DHCGROUP
NETWORK • INSIGHTS • EVENTS

The State of Omnichannel HCP Engagement in Pharma

Where The Industry Stands in 2022

Presented by DHC Group and

AKTANA

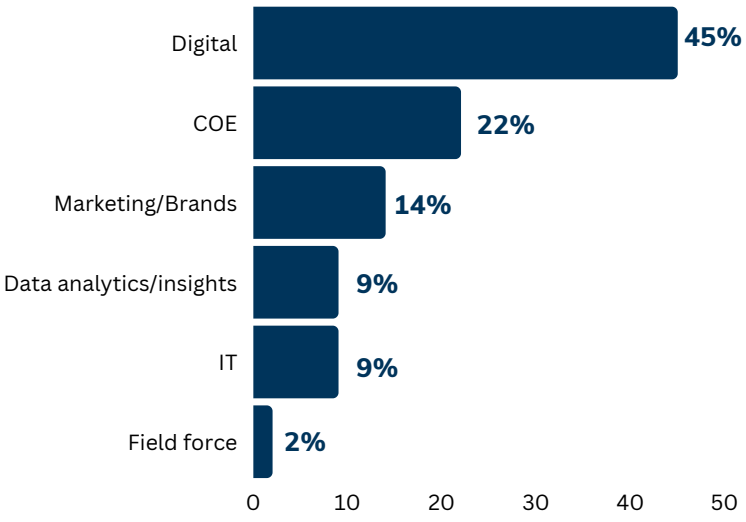
About

Research Methodology

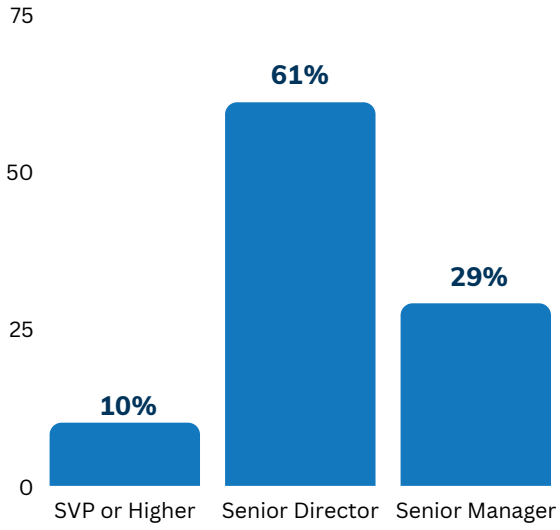
For this project, DHC Group conducted a study with **50 pharmaceutical executives** in Q2 and Q3 2022 utilizing a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Functional roles included a mix of digital, COE, brand, field force, data analytics, and IT.

Respondent Profile

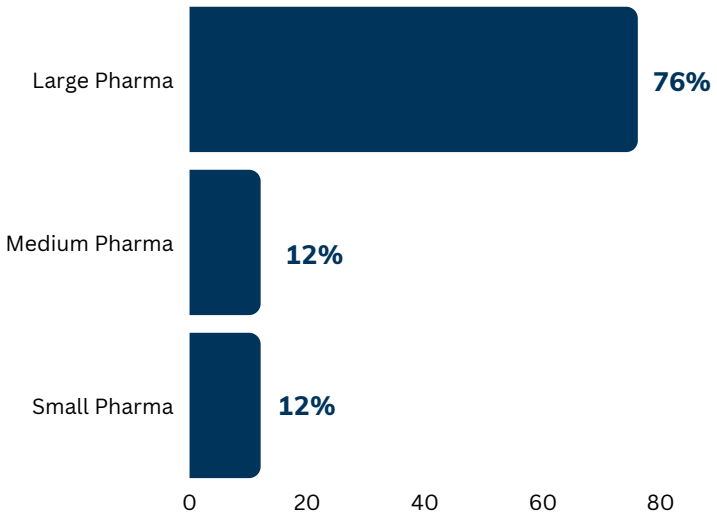
Role



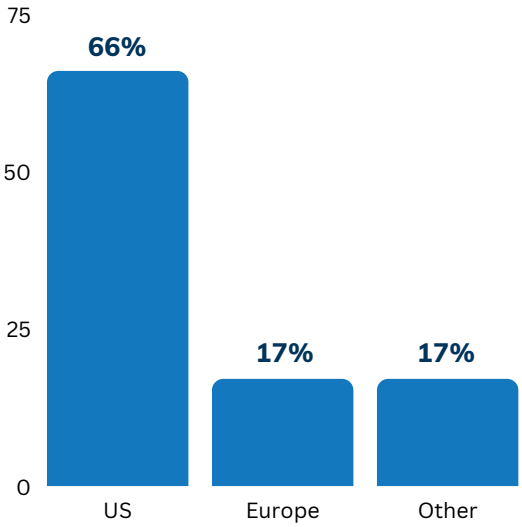
Seniority Level



Company Size



Geography



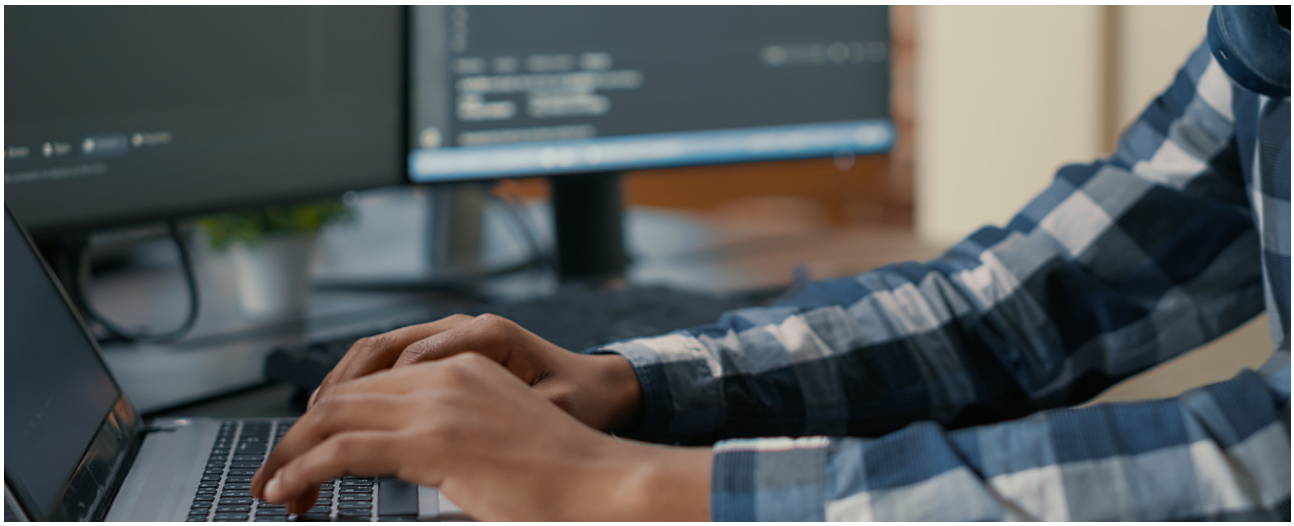
About

Our Expert Contributors

While many pharma executives agreed to be cited and quoted as a source as part of the research, a number of executives chose to submit their feedback and responses anonymously for this study. For those interested in learning more about the details of the research, or individual questions, please contact us at info@thedhcgroup.com.

