AN ASSESSMENT OF HCP PORTALS IN 2022

Modern HCP Portal Strategies for Pharma Leaders
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT

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Is your HCP portal an industry leader?

Today, healthcare professionals (HCPs) are spending a larger portion of their work day in front of a screen looking for information to support better patient care. HCP portals provided by pharmaceutical companies are one of the most vital tools for searching and finding essential information—from patient treatment information and advice to forms and documentation used by medical office managers.

Pharmaceutical companies that want to improve their brand reputation and better engage health care professionals must focus on strategic improvement of HCP portals and related tools. Even more, companies looking to compete with those leading the way in the industry (or stay one step ahead of those who aren’t caught up yet) must make their digital experiences as helpful, intuitive, and efficient as possible using modern UX practices. HCPs want to use and access tools in their work the same way they are able to gather digital information outside of their jobs.

Last year, we conducted an analysis of 39 HCP portals from the top 20 U.S. pharmaceutical companies, and we shared those findings in An Assessment of HCP Portals in 2021. Our goal was to see what’s working, what’s not, and what these findings told us about the future of the pharmaceutical industry’s relationship with HCPs.

This year, we pored through the sites to see which companies are actively working on improvements to their portals—and what those improvements are telling us about the competitive landscape. We also polled our team of pharma-focused UX leaders to learn what it may take for companies to stay competitive today. The best practices they shared are thought-provoking and informative as we look to see where the industry is trending and why.

We hope the research and insights report we’ve compiled provides as much value to you as it has for us.
Our research methodology

In our original report in 2021, we identified the top 20 pharma companies and analyzed the HCP portals we could find that they produced. Our team examined 39 portals in total.

We evaluated each site against three things:

1. **CONTENT WE KNOW IS SOUGHT OUT BY HCPS**
   We conducted this audit to determine if there was enough useful information in the portal for HCPs to confidently, effectively, and safely prescribe a drug—or find useful information they’d need, like contact information, product quality reporting, and prescribing information.

2. **FUNCTIONALITY WE KNOW WORKS TO SUPPORT HCP NEEDS**
   When looking at site functionality, we examined features we know are desired by HCPs such as:
   - **Search**: Does the portal have search functionality to speed up the user’s experience?
   - **Find a Medical Science Liaison (MSL)**: Can the user do this themselves, or are they given a generic number to call?
   - **Interactive Prescribing Information (PI)**: Will the user be able to quickly find the specific information they need or do they have to squint at long blocks of unsearchable text?

3. **HEURISTIC SCENARIOS THAT SIMULATE TYPICAL HCP EXPERIENCES**
   We analyzed how well the site performed against four heuristic scenarios, like assessing the home page for “first appearance” trustworthiness, searching and navigating for dosage information about a product, attempting to contact an MSL using the site on a mobile device, and testing the site for accessibility issues.
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT—RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Scoring

We scored each portal based on these 3 criteria and compiled the data to produce a final score. This score then helped us rank the portals into two primary categories:

**GROUP 1**
Leading the Way
*(high-scoring portals)*

**GROUP 2**
Keeping Up
*(low and medium-scoring portals)*

The rankings helped us to see patterns for companies that are behind or ahead of the curve—and why.

Our 2022 Methodology

This year, we combed through the same 39 portals from the original 20 companies on our list looking for a few key indicators:

- Which (if any) sites had changed in the past year
- What specific content or functionality had changed
- Whether any changes we saw increased or decreased a site’s score

For consistency, we kept all of the scoring criteria the same in 2022—with an eye towards seeking out patterns or new approaches in the past year. Let’s take a look at how the landscape has changed.
Research Findings

Here’s how the 39 sites scored in 2021. We plotted each portal’s final score and ranking on a chart. Sites toward the upper right (green squares) indicate organizations setting the bar for the industry and providing the most robust overall digital experience. This is the group we call “Leading the Way.” Sites near the lower-left (pink circles and blue triangles) indicate organizations still in the early stages of developing and implementing an effective digital strategy. We’ve combined these two categories into the “Keeping Up” group.
When we combed through the sites this year to see what had changed in 2022, we made note of 5 organizations that had added more **content features** we know are sought out by HCPs. This increased the overall scores of these 5 organizations, and it moved 3 organizations from the low-scoring portals group to the medium-scoring portals group.

