



# Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

## Board Meeting

### Digital and social media trends

16 September 2019

**Issue/ Purpose:**

To update the board on the trend of audiences moving from traditional to digital communication channels, and where our audiences now obtain their information.

**Summary:**

There has been a significant trend of audiences moving from traditional communication channels, like TV and printed newspapers, to a range of digital channels and devices.

The Agency, and specifically the Communications directorate, has already done significant work in this area and we will continue to develop our strategy to reach audiences across these channels.

**Resource implications:**

**People** –ongoing resource required from Communications

**IT** – some resource required in the future if new channels are developed

**Procurement** - N/A

**Financial** – N/A

**EU Referendum implications:**

None

**Implications for patients and the public**

Improved awareness of the Agency by communicating through different channels, improved customer service by users being able to access information on different devices.

**Timings:** N/A

**Action required by Board:** To note.

**Author(s):**

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**Which of the five themes in the Corporate Plan 2013/2018 does the paper support?**

'We will be an exemplar of organisational excellence and efficiency'

**If relevant, which Business Plan strategic activity does it support?**

N/A

**CET Sponsor:**

Rachel Bosworth, Director of Communications

**Digital and social media trends****Changes in how UK citizens obtain their information**

In the past 20 years there has been a shift of audiences consuming information from traditional sources, such as TV and newspapers, to online channels.

As a result traditional media has seen a decline:

- 25% of all local and regional newspapers have closed in the last decade
- Newspaper circulation nearly halved between 2007 and 2017
- BBC2 and Channel 4 now have fewer viewers than Netflix and YouTube

Whilst use of digital media has grown:

- 96% of adults now use a mobile phone
- 1 in 10 adults now only ever use a smartphone to go online
- Online advertising has grown enormously, with 40m of the UK population able to be reached by Facebook adverts. This figure is 27m for LinkedIn, 24m for Instagram and 13.6m for Twitter
- More people now use online streaming services than traditional paid TV like Sky, with nearly half of households now using them. 60% of internet users stream TV online
- Two thirds of UK adults now use a 'second screen' when watching TV. This means that whilst watching a normal TV, they are also using a mobile, laptop or tablet

Despite these changes, the 'digital revolution' is not uniform across the whole population:

- 13% of adults do not use the internet at all
- These are overwhelmingly those who are older (48% of over 75s never use the internet)
- Those with a disability or who are economically inactive are also less likely to use the internet
- There is still a high reliability on TV as the main source of information among older people, versus the internet among younger people
- Over a third of the population (37%) read, watch or listen to news less than once a day, despite the greater array of choices and channels on offer

The major trends can be summarised as:

- There has been a huge growth in the range of devices people can now use to access information, especially via mobiles

- The internet has made it easier for organisations (including the Agency) to communicate directly with users, rather than using mainstream media to amplify their messages – though this remains important
- Rather than a simple switch from watching TV or reading a newspaper to using a mobile, users are now likely to receive their information from multiple channels on a range of devices
- A demographic divide in use of digital technologies still exists, though this is narrowing

### **Widening use of multiple channels**

Many media organisations who traditionally delivered content via radio, TV or newspapers now use a range of digital channels. In addition, the internet has allowed a whole range of new media outlets to open and distribute information.

This means that in a single day a user might receive information in the following ways:

- Listening to the news from a commercial radio station
- Reading the news on their mobile from an online-only outlet, such as Huffington Post
- Reading the Twitter feed of a *Times* journalist
- Listening to a podcast from an independent news outlet in America
- Watching the BBC news on their TV
- Interacting with Facebook posts from their friends
- Seeing news from their friends and favourite brands on Instagram

In this new environment, public and private organisations now also need to publish information on a range of channels and ensure these can be accessed on different devices.

### **How healthcare professionals (HCPs) use digital channels**

There is little specific research on how HCPs specifically use digital media, but much of their use is likely to reflect the wider demographic trends in society.

As HCPs are clustered around specific professions who are educated and work together, there are strong networks on social media channels where there tends to be discussions within those professions. A 2015 study found that on Twitter, HCPs tended to 'cluster' around others with the same roles as them: nurses would follow and interact with other nurses, doctors with doctors etc. This trend will also be the same on other channels like online forums and Facebook groups.

The RCN actually [advises how nurses can use a Twitter chat](#), as an example, to contribute towards the continuing professional development hours and help them revalidate. This would also apply to other healthcare professionals.

Social media has led to a 'blurring' of lines between personal and professional consumption of information. For example, a nurse may follow pages on Facebook about research in areas of interest to her or him, or have conversations about best practice, but using a personal profile and in their own time.

### **What the Agency has done already**

The Agency has a presence on many digital platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. We have developed our use of these platforms over time.

This is in addition to the three main websites (Gov UK, CPRD and NIBSC), blogs and many more minor portal websites and microsites. Traditional media, including print, radio and TV, remain an important part of our communications mix, as well as digital channels.

Some examples of our digital communications work include:

- award-winning campaigns (Fake Meds) which made significant use of social media platforms including Twitter and Facebook, and introduced new channels for the Agency such as Instagram
- filming video in-house that is displayed across multiple digital platforms to make our content engaging for audiences, e.g. for the annual lecture
- producing videos using screencast technology that enables a digital recording of activity taking place on your computer screen, for example demonstrating how HCPs and patients can make reports on Yellow Card
- creating engaging static graphics or animation for social media to help increase audience interaction with our messaging and completion of our call to action, for example to assist with the recall of products at patient level,
- using email marketing tools for widespread stakeholder engagement and the promotion of the Agency's event programme

### **Future plans**

We are constantly reviewing and optimising the way in which the Agency uses these digital channels to achieve communication objectives.

In addition to this ongoing work, more significant changes to our digital channel portfolio are being undertaken as part of the Operational Transformation programme, linked to the Customers workstream. This includes how we can improve our online content, and what platforms it might sit on in the future.

We will ensure that our future platforms are optimised and accessible on all different devices. Over 50% of visits to the Gov UK website are now on a mobile or tablet, so this is essential.

### **Summary**

The Agency has responded well to the challenge of our audience shifting the way in which they desire to access information. Championed and supported by central Government best-practice guidance, we work to continually respond to innovations in this area and ensure that we are focused on the needs of our customers in any changes to the way we use digital and social media. We also ensure we use a range of digital and traditional communications channels, to ensure we are able to reach relevant audiences.