We would like to thank the following experts and thought leaders below for contributing their time and insights to this industry brief by participating in qualitative interviews. What follows is a summary and highlights of the collective conversations with these industry experts and thought leaders.

Anonymous, Director Omnichannel, Major Pharmaceutical Company
Anonymous, Integrated Customer Engagement, Major Pharmaceutical Company
Anonymous, Head Commercial IT, Major Pharmaceutical Company
Anonymous, Business Enablement, Major Pharmaceutical Company
Anonymous, Director Omnichannel, Major Pharmaceutical Company
Lisa Anderson, Director, Omnichannel, AstraZeneca
Mark Bard, Co-founder, DHC Group
Derek Choy, Co-founder and COO, Aktana
Irene Coyne, EVP Group Client Director, CMI Media Group
Jim Delash, Multi-channel Marketing Director, GSK
Joyce Ercolino, Director, Digital Excellence, Harmony Biosciences
Jose Ferreira, EVP Strategy, CMI Media Group
Justin Freid, Chief Media and Innovation, CMI Media Group
Erica Hawthorne, Executive Director, Digital Strategy, Bayer
David Salmon, Global Head Innovation, AstraZeneca
Amy Turnquist, Principal, Life Sciences, North Highland
Steven Xie, Director, Omnichannel Marketing, Biohaven



Introduction

98%

of pharmaceutical execs state it's important to create and implement an omnichannel strategy for their organization

It's hard to find a pharmaceutical executive who does not believe it's important to have a robust omnichannel strategy for the organization today. However, the gap between the belief in omnichannel and execution remains. What are the hurdles to success? What's working today? And what role will AI and machine learning play in pharma's commercial future? We address these questions and more in this overview of omnichannel innovation and strategy specific to a health professional audience.

> At a high level, omnichannel means seamless integration with personalized content. It's customer-centric. We're not just pushing information through different channels
>
> Lisa Anderson, Director of Global Omnichannel Marketing, AstraZeneca

Where Do Organizations See Themselves Today?

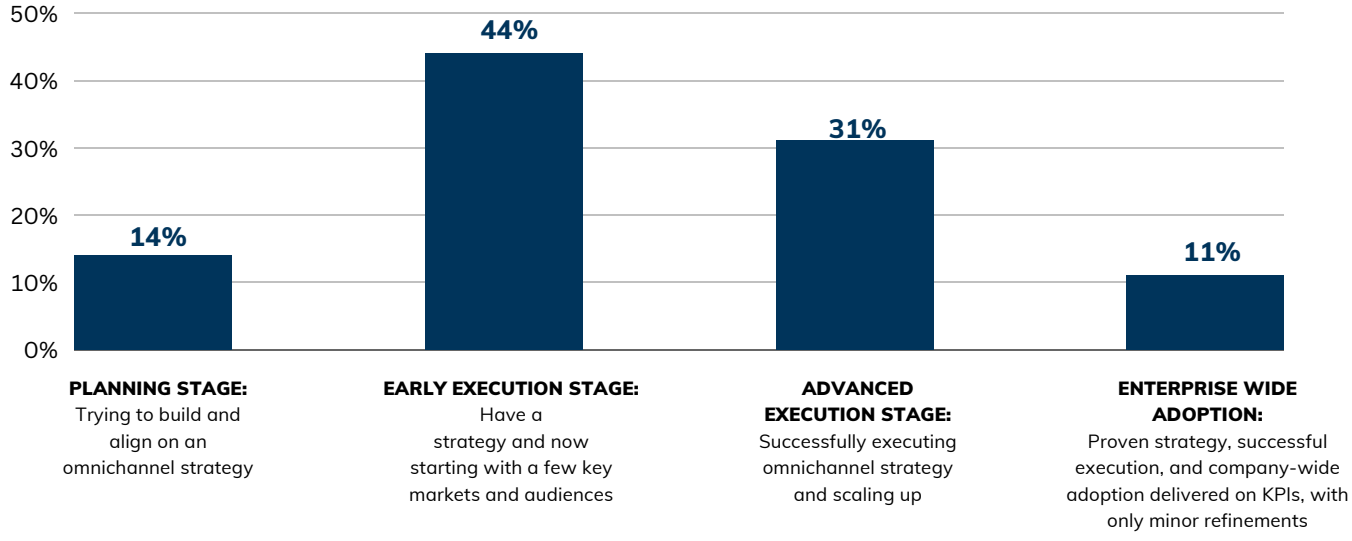
In addition to identifying the challenges and solutions to omnichannel success, we also sought to better understand the stages of maturity within the industry overall. In our research, we asked pharma executives to describe the current maturity level of their organization.

At one end of the spectrum, 11% stated they were firing on all cylinders with full, enterprise-wide adoption of omnichannel. At the other, 14% described their status as planning, still mapping out the fully operational omnichannel organization they want to be. The majority found themselves somewhere in the middle—clear on strategy but still working to put a scalable solution in place.

In our section about what's working today, we looked for shared themes among those who self-identified as "Advanced" and "Enterprise-wide" omnichannel organizations. Among those common threads? Cross-functional ownership, investment in intelligence tools and leveraging AI to drive long-term organizational change at scale.

Mapping the Omnichannel Maturity Curve

Within your organization, how would you describe your omnichannel maturity level today?



How Much has Really Changed since COVID?