Of the HCP portals evaluated in 2022, there seems to be a push towards **heightened transparency of information**. This is being accomplished by:

- Providing accessible patient resources
- Providing additional means of contact
- Including easier access to news

*Click here to see how your site ranks on these graphs*
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT—RESEARCH FINDINGS

What’s the value of transparency of information in HCP Portals?

None of the sites we studied in this report pursued improvements to the functionality or heuristic approach of their tools in 2022, but all of the sites that increased their scores focused on improvements to content, information, and providing additional methods of contact.

It’s clear that the job of healthcare workers has changed recently, and HCPs are looking for answers to both simple and complex questions—which requires more transparent information and contact options. Outside of this research effort, we’re also seeing a pattern of pharma companies seeking out better ways to connect and engage with HCPs. Given this insight, these findings weren’t entirely surprising to us.

But while making it clearer for HCPs to find outreach methods and information is a helpful step, we believe pharma companies can think bigger about what it really means to engage with HCPs. In the next section, Think Company’s UX experts with extensive experience in pharma compiled their top recommendations for HCP engagement—keeping in mind the modern landscape and the changes to the healthcare field we know are here to stay.
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT

6 modern HCP portal best practices to help you engage and build trust

Staying ahead of your competition is challenging, but understanding the engagement needs of HCPs in 2022 and beyond will help you focus your digital efforts.

We’ve worked with many pharmaceutical leaders who share a similar goal: to understand what today’s HCPs actually need from their digital tools and information, and becoming the go-to, trusted pharmaceutical brand for those resources.

Accomplishing this goal is easier said than done. HCPs have increasingly complicated needs that must be met quickly, in the moment, and for specific reasons.

We’re seeing a few digital strategies emerge as modern answers to HCP needs—all based on changes in the medical field and the growing complexity of serving patients as the field is changing. Based on our observations of trends in the and hands-on work in this field, we’ve gathered some recommendations for gold-standard UX practices that leaders are using today.
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT—6 BEST PRACTICES

1. Know your *actual* audience and provide the right content

You probably assume that a majority of your users are physicians, but our research shows that portal audiences are much broader and include a wide range of healthcare professionals.

When thinking about your tools, consider the following:

**YOUR CONTENT SHOULD HAVE SOME LEVEL OF PATIENT CENTRICITY**

Your portal is focused on providing exactly what prescribing physicians, surgeons, or those using technology need in order to do their jobs. But HCPs also use your tools and information when working directly with patients—often when they’re in appointments or preparing for upcoming appointments. Specific information like explaining adherence to guidelines, for example, is helpful to a patient specifically, but will need to be translated to the patient through content like brochures—or verbally by a healthcare provider.

Because HCPs interpret and communicate complex information and content to patients, they should have quick and easy access to patient resources for in-the-moment needs.

To push this theme further, keep in mind that physicians aren’t the only healthcare providers who translate complex information to patients. Nurses are an underserved audience of HCP-related content, but they’re often the closest contact to the patient and have the most insight into what patients need—and therefore, what kind of questions your content needs to answer.

Ultimately, the tools and information you provide through your portal will help a wide variety of HCPs to help other people.

**HEALTHCARE BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS USE YOUR PORTAL TO MEET VERY SPECIFIC NEEDS**

Healthcare business professionals (HBPs) like office staff and those who work in billing, for example, are frequently navigating to your sites and portals to find a variety of information.

During the prior authorization process, healthcare providers aren’t usually the people doing the actual work—HCPs often enter the process much later during the signature stage. Office managers are most often using your tools to find the forms they need, or to figure out how to order more product samples.

Your design decisions should quickly and easily meet the needs of physicians, nurses, and anyone else working with patients, but you should also be thinking about office managers who need information—and who don’t want to have to submit medical forms via outdated methods like fax or paper mail when it’s not necessary.
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT—6 BEST PRACTICES

2. Make it easy for HCPs to contact humans when they need to

We’ve been talking a lot about how a healthcare professional’s go-to need is to find information quickly online from your site, but often an HCP’s needs will extend beyond a web search and will require one-on-one discussion with an expert. There are a few best practices in this area that you can employ to give HCPs options to fit their needs.

