

How pharma Tweetchats can drive healthcare innovation

*As Twitter continues
to grow as the social media network
of choice for rapid discussion and information sharing
between multiple participants, this white paper explores why it is
critical for pharma to engage in this new channel via Tweetchats to
inform, connect and build trust between pharmaceutical companies
and broader healthcare stakeholders.*

Patricia Alves & Jaclyn Fonteyne,
Boehringer Ingelheim



Tweetchats have gained increasing publicity within healthcare recently as a number of pharmaceutical companies, including Boehringer Ingelheim, have taken their first steps into this new form of social media engagement. As more companies explore this activity, we felt it was important to share some of the lessons we have learned around why and how pharmaceutical companies should run Tweetchats.

“Think of a Tweetchat as a conference call using the social media channel Twitter”

Firstly, it is important to define exactly what a Tweetchat is, for those who are unfamiliar with the concept. In simple terms, think of a Tweetchat as a conference call using the social media channel Twitter. This channel is designed to mimic the shorthand nature of conversation originally born from text messaging, with users able to write posts of up to 140 characters in length. The beauty of Twitter is that these messages can then be broadcast to all of one's followers, rather than just linear correspondence between two people.

Tweetchats then take this form of one-to-many dialogue a stage further, by making use of a hashtag, denoting the topic of the discussion (e.g. #pharma or #cancer), which other users can follow. This means that a real-time conversation, taking place on a defined day and time, between multiple participants around a particular subject can be followed and Tweets from all contributors seen via the hashtag, even if the user is not following that Tweeter. In essence, the conversation becomes many-to-many, just like a real-life round table discussion.

Empowered patients and other advocates of progressive healthcare saw the early opportunity Tweetchats afforded to share ideas and opinions from all over the world in an organized and efficient way. Some of the first groups to spring up included the #hcsmeu ('healthcare social media Europe') Tweetchat and a number of disease area focused groups, such as #bcm ('breast cancer social media').^{1,2} For the pharmaceutical industry, these condition-centric discussions are of particular interest, as they offer the chance to listen to some of the real-world challenges in preventing or managing certain diseases. As an organization venturing into the area of cancer treatment, watching others conduct successful Tweetchats made us realize that it was vital to not only be involved in, but also start leading these discussions, in order to develop better, real-world health solutions.

Critically, this realization was not confined to just the social media advocates within Boehringer Ingelheim, with one of our senior medical affairs leaders, Lars Groenke, stating that, “it is clear that our customers are increasingly using digital and social media and this will carry over to their professional communication habits. If we want to offer attractive and innovative new formats to interact with these people in the future, we need to try new ways”.

External digital experts, such as Len Starnes (formerly a digital lead at Bayer HealthCare) have also recognized how ground breaking social media activities like Tweetchats can be for the industry. In reacting to one of our early Tweetchats, Starnes paraphrased astronaut Neil Armstrong in describing it as ‘one small step for a pharma, one giant leap for the pharma industry’.³

The real value from Tweetchats is that many different types of healthcare stakeholders get involved, all of which see benefit from taking part (figure 1):

“The specific nature of short-form conversation within Twitter lends itself very well to broader group discussion”

- **Patient advocacy groups** have the opportunity to share their first-hand experience of working with patients and providers with organizations that can act to improve disease management, but who may not fully understand the challenges being faced on the front line.
- **Healthcare providers** in turn, can respond to the feedback procured from patient advocacy groups and patients around their challenges beyond the clinic and also escalate areas of unmet need to pharmaceutical companies and other providers of health solutions.
- **Pharmaceutical companies** procure real-life insight from both groups around the key areas of unmet need and how medicines, diagnostics and broader support services need to address these. In addition, through facilitating these Tweetchats, closer relationships are forged which can lead to further discussion and partnership beyond the confines of Twitter.

In many ways, these benefits reflect those that might be observed in traditional face-to-face interaction at congresses and advisory board meetings, but in a much more efficient and inclusive way. Even compared to other digital and social media channels (e.g. online research, LinkedIn or Facebook), the specific nature of short-form conversation within Twitter lends itself very well to broader group discussion, rather than a series of one-to-one engagements, allowing participants to share ideas and crowdsource feedback.

As Len Starnes enthuses, “this type of Tweetchat enables all the stakeholders to come together – pharma, doctors, payers, patients, government etc. I love that participatory aspect”.