50% of pharma execs believe their ability to engage with physicians has increased over the past two years

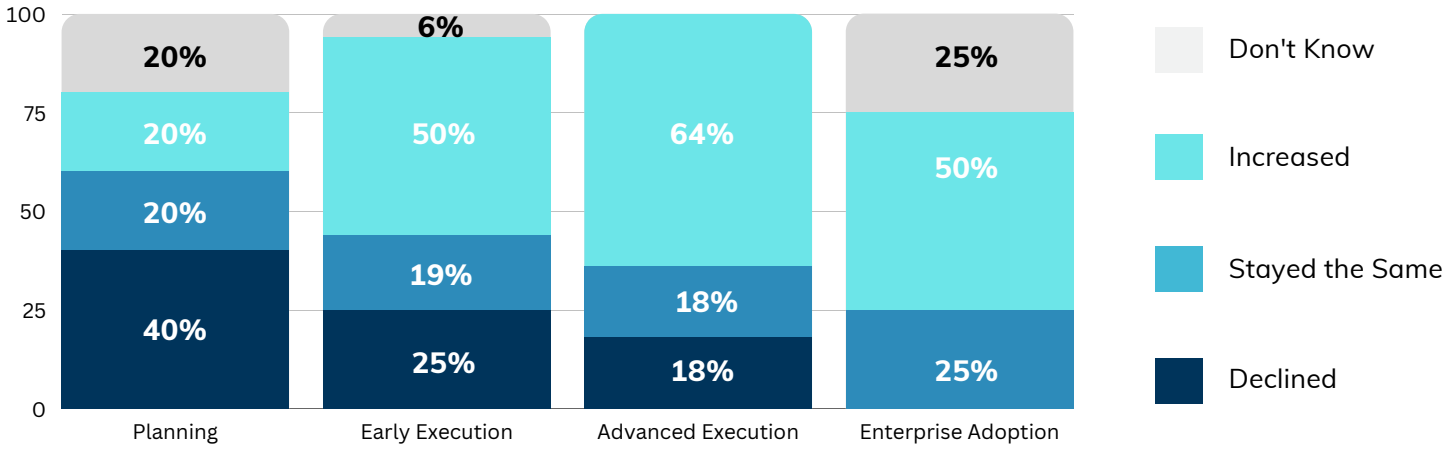
19% believe it has stayed the same, and only

22% believe it has declined

Finally, we wanted to know whether the disruption sparked by COVID has truly fueled long-term innovation. Have the past two years forced pharma companies to rethink their fundamental approach to engaging with physicians? The answer to both questions is clearly - yes. According to pharma executives in our study, half believe their ability to engage physicians has actually increased over the past two years. But what's driving the shift?

Is it pharma finally reimagining legacy organizational structures? Better and more efficient use of data and analytics? A core mindset shift toward delivering information that physicians actually need in the moment? The answer is likely all of the above. However, it's clear that the recent push towards innovation has introduced a new era of truly customer-centric sales and marketing—an era driven largely by technology like AI and machine learning, which is emerging as the key to scaling up beyond omnichannel pilot projects and brand-by-brand success.

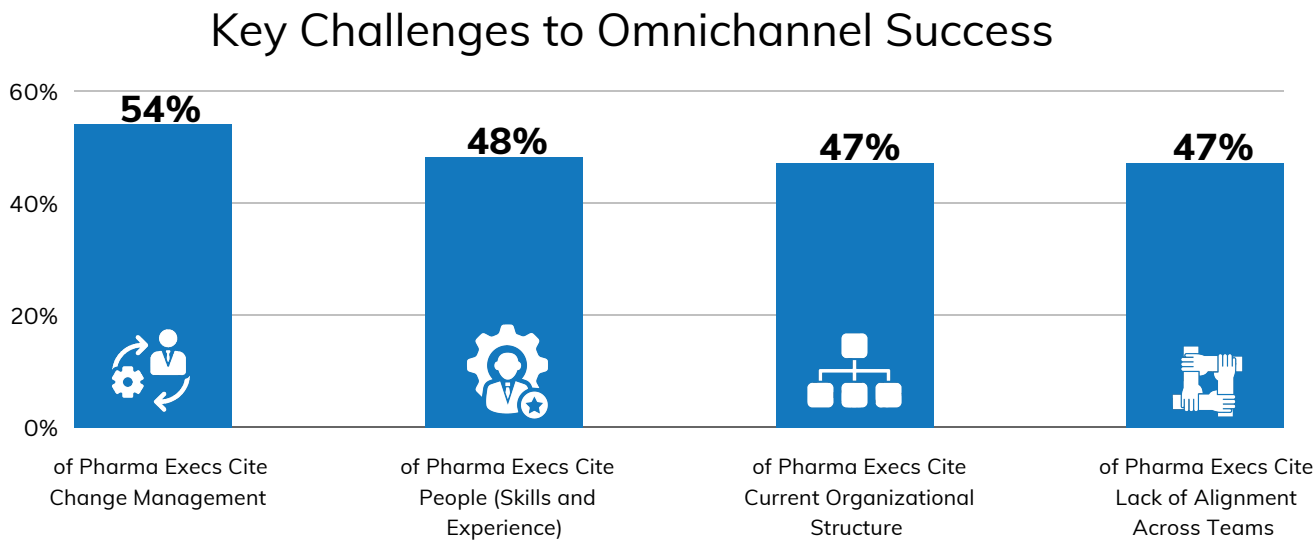
Change in HCP Engagement by Maturity Level



Hurdles to Omnichannel Success

Before we look at where the industry is headed, let's examine the various roadblocks that pharma leaders report are still holding the industry back. Here are the three most common themes, supported by data and interviews, analyzed below. To provide additional context, we've also incorporated direct responses from your peers to several open-ended survey questions about the biggest challenges their organizations face.

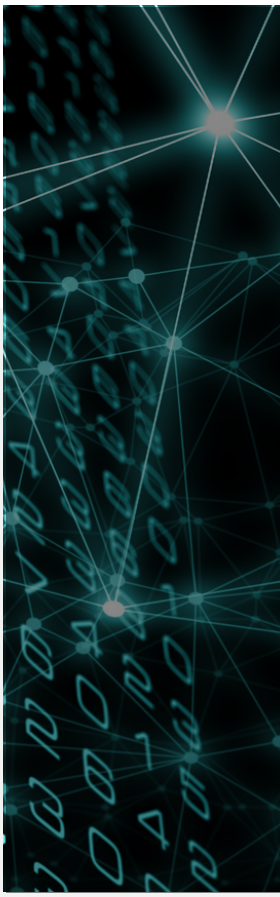
People, Structure, and Culture



From the c-suite down, pharma industry executives seeking long-term omnichannel success are unified by their desire for change. Regardless of company size, embracing omnichannel requires a deep, culture-supported mindset shift backed by two primary components. First, there must be organization-level strategies that are driven by a unified goal and supported by an adequate budget. Second, business units need the ability to be guided by measurable goals around user adoption.