When thinking about your tools, consider the following:

LIVE CHAT IS A STANDARD

In most pharmaceutical call centers, HCPs can or should be able to talk with medical professionals (or those educated in this field) via live chat once a question or need gets more specific. Often in this scenario, a chatbot begins the interaction, then humans are able to complete the conversation to help move a user in the right direction.

Live chat is still a best practice and has become standard for organizations who are leading the way.

EASY, SEAMLESS VIRTUAL SESSIONS WITH SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS CAN HELP YOU STAND OUT

Another important feature is allowing HCPs to schedule sessions with Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) or Clinical Science Liaisons (CSLs). Most HCPs know these people are available, but there are new features today that allow HCPs to talk with MSLs and CSLs virtually. These features include digital forms at the point of action that allow HCPs to search for professionals, quickly schedule a meeting, and get information about the person they want to talk to. Ideally, you can integrate this action with a tool similar to Calendly to make the appointment process even more seamless.

This type of interaction is today’s gold standard, since HCPs will need better, more simple access to human beings as their needs and questions become more specialized—and as their worlds become more geographically dispersed.
3. Make telehealth information more readily available

Because of the shift in patient behavior since the Covid-19 pandemic began, the demand for telehealth interactions has increased dramatically. This increase means that HCPs are doing more research online—either when speaking directly to patients or when providing follow up information to patients. Because of this shift, there’s an even higher demand than usual for HCPs to deliver digital information in the course of their work.

But the telehealth landscape is still fragmented. HCPs are being forced to work with a variety of different tools that may be new and unfamiliar.

Our key recommendation here is to be more flexible about where content is published—and don’t limit yourself to your own properties and traditional systems. Your HCP audience is using a variety of telehealth tools and options today. Simpler is better as your content needs to be accessible through those tools.

4. Attract more users with specialized medical content

One of the biggest challenges on your mind is likely around how to overcome negative brand perceptions from HCPs and increase the reputation of your pharmaceutical brand. One of the best strategies for solving this problem is to double down on your content strategy and provide medical information that’s more specialized than general.

The more niche and specialized the information in your HCP portals, the better. In 2022—with so much available content and information on the web—it takes a more specific question to move HCPs from an outside website to your HCP portal. Further, if a healthcare provider perceives that you are making an investment in very specific healthcare topics and questions, they develop more trust for your brand.

Conversely, healthcare brands that produce content that’s overly general in nature are seen as less trustworthy. HCPs often have access to standard dosage information and other core resources from other sources. Ask yourself: what can your organization provide that’s more specific and useful?
5. Address misinformation

Another modern consideration for pharma brands is how misinformation and disinformation claims directly affect the ways you must provide and present information via portals. Recent Covid-19-specific misinformation claims are a modern example of this challenge, but misinformation as it relates to both products and larger issues in healthcare has been a trend that ebbs and flows in urgency over the decades.

How is your brand providing resources to help overcome dangerous or harmful perceptions about products, conditions, or treatments? And how are you helping HCPs trust the information you provide and translate the information to concerned patients?

One of our favorite examples of this tactic in practice is a recent resurgence of “clinician reviewed” badges on digital content that HCPs may be exploring. This is a simple but strategic way that medical information providers are reinforcing the credibility of their information in HCP portals—and it’s yet another way to increase the trustworthiness of your brand in the eyes of HCPs.
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT—6 BEST PRACTICES

6. Remember that HCPs have an eye for contemporary design

One of the most effective trust-building strategies we’ve seen from pharmaceutical brands is to use an aesthetic and marketing approach that HCPs will perceive as more trustworthy.

After pursuing over a decade’s worth of research in the course of our pharma work, we know that HCPs automatically distrust visuals that look too marketing heavy. There’s a big difference between HCPs perceiving “design intervention” and being bombarded by “happy patient” images—typically stock photography that depicts heavily idealized, overly cheerful patients. To most HCPs, the latter leaves a negative impression. While some research tells us that HCPs like nurses prefer to see happy patient images, too much of it also gives them the impression that your content is less useful.

There is an increased appetite for better design overall among the HCP audience. Because this audience interacts with well-designed applications, websites, and digital tools every day outside of the context of work, they can easily recognize better design.