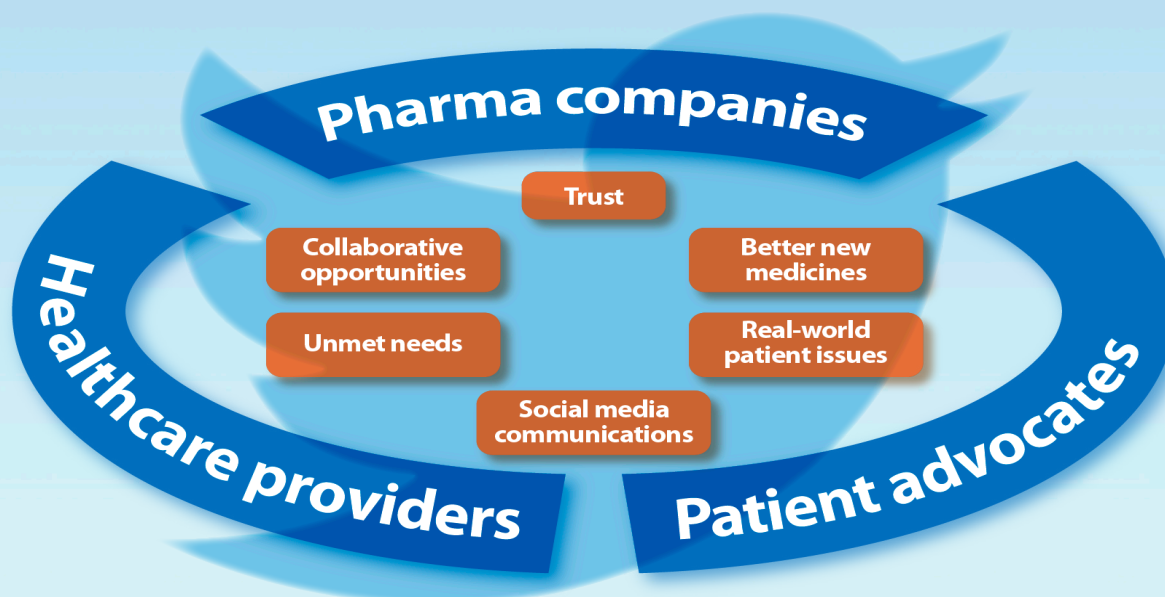


Figure 1: Healthcare providers, patient advocacy groups and the pharmaceutical industry can discuss multiple areas of common interest via Tweetchats.

Organizing a successful Tweetchat – planning, planning, planning

“The theme needs to be very specific and address a genuine issue to stimulate debate”

Anyone who has taken part in a successful Tweetchat will note how fluid and dynamic the conversation is, with an overarching feeling of spontaneity that is driven by the real-time nature of the dialogue. However, this can be misleading and belies the extensive planning that is required to ensure good participation levels and a positive outcome. The old adage of ‘build it and they will come’ should certainly not be applied to Tweetchats. Instead, the live Tweetchat itself should be viewed as the tip of the iceberg, with 90% of the underlying effort taking place before the Tweetchat even begins.

In our experience the following planning stages are critical to ensure success:

1. Define the theme, audience and alignment with associated groups / events

Just in the same way that a real-life event needs to define what topic it is going to cover, who this topic is relevant to and identify an appropriate time to take place, a Tweetchat must do exactly the same. The theme needs to be very specific and address a genuine issue to stimulate debate. For example, our first Tweetchat looked at some specific issues relating to atrial fibrillation, rather than just being a broad discussion on the cardiovascular space. Once the theme is identified, defined sub-topics can be set (typically 3-4 for an hour-long Tweetchat), designed to probe the issue in more detail. These sub-topics should be open questions to trigger rich qualitative debate.

Aligned with the theme for the Tweetchat, it is important to consider the desired audience with whom this discussion will resonate. For example, are there disease associations or patient advocacy groups campaigning around some of the issues being raised? Are there particular medical experts who should be involved to share their expertise? In addition, defining geographic scope is important, as healthcare issues in any given disease area may vary significantly from country to country. As with any ‘open’ online forum it is impossible to block Tweetchat participants who sit outside these defined geographies, but it is possible (and advisable) to be very clear on who the Tweetchat is intended for.