In addition to top-down change management and a clear organizational point of view advocating for an omnichannel approach, the experts also agree that success starts with people. "**One of the most common missteps I see, in terms of impeding progress in omnichannel, is the failure to build the strategy with people at the center of the transformation,**" says Amy Turnquist, a principal at North Highland, a management and transformation consultancy. "**Without that cross-functional buy-in across the enterprise, you simply won't be able to move beyond siloed MCM execution.**"

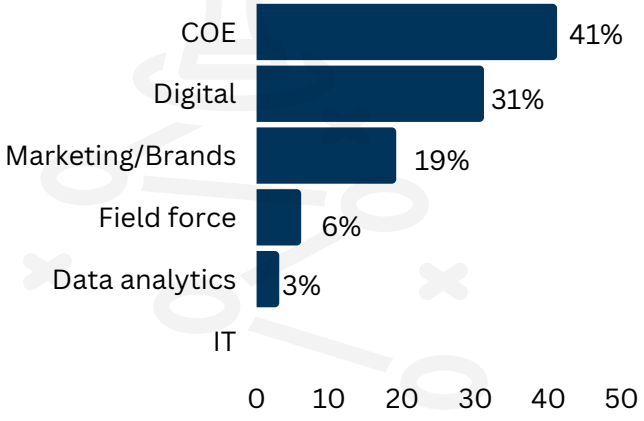
Looking beyond the people charged with carrying out omnichannel strategies, clunky organizational structures—and the lack of team alignment they may inhibit—are also seen as barriers to success.



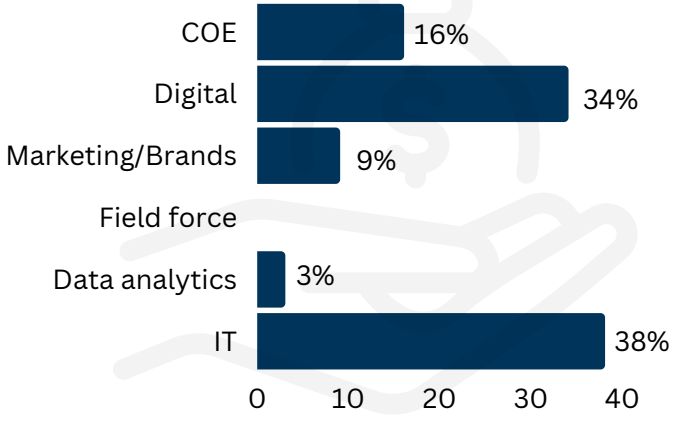
Organizations are still divided with respect to which team should "own" omnichannel.

> We've had centers of excellence, and I was part of one for a long time. Now I'm part of a broader team. That was intentional to split people off and move the budgets off of the COE into the brands. That's good for a lot of things, but it's bad for things like, "Well how do we set up a strategy for omnichannel across the company?" Because customers aren't just limited to one business unit, they could be customers across several business units.
>
> Jim DeLash, Multi-Channel Marketing Director at GSK

Which team is the primary owner of the overall omnichannel strategy in the organization?

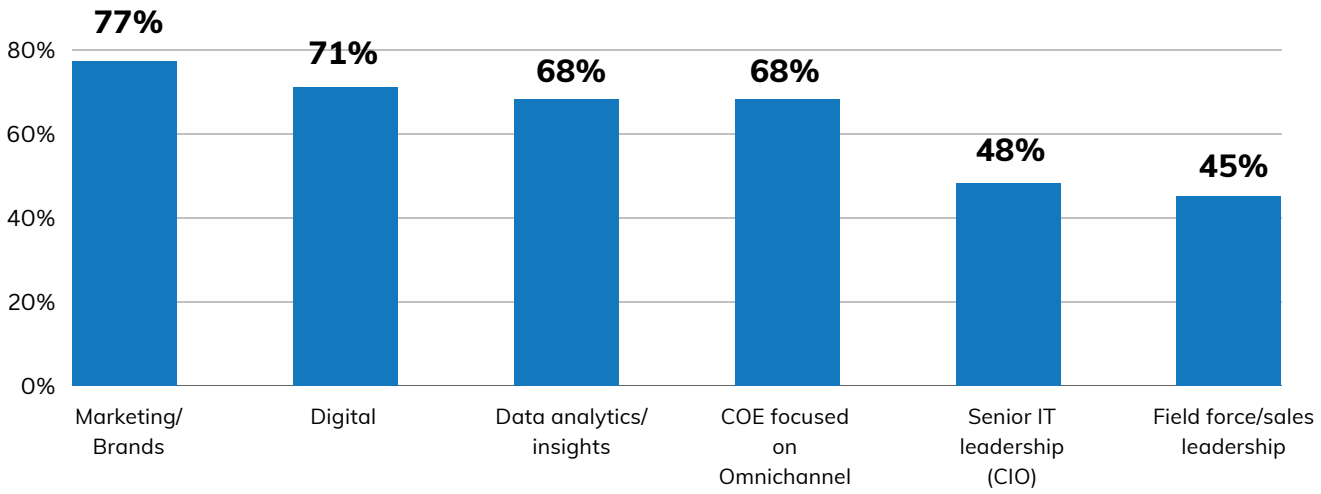


Which team holds the budget for omnichannel tech stack investments?



What *is* clear is the cross-functional involvement required to achieve omnichannel success. If teams don't have the people, structure, or motivation to work across the organization, long-term success with omnichannel can be extremely difficult - if not impossible.

Which of the following are involved in your organization's overall omnichannel strategy?



Teams most often involved in omnichannel strategy are Marketing, Digital, Analytics and COE.

Building on the commentary above, several anonymous insights from pharmaceutical executives further explain why there are still structural and internal process challenges to overcome:

> Local vs. global decision-making, from choices of technology to definitions and strategy.

> Senior management endorsement of a plan and empowerment of an accountable and empowered team to implement is critical to success.

> Breaking down silos and alignment on reporting is important. Stop focusing on just operational metrics and think about performance metrics as well.

Technology for Integration and Intelligence

Key Challenges to Omnichannel Success

45%

of Pharma Execs Cite Technology Related to Integrating and Managing Data

42%

of Pharma Execs Cite Technology Related to Intelligence and Optimization

Beyond change management issues, technology was another reported barrier to omnichannel success—specifically, the need for solutions that can integrate, manage and translate data into actionable steps with intelligence and optimization. **"I think it's actually the technology [that's a hurdle]."** said Jim Delash of GSK." Not that it doesn't exist. It's that's it's not connected."

Physicians are coming to the table with modern consumer expectations for seamless, personalized customer experiences from life sciences companies. There's no question that pharma wants to rise to the occasion, but without a connected technology ecosystem, that "real-time touch" is impossible to deliver.

