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News

Face-to-face or virtual reps? 15.09.2020

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Virtual sales reps are "highly unlikely" to replace the value provided by face-to-face visits from actual reps, Takeda's Oceania managing director Brad Edwards says, while Hahn Healthcare boss Craig Moore argues virtual reps provide similar value.

"It may sound like I'm stuck in the past but if you ask me what is the most effective way of engaging with customers, it is still a really well-trained, smart, high EQ sales person in front of a doctor talking about a product in a way that's really relevant to that specific doctor," Edwards said.

"Being able to answer challenging questions face-to-face is still the most effective way of creating value."

With [13 years experience in top leadership roles](#) across three companies in Australia and New Zealand, Edwards says he has "been really interested in the virtual rep concept for some time".

"Even sophisticated virtual rep platforms where doctors can tailor the content and can access it at a time that suits them doesn't seem to be as effective as face-to-face, especially if the doctor has built a relationship of trust with a rep that spans a number of years," Edwards said.

However, he said with COVID forcing more virtual

interactions and increased use of other platforms, digital engagement and virtual sales reps will have a bigger role to play in the future in supporting face-to-face interactions, or in enabling better access to doctors in remote locations.

"I think what you will see in cities like Sydney and Melbourne is there will still be a face-to-face focus but the further you go away



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Takeda Oceania MD Brad Edwards

from the cities to doctors based in rural and remote communities or areas where access barriers exist, there will be a bigger shift towards virtual interactions," Edwards said.

"Just my view, but I don't see a wholesale shift to exclusively virtual representation delivered on sophisticated platforms by any company.

"It will certainly become more common as a way of doing business and will be better accepted by customers, but I personally see an ongoing need for great face-to-face salespeople."

However, Hahn Healthcare boss Craig Moore believes both virtual and face-to-face reps have value, with a large proportion of Hahn's virtual connections coming from healthcare professionals (HCPs) calling back when they are ready to listen and are fully engaged.

"There are plenty of examples where relationships have been built virtually and we have many case studies of genuine positive behaviour change of HCPs based on virtual engagements," Moore said.

"People buy from people and if your virtual rep has value to offer and the skills to deliver it, great results can be achieved.

"There is real value in face-to-face but that doesn't mean there is not similar value that can be achieved virtually."

Moore said the technology platform is not the secret; instead, it is how the strategy is set up, training of reps, then managing and supporting them that makes the difference.

"After five years of doing this, we have learnt a thing or two in this space," he said. "I believe the future will involve multidisciplinary, multichannel teams that bring a suite of different solutions to HCPs incorporating medical, nurses, virtual and field reps.

"Not every sales problem is a nail to be solved with a hammer being a rep. Reps will always be important but things are evolving."

Megan Brodie

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