Finally, while a Tweetchat can be run as an isolated event, they work best when associated with other high profile activities. The Tweetchats we have run at Boehringer Ingelheim have all been conducted at times that align with relevant external activities, e.g. #ChatAFib timed to coincide with the European Cardiovascular Society Congress, or #ChatNSCLC coordinated around lung cancer awareness month. This will encourage greater participation and also mean topics can be aligned around what the audience is interested in hearing at that particular time.

2. Secure internal support and participation

There are inherent risks involved in conducting open, real-time online discussion, associated with that fact that pharma is a highly regulated industry. Stringent rules are in place to prevent direct product promotion to patients, for good reason, and we also have a responsibility to conduct appropriate pharmacovigilance monitoring in any form of ‘research’ activity that

could generate discussion of adverse events. We know that the pharma industry sees the value, on all sides, in such discussion, so these regulatory factors have undoubtedly been the reason why many pharmaceutical companies have not conducted Tweetchats so far. But the risks are manageable and outweighed by the benefits, when properly planned.

“The risks involved must be tackled head-on by having open and frank discussions around different scenarios”

While ‘planning, planning, planning’ is therefore the overarching motto for a successful Tweetchat, ‘communication, communication, communication’ is the mantra that should be applied to keeping internal stakeholders on board. The risks involved must be tackled head-on by having open and frank discussions around different scenarios, how to manage them and who should be involved.

As Judith von Gordon, Head of Media and PR at Boehringer Ingelheim, succinctly puts it, “senior management is supportive of all our initiatives in social media provided we are aware of potential risks and benefits”, before adding that “the communication team sits closely together in one building with the legal team and senior management so short-term checking back is easily done”, accentuating the importance of regular communication.

Questions such as the following need to be asked early on in the process:

- What happens if someone mentions a specific product?
- What happens if someone mentions a side-effect?
- What happens if misleading medical information is presented?
- What happens if off-topic discussion is initiated about a company or its products?

Our experience has been that the incidence of such events is typically extremely low (in the four Tweetchats Boehringer Ingelheim ran in 2013, only one Tweet occurred with respect to the above questions) and rules for the Tweetchat should clearly state what is in- and out-of-bounds. But once the Tweetchat has started it is impossible to control what is Tweeted by others and, as the organizer, a pharmaceutical company has a responsibility to manage inappropriate Tweets.

By presenting a clear risk-management plan covering such scenarios and how they can be managed, plus ensuring the appropriate regulatory, legal and compliance individuals are involved in the Tweetchat, discussion can move onto the benefits of the activity and allow communications and brand personnel to get behind it.

3. Proactively reach out to participants ahead of the Tweetchat

Even with a highly relevant topic and internal support to proceed, raising sufficient awareness of the Tweetchat ahead of time is vital for achieving strong participation. Defining the appropriate audience for the Tweetchat should go so far as to identify specific organizations and individuals, who may or may not have already had engagement with your organization, who should be involved. A productive Tweetchat does not need hundreds of participants – in fact that would prove slightly overwhelming – but at least 20-30 active participants are needed

for a vibrant conversation and, with time in short-supply, ensuring the Tweetchat is in the diary of desired participants is therefore important. Quality over quantity is the focus here – involving a small number of relevant people is much more important than big numbers.

This can be done through a number of channels:

- Setting up an online ‘hub page’ for the Tweetchat which includes details on the theme, appropriate audience and date / time. Channels like Twubs can be good for this, where an image can be uploaded with these details, which can be linked to from other online promotion.⁴
- Registering the Tweetchat hashtag with appropriate tracking channels, such as the Healthcare Hashtag Project from Symplur, that allow users searching for Tweetchats on aligned topics to find it, can also allow for automated production of transcripts and analytics following the live event.⁵
- Utilizing other digital and social channels to engage with potential participants. For example, commencing open Twitter promotion well ahead of the live event and direct Tweeting to relevant followers. Using Twitter’s commercial offerings to help put Tweets in front of the right individuals can also be of great value, using aligned keywords, hashtags or targeting against suitable profiles.⁶
- Using a guest moderator who has an interest in the topic and a strong, relevant network themselves. This will not only stimulate greater participation, but also position the Tweetchat as more of an open and impartial discussion.
- Get offline too! If there are specific experts who you really want to get involved then pick up the phone to them. The online space can be very noisy sometimes, so a direct discussion is often the best way to explain what you are trying to achieve and why it would be good for them to be involved.