> Everybody expects that real-time touch. This is how we work everywhere else in our lives. Physicians are no different. And we just have to meet them where they're meeting us—it's the path of least resistance.
>
> Joyce Ercolino, Director of Digital Excellence at Harmony Biosciences

However, many are also quick to point out that technology alone is not a panacea to a lack of strategy or remaining structural issues. In other words, you still need to have the fundamentals correctly established to employ technology at scale with any meaningful impact.

"I've seen organizations rush to deploy the next best action, for example, or modular content, without putting the appropriate change management strategies in place first to align the field force and the digital teams around the why, what, and how of the organization's omnichannel vision." said North Highland's Amy Turnquist. "The technology, the tools, the processes — they all need to be in place. But if you don't bring the heads and hearts of your field force into the journey, if you don't embed new mindsets and beliefs across the marketing, brand and analytics teams, there is no omnichannel."

The open-ended responses from pharma executives unpack more of the nuance around the question, with experts commenting on the primary challenges of incorporating intelligence into overall omnichannel strategy, including:

> Communicating learnings and insights across multiple corporate divisions.

> Each of the teams run their own reports, operate from different data lakes and are 'beholden' to separate stakeholders.

> Believing the models and not relying on anecdotal 'old ways' of going to market.

Having Enough Content

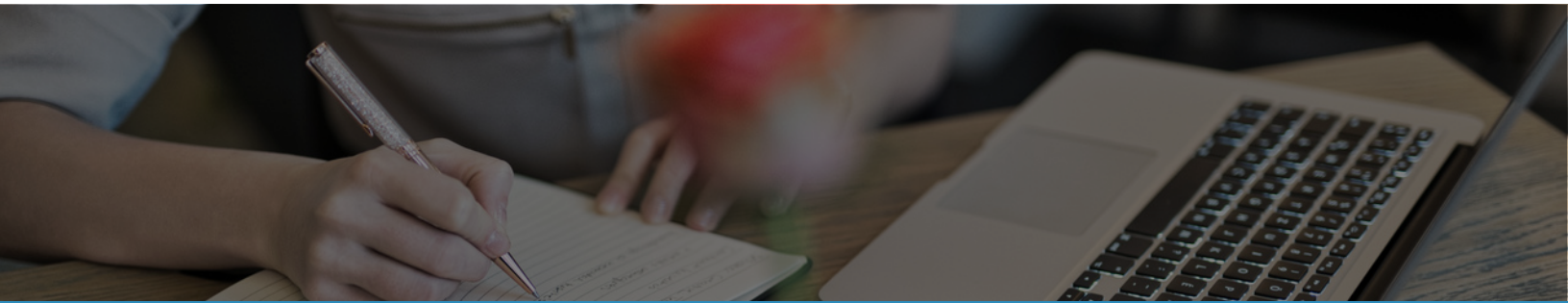
62%

of Pharma Execs Cite Lack of Content as a Key Challenge to OC Success

Perhaps the key word is “enough,” especially as expectations for personalization and channel preferences shift among HCPs. Once all the other pieces (data, technology, strategy, partnerships, etc.) are in place, it’s telling that the omnichannel experts we heard from are most concerned that the necessary content might not be available.

There are a few factors driving this. First, the internal process for approving content is generally too slow to meet the personalization demands of the audience. It’s important to recognize that the creative required for a modular design model can be daunting to a company that evaluates content creation and approval in weeks or months. In addition to speed, adapting to changing environments and audience needs generally presents a difficult hurdle. The challenge with having enough usable and timely content is often bottlenecked by regulatory groups where every iteration—and it’s intended use — needs to be approved. Finally, even when the first two issues are solved, often the very real challenge becomes incorporating the process, people, and technology to generate the content.

> If I decide I'm going to prioritize an investment in my data, my data architecture and my analytics to drive personalization, but my organization doesn't have the capacity to generate content at a volume and in a way that supports that personalization, it is a wasted effort.
>
> David Salmon, Global Head of Digital Strategy & Enablement, Oncology at AstraZeneca



In anonymous open-ends from interviews with pharmaceutical executive respondents, they explained more about content challenges:

> Our ability to get content through MLR in a timely manner and at scale is a real challenge for us.

> We need to ensure that our creative and approval processes can adapt to take advantage of the full power of omnichannel.

> We need more dynamic content to be more personalized - and to leverage data and tech to do that.

The Big Takeaway: Know Where You Are in Your Journey

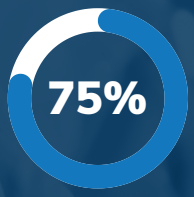
"Take the time to baseline your organizational strengths objectively and quantifiably across data & analytics, culture, customer insights & VoC, agility, content delivery and cross-functional collaboration – and be honest about your gaps - before you set priorities or take action towards any one priority or process," emphasized Turnquist. "Where are you today, really, and where do you need to be? How will you measure, and communicate, success to other stakeholders over time? How will you weigh the relative ROI of closing gaps vs. creating new capabilities? It's hard to resist the temptation to jump in and just start moving, but given the complexities of omnichannel, taking time to pause and get an objective maturity baseline will reap long-term rewards."