This strategy should apply to your websites and portals all the way through to supporting documentation—every tool or piece of content an HCP would interact with in the context of your brand. Prioritizing a contemporary design is one of the best ways to build credibility among your audience.
HCP needs are always changing; adapt with them

As evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot can change in the healthcare industry in a short amount of time—and the digital needs of HCPs will change at the same pace. If you’re looking to better connect with HCPs, you can start thinking strategically about their digital pain points and provide them with a specialized experience. Over time, you’ll earn their trust as well as their loyalty.
Through this research effort, we have developed a maturity model to help pharma organizations recognize where they are and where they should focus on continuing to advance their digital presence.

Companies in the Nascent and Emerging ("Keeping Up") stage may be aware of the need to improve their HCP portal experiences or plan to align the portal’s content and structure to be more user-friendly and efficient. At the Operational and Strategic ("Leading the Way") stages, companies are implementing a data-driven strategy, have an interdisciplinary process to govern content publication, and differentiate themselves well enough to be considered best-in-class by HCPs. You can review the themes of today’s portals that are leading the way in our 2021 paper.

Beyond the criteria above, companies can focus on these core themes to improve their portals.
**ACCESSIBILITY**: Color contrast

Most HCP portals that scored low in our accessibility heuristic had color contrast issues, making it difficult for individuals with low vision, vision impairments, or color blindness to read content and navigate the sites.

*To be clear, accessibility is not a trend. Ensuring accessibility for all users is an unquestionable necessity for every site, and a foundational element to the digital experiences we build at Think Company. More and more organizations realize how vital it is to democratize their content, and this should always be kept at the forefront when creating the design and content structure.

**PRODUCT ORDERING**: Single source samples

Many companies rerouted to My Sample Closet for samples. The healthcare professional could perceive this as an improved experience because they could order samples from multiple companies from a single website instead of going to numerous websites (with the accompanying multiple logins and checkouts).

**OUT-OF-OFFICE BENEFITS**

Virtual engagement is here to stay, and HCPs are using tools like Zoom/Teams to communicate with patients and their businesses. 65% of all HCPs said they value self-administered methods for patients (auto-injections or on body devices) more than they did pre-Covid-19. This may impact the importance of patient resources and a more holistic “out of the office” experience via apps and portals. This directly impacts the role of sales reps. With 55% of physicians expecting sales rep office access to remain limited because of Covid-19 restrictions, life science companies are adopting new approaches to deliver product and patient education materials to physicians digitally.
HCP PORTAL ASSESSMENT—6 BEST PRACTICES

REFRESHER

Data

The best companies examine data to give HCPs the information they want and need. 72% of physicians agree that data is valuable, but only 28% receive cost information such as estimated patient out-of-pocket costs. These physicians reported wanting more outcome data for treatment and medication options. Companies can also use data to develop a more personalized experience for HCPs, targeting their specific prescribing behaviors, patient profiles, and history of interactions with the platform. Streamlining health information systems makes it easier to have access to this data. Internally this means updating legacy systems and combining multiple data sources like CRMs, ERPs, and analytics to provide a singular, consistent experience.

Chatbots & AI

As mentioned above, the chatbot market is projected to nearly triple in the next few years. Chatbots offer an “anytime” accessibility to users and allow HCPs to ask questions rather than search the site themselves. As more and more HCPs utilize chatbots, machine learning adapts to their needs and provides more accurate and helpful answers over time. Chatbots also offer content and design teams a regular stream of information about what information and functionalities their users are most interested in. Among physicians who are seeking additional training, 34% are pursuing classes in AI. Healthcare professionals seeking training in AI is an indicator that they will need more access to data and are more aware of how machine learning and artificial intelligence can be used in a clinical environment.

Educational tools for HCPs: Apps and videos

As quality and access through smartphones have improved, HCPs have shown an increased interest in video content. A 2020 Stanford Medicine Health Trends Report found that nearly half of all physicians (47%) and three-quarters of medical students (73%) say they are currently seeking out additional training or classes to better prepare themselves for innovations in healthcare. They are drawing from each other’s expertise through virtual learning platforms specifically created for the field of medicine.
You know by now that HCP portals are an essential link between medical professionals and the information they need to treat their patients safely and effectively. If you’re not thinking carefully about how to engage with and earn trust from HCPs as their world and access to digital tools evolves, your organization will experience more friction as you work to keep pace with competitors—and you may even fall behind.

Want to know how your portals performed or talk with us about improving your tools? Schedule some time with our experts.

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