of decreased market share, the sales force was disillusioned and experiencing a drop in morale, which further threatened to erode the brand’s commercial success.



QPharma was engaged to help the client identify a solution. Numerous key objectives were identified:

- Increase the use of the product among existing customers;
- Increase the overall customer base and market share;
- Improve the sales force’s understanding of their target customers’ needs and expectations;
- Help the sales force understand how physicians prefer to engage in scientific communication, and help them learn how to present clinical data in ways that would positively resonate with healthcare practitioners (HCPs);
- Identify skills and techniques to improve the sales force’s ability to interact effectively with HCPs;
- Improve the sales force’s competitive selling skills; and
- Improve sales force’s ability to handle objections.

THE SOLUTION:

Using data received from anonymously surveying both the sales force and a cross section of their target customers from each of the main specialties, and incorporating techniques and skills from the *Knowledge Mobilization* methodology developed by Dr. Peter Shaw, QPharma’s Chief Medical Officer, the proposed solution was to produce an interactive half-day workshop to roll out to the entire sales force at the client’s National Sales Meeting.

“Knowledge Mobilization refers to *‘the ability to get the right information to the right people in the right format at the right time, so as to influence decision-making.’*” explained Dr. Shaw, an industry-recognized expert in pharmaceutical sales force effectiveness. “In the case of this program, in order to make the most of this technique, it was imperative that the sales force gain a full understanding of their customers and how to effectively communicate with them.”

The 90 sales professionals were asked to complete an anonymous electronic survey on all aspects of their interactions with target customers:

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- Outlining issues doctors faced when treating patients with osteoarthritis of the knee;
- Identifying which product(s) they considered to be the main competitors in the market;
- Identifying the main clinical reasons doctors gave for not prescribing their product;
- Identifying the main reasons for doctors prescribing another product;
- Highlighting positive and negative experiences with target customers;
- Positioning the main attributes, differentiators, and selling points of their product;
- Identifying which competitor messages they had most difficulty in countering;
- Identifying which materials they found most useful in backing up key messaging points; and
- Articulating questions they had always wanted to ask a doctor, but never had the opportunity to.

In addition to the sales force survey, 80 target customers, including 40 orthopedic surgeons, 22 rheumatologists, and 18 sports medicine specialists in 21 U.S. states were invited to complete an electronic survey, for which they received a modest honorarium.



Survey questions covered a variety of topics, including:

- Their use of client company and competitor products in the management of osteoarthritis of the knee;
- Their knowledge of the pharma companies promoting each of the products;
- Where they positioned each of the products in their order of preference, and what influenced their choice of a product;
- Their perceived differences between the available products;
- The main reason for their first-choice product;
- Factors surrounding prescribing and purchasing decisions;
- If all things were equal, and the products launched at the same time, which would be their choice and why;
- Their needs and expectations of a sales professional promoting a product in this therapy area; and
- What they perceive as the essential qualities of an effective sales professional.



What influence does the Sales Rep have on your choice of a hyaluronic acid product for an OA knee?

	1 Negative impact	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Positive impact
Impact of Sales Rep	3%	5%	8%	55%	21%	8%	0%

Essential to the development of the workshop was a deep understanding of how doctors make prescribing decisions, and what influences that decision making. Dr. Shaw's expertise in this area is supported by his many years of experience as a practicing physician. Reinforcement of the importance of knowing the social style of a key customer, passive assessment, active listening, cognitive dissonance, and skills involved in presenting clinical data, were needed to bring everything together and develop an interactive learning environment where positive outcomes could be determined and measured.

SURVEY OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS:

The surveys conducted revealed a clear mismatch in what the sales force *thought* were the main issues and concerns of their target customers, and what actually concerned the doctors surveyed.

To start with, the product that the doctors considered the main competitor to the client company's product was totally different from what the sales force considered their competitor, and the selling messages were not consistent with the needs and concerns of doctors in these therapy areas. It was also evident that the reasons for making a prescribing decision were not always based on evidence or clear clinical efficacy, and that the sales professionals needed to be more acutely aware of local, formulary, reimbursement, and managed care issues.

DEPLOYMENT:

A three-and-a-half hour interactive workshop was conducted at the client's national sales meeting, with a clear training agenda and opportunities to practice skills learned. Initially, the results of the two surveys were presented and combined so that the sales team had a clear understanding of the needs of their customers. The workshop included comprehensive training to help the sales professionals gain a detailed comprehension of the information their target customers needed, and how to present it in an appropriate way. By adopting a solution-based approach, the main objectives of increasing sales from both an existing and new customer base would be achieved.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED:

“Most training does not take into consideration the needs, experience, and expectations of the person making clinical and prescribing decisions,” said Dr. Shaw. “Aligning sales professionals to the specific issues and concerns of their target customers, and enabling them to deliver the right information in the way that doctors expect — and at the right time — is essential in a customer- and patient-centric environment if clinical decisions are going to be influenced positively.”

A direct outcome from this workshop was markedly increased access opportunities for the sales force, a rise in use of their product by existing customers, and reports of enhanced opportunities to develop relationships with new potential customers.

All the sales professionals who attended subsequently reported that they were more confident in assessing and understanding the issues concerning their target doctors, and in delivering clinical information and data in a succinct and meaningful way — thereby sustaining a meaningful clinical dialogue. Their understanding of the relevance of the supporting materials, and what they meant to the practicing clinician, ensured that they were now able to adopt a solution-based approach that addressed the most common issues in this therapy area. Today, the formerly disillusioned sales force is motivated to succeed and excel, and QPharma's satisfied client is well positioned to recapture its winning market share. ■