What's Working Today

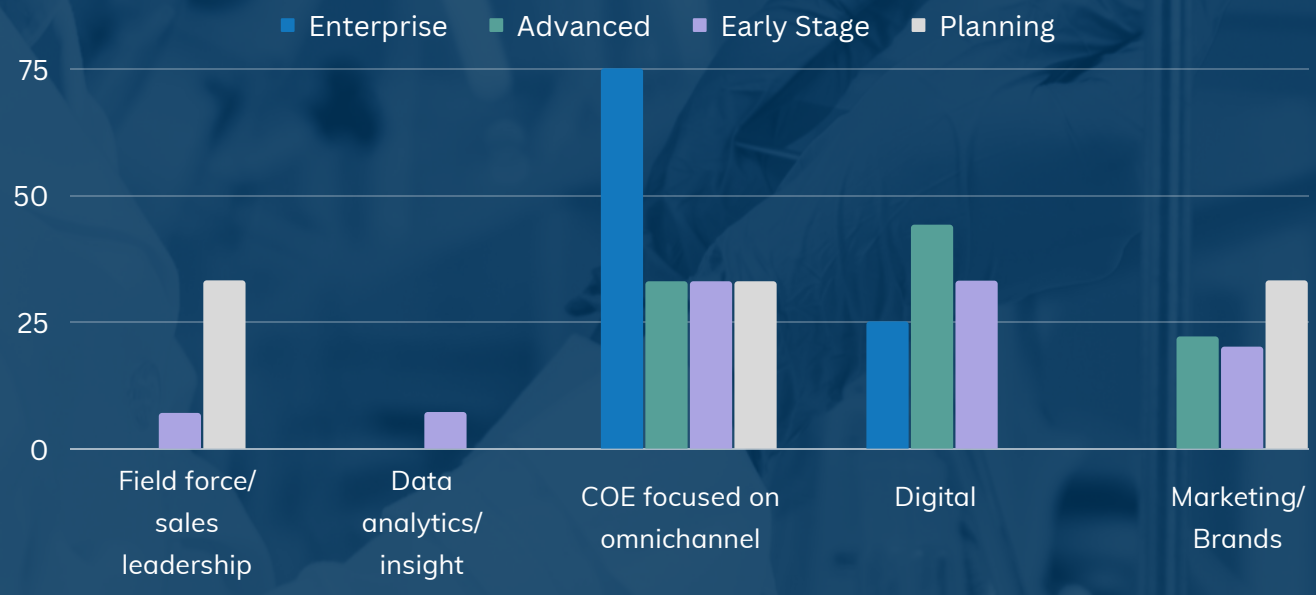
At first blush, it may seem like the consensus about how to best implement omnichannel is that there is no consensus. After years of focused initiatives, life sciences organizations are still a long way from aligning on best practices for delivering a seamless, personalized customer experience. That said, looking for commonalities among those who report a high level of omnichannel maturity within their organization seems like a good place to start.

Embrace a Cross-functional Leadership Structure

In the early days, omnichannel was often pigeonholed as a marketing initiative, but we now know that's a great oversimplification. "A bunch of marketers who understand digital are not going to move the needle," said Steven Xie, Director of Omnichannel Marketing at Biohaven. "You need to really bring all the stakeholders together."



In fact, 75 percent of those who self-identified as "Enterprise" deployers followed an Omnichannel Center of Excellence model. "Digital" was the second department most frequently cited as the primary owner.

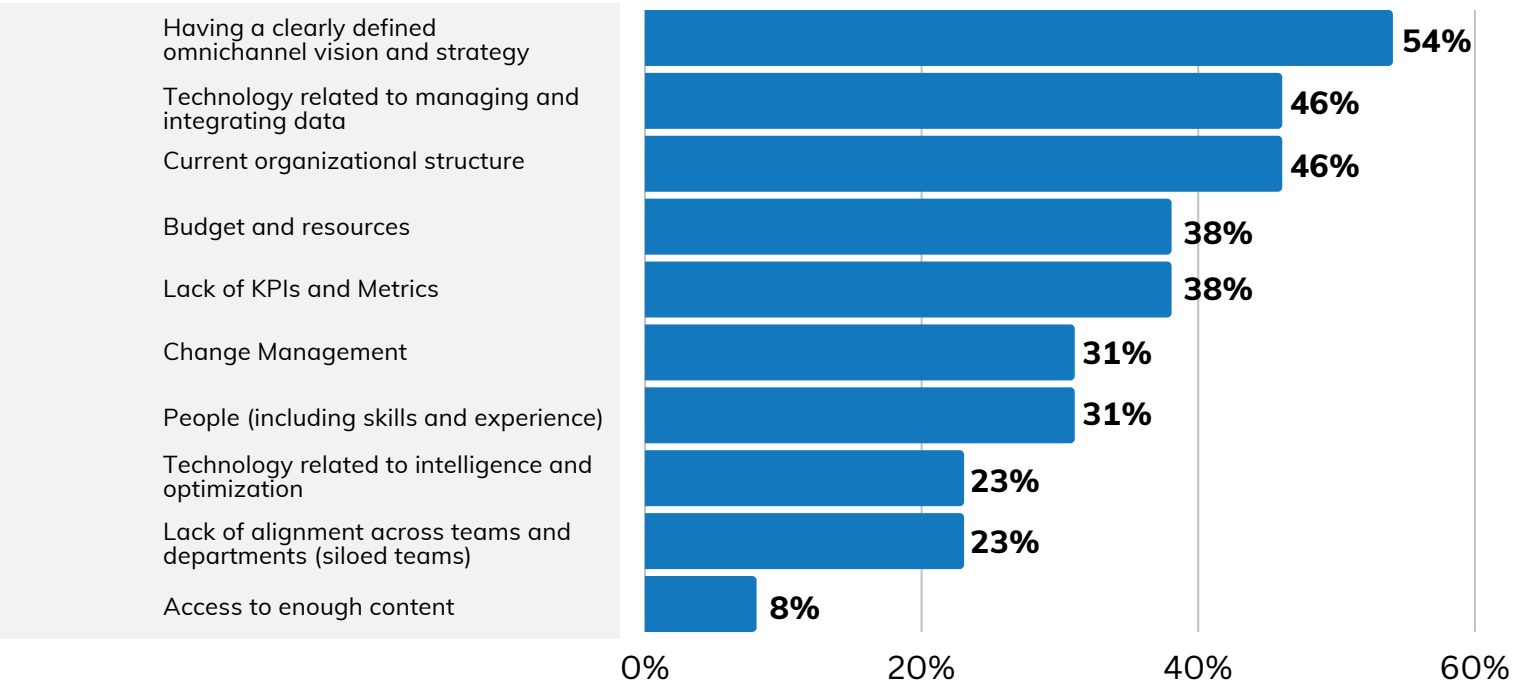


Primary owner of omnichannel strategy by maturity level

> I think COE is absolutely important. You need expertise. I think as an organization, you need to bring the resources to focus on nurturing a group of people who can really be the evangelists, so to speak, to educate the broader constituent stakeholders across the organization.
>
> -Stephen Xie, Director, Omnichannel Marketing, Biohaven

It makes sense that these two relatively new cross-functional or horizontal departments would lend themselves to advancing omnichannel initiatives, as nearly all survey respondents reported that achieving success with omnichannel required participation from core teams across the organization. If we consider true omnichannel to include every customer touchpoint, personalized based on actual behavior and data, this is a must.

Additionally, those who adopted a COE approach (to omnichannel) reported fewer significant challenges across the board, especially related to organizational structure and change management.



Percentage who responded "Not at all a challenge" or "Not a significant challenge," grouped by primary owner of omnichannel (Omnichannel COE)

Invest in Analytics and Intelligence Tools

88%

of advanced-maturity organizations and

100%

of enterprise-wide adopters agree or strongly agree that there is a need for centralized commercial intelligence (such as AI, next best action/experience, suggestions and insights or advanced analytics) for overall omnichannel success.