Unfortunately, we all face time challenges, so even with a highly relevant theme there is no guarantee that people will have the time to join. Therefore, as a general rule assume that if you want 20+ external participants in the Tweetchat you will have to reach out to 100+ relevant individuals or organizations.

Of course, the above steps are no guarantee of success and the specific nuances of how you get this process right can only really be learned by doing it. For Boehringer Ingelheim’s first Tweetchat we did not spend months and months researching the right process, but instead went for a smaller scale pilot and have been refining the process with each Tweetchat since. This really is the best way to secure further internal and external support. To quote Len Starnes, “the only way you can really convince people of the value is to do it”.

However, starting with a defined theme and audience, support from internal stakeholders aligned around a risk management plan and appropriate resource allocated to promoting the Tweetchat ([figure 2](#)) you will give yourself every chance of a successful outcome right from the start.

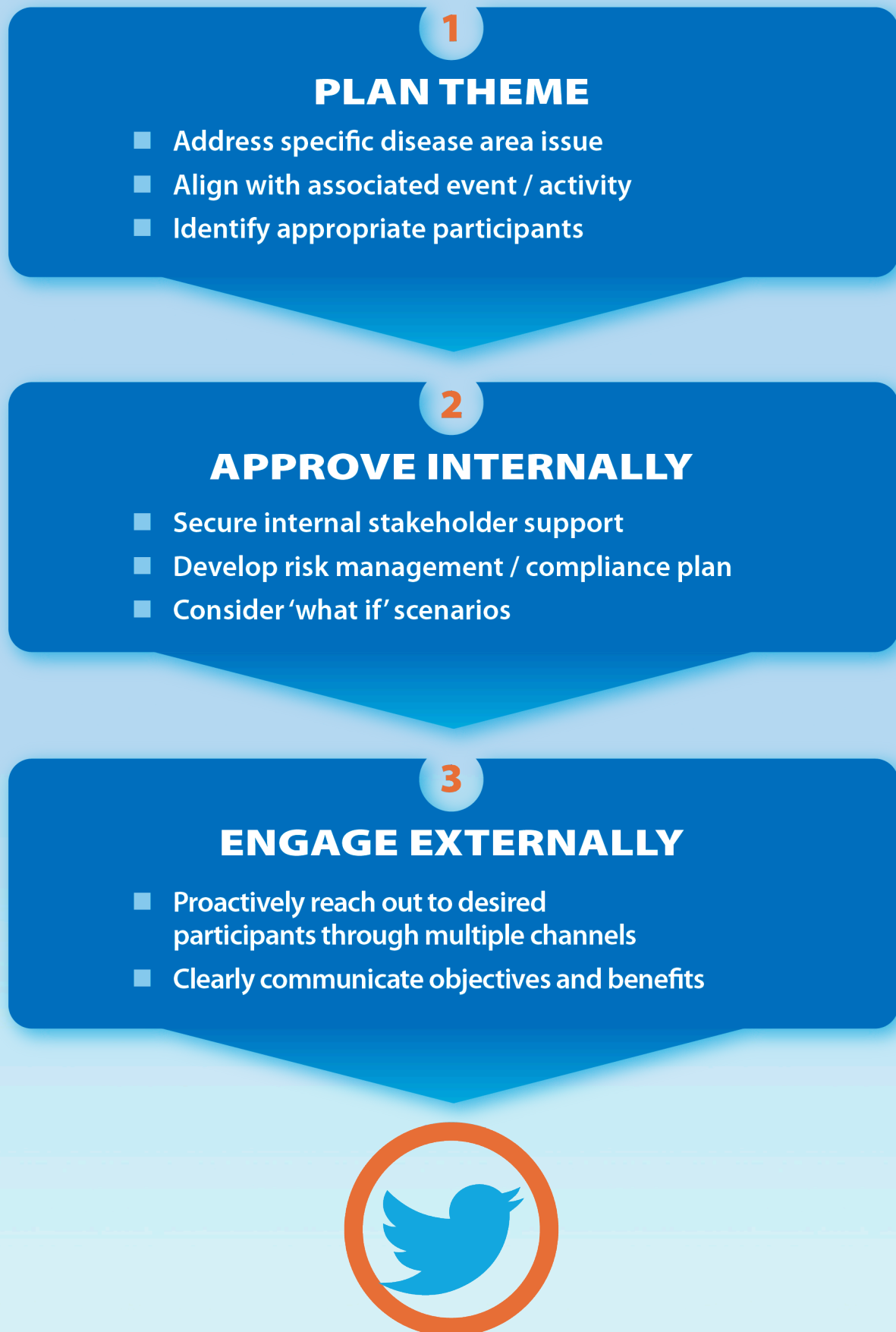


Figure 2: Conducting a productive Tweetchat requires three stages of careful planning well ahead of the event.

Getting it right on the day

“This is not, and should not, be a product-focused sales and marketing exercise”

With the right preparation, the day of the Tweetchat should be the most fun part, but it is important to know what to expect. Ahead of the designated start time, the internal participants should all be clear on their roles and, ideally, be in the same room or at least on the end of telephone to discuss directly any issues that arise. It is easy to forget that, unlike a webcast, you can and should talk among yourselves during the live event as the only thing anyone externally can ‘hear’ is what you Tweet!

At the designated start time, it is first of all important to outline the theme, reiterate the ground rules and do introductions, so that everyone is clear on what is being discussed and with whom. Incidentally, this should be reinforced at various points, as some people may join part-way through.

Secondly, do not expect a flood of Tweets the minute the first topic is presented. It usually takes a while for the conversation to warm up and most participants, especially if new to Tweetchats, will prefer to ‘lurk’ in the background to assess the conversation dynamics before getting involved. This means that having a few backup questions, or information designed to elicit a response in relation to the topic, is wise. Of course, the flip side is that Tweets may come in that are off-topic (in which case participants should be gently steered back on track) or raise compliance issues, which can be dealt with by the pre-prepared scenario planning.