> The company must get past the 'business as usual' mindset. You can't just insert the analog process into a digital world.
>
> -Erica Hawthorne, Executive Director of Digital Strategy, Bayer

The obvious challenge is that every department has distinct functional goals and priorities, many of which have deep roots in the traditional commercial model. For example, while their roles have evolved, sales teams are still largely driven by best practices around frequency, engagement plans, and reacting to sales trend anomalies. Marketing teams, on the other hand, are primarily strategy-led, focused on initiatives like event follow-up or executing HQ campaigns around key brand messages.

Meanwhile, data science and analytics teams have been tasked with making sure data —not instinct—drives the ideal mix of channels, content and timing for each customer. The responsibility of optimizing the customer journey often rests on their shoulders, despite their relative detachment from the day-to-day execution of commercial strategy compared to their sales and marketing peers.

> The very first hires I tend to make when I come into a new company is analytics, simply because at the end of the day, the challenge with Omnichannel is everybody's got an opinion on it. Everybody's got a point of view, and if you don't have numbers, then the decision always defaults to the highest paid person in the room.
>
> -Director, Omnichannel, Large Pharma

Use Transparent Tech to Balance Group Initiatives with Individual Goals

Organizations need to be realistic about what it takes for different departments to simultaneously coordinate multiple customer journeys when the variables are always changing. Missteps are inevitable if you rely on each team to reference a central data source and tailor their own actions independently. Conversely, assigning the entire orchestration responsibility to one department creates an immediate bottleneck that makes scaling impossible.

"We've found that organizations benefit most from solutions that provide each team with an interface that aligns to their area of focus, then shares transparent, actionable recommendations across teams," said Derek Choy, president at Aktana. "I can't stress the importance of being able to trace the 'AI thought process' back to the data if you want real adoption."

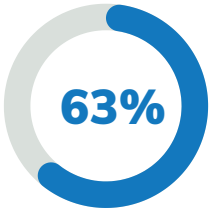
What is the most important thing your organization needs to address, fix or resolve to improve omnichannel overall within your organization today?

> A single source of truth about what [omnichannel] is.

> To align on what omnichannel means to the organization and determine the importance across departments.

> To change the mindset of all departments—sales, marketing, IT—to focus on the HCP and what they need to improve their patient's lives and not what we think they need.

When it Comes to KPIs, Prioritize Quality over Quantity



of Pharma Execs Agree There is a Need for a Single Interface to Manage and Control Omnichannel

This speaks to the need for unified and consistent data throughout the organization. While the less is more principle might apply, an even better approach to a successful omnichannel program is organizing the data in a dynamic way that focuses on key metrics.

> Sometimes there are too many data points. Again, it's the metrics that matter. Less is more ... speed to make a decision is better than taking too long. Sometimes you can have analysis paralysis. Sometimes you need just enough information to move.
>
> -Joyce Ercolino, Harmony Biosciences

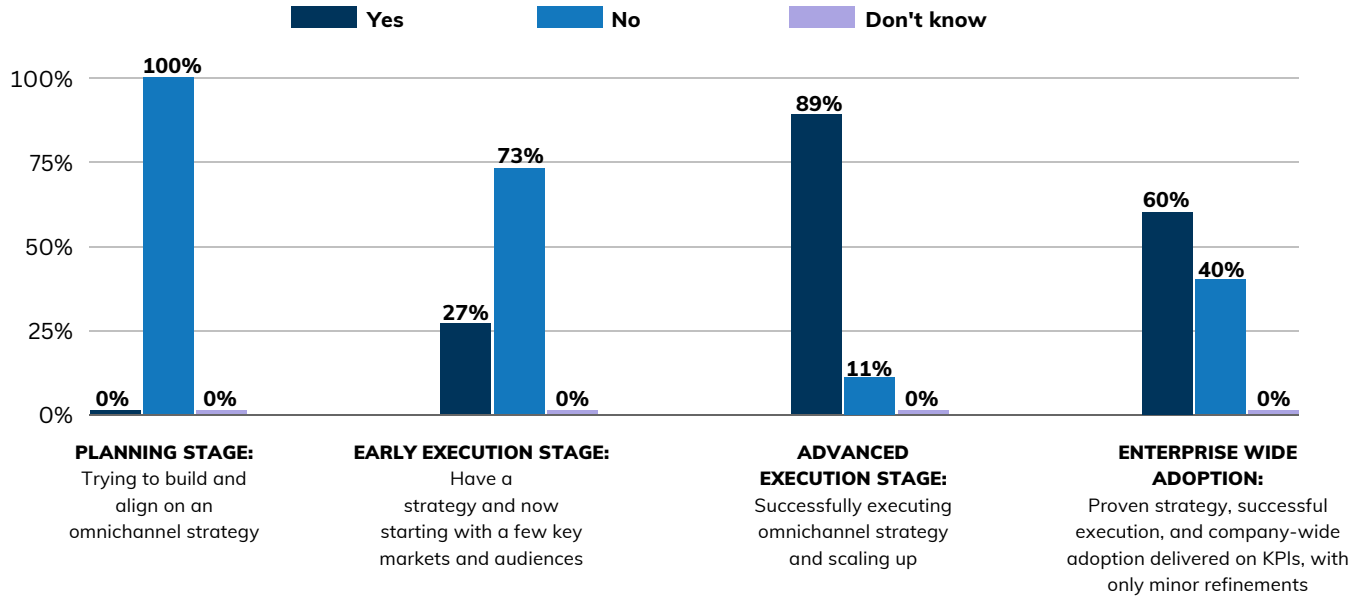
This is where a reporting dashboard built on top of an AI or machine learning platform that captures engagement feedback in a closed-loop system can lead to a more successful implementation. While brands may customize metrics based on their market and data availability, the majority agree there is value in having a connected view that goes beyond operational metrics to learn from real performance impact.

> We're doing multi-touch attribution and marketing mix modeling—trying to maximize reach, frequency, and engagement across all channels, with regular re-balancing and optimizations.
>
> -Senior Director, Digital - Large Pharma Reporting Advanced Maturity

Align with AI: Optimizing Engagement across HCP Touchpoints

Being able to successfully optimize HCP engagement across channels and departments is another key indicator of omnichannel maturity.

Are your internal teams currently optimizing engagement across all HCP touchpoints (i.e. not just within individual channels or departments like sales, marketing or digital)?



But among those we surveyed, less than half of pharmaceutical executives said they were currently doing so.

Those who answered "yes" are leaning heavily on technology to align departmental goals and navigate the last mile between strategy and execution between historically siloed teams. Here are a few examples.

Using AI to Optimize Customer Journeys

AI is particularly well-suited for uncovering HCP preferences for content, channel and cadence of communication. Beyond evaluating simple engagement metrics like email-opens and click-through rates, AI-powered optimization engines can extract and synthesize the critical context from outside data sources and past interactions across channels—like call note insights—to personalize the customer experience.

How are you currently optimizing across touchpoints and how is it working?

> Creating touchpoint journeys and using AI to optimize content, channel, cadence, and customer mix. [We're seeing] progress in some key markets, but the challenge of coordination is holding back progress.

> AI algorithms that we are piloting in various market archetypes to demonstrate commercial value.

It's not enough, however, to capture customer preference as yet another data point. In order to effectively address coordination challenges, recommendations for applying these personalization insights need to be dynamic, considerate of real-life challenges like digital fatigue and channel capacity, and packaged into bite-sized suggestions that are easy to understand and act upon for users across teams. This is where Next Best Action (NBA) comes into play.

Aligning Sales and Marketing through Next Best Action

With more data than ever to sift through and a host of digital campaigns running simultaneously from their marketing counterparts, Sales needs an easy way to stay plugged into the overall customer journey. Next Best Action or Next Best Experience technology equips all teams with the necessary visibility to work toward the same objective, regardless of which department traditionally "owns" the campaign or channel.

How are you currently optimizing across touchpoints and how is it working?

> Building and deploying global platforms and improving organizational structures that enable omnichannel engagement.

> Ensuring every HCP touchpoint is considered when determining next best action.

The Big Takeaway: Advanced Technology & Transparency are Fundamental to Omnichannel Success at Scale

While a brand may be able to use analysts and brute force to better understand a target audience of 200 high-value oncologists, for example, scaling up to cover hundreds of thousands of physicians across brands can only work with an underlying approach that fully utilizes AI and machine learning to translate strategy into tactics and optimize decision making in near real-time.

It's just as critical to acknowledge technology's ability to help mitigate "softer" issues like change management and team alignment. Technology that helps navigate competing priorities and grants transparency between teams can be a powerful tool for breaking down silos and driving the adoption of new solutions that makes

Where Do We Go from Here?

By Derek Choy, Aktana

Every great transformation comes with growing pains. Still, I'm sure you would agree that there's never been a more exciting time to be part of this industry. After decades of a go-to-market approach defined by best-guess strategies and appealing to physicians as a monolithic group, we're finally flipping to script.

Today, it's a strategic imperative for brands to transform the HCP experience into a seamless, cross-channel journey that's personalized to a segment of one. With so many more options for engagement, organizations also need a scalable way to prioritize actions with the highest impact, refine strategies and focus valuable internal resources where they'll deliver the greatest ROI. None of this is possible without technology like AI and machine learning.

> In three to five years, I would hope that we've suddenly moved as an industry where AI isn't a buzzword. It's actually just baked into the mainstream of our go-to-market strategies because it's so essential.
>
> -Paul Thompson, Global Director of Field Force AI Enablement at Novartis
> Aktana's Omnichannel AI Masterclass, March 2022

But as we saw and heard in this research, knowing where to start or how to expand isn't always clear. After more than a decade of implementing and scaling AI-driven intelligent engagement solutions for 300+ brands, this is what we've learned.

If you're just starting out

Don't let the quest for perfection stall progress. You don't need to have all of your data meticulously housed in one data warehouse before you can start. When our clients aren't sure where to begin, we start by evaluating their data landscape and prioritizing the real-life applications they can realistically support and measure. For most, that means that as long as your intelligence platform can connect to an existing system with accessible, consolidated data—like your CRM—you can start seeing value from AI.

If your goal is to stand up a solution quickly, opt for a configurable product that allows you to start small while building a foundation for more advanced capabilities to enable when ready. For example, many of our customers take a crawl-walk-run approach, shifting more decision-making power from rules to AI/ML as their confidence in the models grows.

If you're ready to scale

Work from a global foundation anchored by commonalities across markets. Your first AI-driven omnichannel program was probably a custom-built solution tailored to the needs of one brand or country, but replicating this approach for every market isn't scalable. Instead, what efficiencies can you find across your integrations, data and use cases? Take a critical look at what actually needs to be localized in order to be impactful (like specific machine learning models that quantify HCP value or identify patient trends) and what likely does not (like more tactical AI models that determine optimal channels and timing for engagement). Whenever possible, adopt a "decide once" mentality for your commercial strategy so you can focus your resources on true competitive differentiators.

Look for flexible platforms that provide this infrastructure, allowing you to plug in and operationalize the proprietary strategic models developed by your team. This is especially critical for accurately capturing optimization "thought processes" at scale since different brands and markets contend with unique regulations, constraints and definitions of what "optimal" means.

Wherever you are, keep going

Experiment. Measure. Refine. Repeat. Good AI systems will help you do this naturally by closing the data feedback loop, automatically rescoring models and issuing insights back to your team that will help you periodically review and refresh your strategic priorities. If you're seeing a major jump in impact, that's great! And if the uptick isn't as strong as you'd like, you're still learning. Run simulations. Get feedback from your users. Pilot different use cases. AI is meant to be agile. With the right governance and mindset, you will find success.

About DHC Group

Expanding on the legacy of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization Digital Health Coalition, the DHC Group funds and conducts research, hosts and produces industry events, while offering media and outreach opportunities for its members. The DHC Group partners with numerous industry outlets, including the Digital Health Coalition, to drive industry thought leadership forward and make research-supported content available to a broader audience of pharmaceutical, media, publishing, technology, and advertising firms interested in the future of digital health, marketing, and customer experience.

About Aktana

Committed to inspiring better patient care, Aktana's AI helps life sciences companies build stronger relationships with healthcare providers by ensuring every interaction is tailored to individual needs and preferences. Aktana's platform integrates with every data source and major player in your commercial tech stack, transforming mountains of data into clear recommendations. By embedding intelligence throughout the entire omnichannel ecosystem, Aktana makes every customer journey feel like a continuous conversation—seamless, well-timed and always relevant. Today, more than half of the top-20 global pharmaceutical companies use Aktana to coordinate and optimize personalized omnichannel engagement at scale. For more information, visit www.aktana.com.

Looking for Additional Resources?

Frequently Asked Questions about Omnichannel
A practical reference for commercial life sciences teams navigating the omnichannel landscape
Download now

Omnichannel Ecosystem Map
Who does what in the next-generation commercial model
Download now

5 Steps to Intelligent Omnichannel Engagement
A step-by-step guide for getting started with omnichannel AI
Download now

THANK YOU!

DHCGROUP
NETWORK • INSIGHTS • EVENTS