Thirdly, and most importantly, be aware that the conversation cannot be rigidly controlled. You may have a plan to discuss three defined topics over the hour, each with a 20’ slot, but some participants may have their own little mini-Tweetchat on the first topic and discuss it for the full hour. If this happens, just keep going and let them carry on, as you can always review later and respond after the Tweetchat if something interesting comes up.

Finally, bear in mind that the value from a Tweetchat does not stop at the end of the hour’s live discussion. Analysing the statistics to see who was involved / who was reached is important and may trigger further downstream discussion, either on or off-line. In addition, you may wish to factor into your planning some post-Tweetchat engagement, such as production and publication of a transcript of proceedings (with automated tools available for this) and other easily digestible media such as infographics summing up the conversation.

Nor should the value be assessed, even over time, in simple financial return-on-investment (ROI) metrics. This is not, and should not, be a product-focused sales and marketing exercise. Instead, the scale of engagement is the key barometer of success, by opening the door for conversations that can enhance disease awareness and deliver invaluable feedback on how to make existing or new medicines more effective and better aligned to needs in the real-world. Len Starnes references the value of such real-time, participatory engagement as being “a breakthrough in increasing trust and that’s where the real benefit comes in”.

In addition, as our own Lars Groenke stated in reacting to his first experience of this medium, “the Tweetchat proved to be a great tool to learn about people’s needs and burning problems.

It was like a mini social media listening exercise, but with only the relevant people in scope. I can now see clear value for Twitter as a means to communicate with relevant audiences”.

The following case studies (also illustrated in the [infographic](#) on page 12), show the significant level of engagement that can be achieved through conducting Tweetchats, both during the hour of the discussion itself and in the build up phase.

#ChatAFib

The first Tweetchat we conducted was in May 2013, oriented around the topic of atrial fibrillation and using the hashtag #ChatAFib.⁷ While this was very much viewed as a pilot for this new way of engaging, there were defined objectives around:

- Raising awareness of ischaemic stroke protection.
- Driving social media conversation about treatment goals in atrial fibrillation, plus the broader topic of stroke prevention.

Despite being the first time any pharmaceutical company had attempted such engagement, there were 26 contributors during the hour-long Tweetchat and an estimated 129,800 Twitter accounts reached with the hashtag. Above all, the conversation was both positive and informative, which told us there was definitely something useful here!

#ChatAFib was therefore repeated on the 2nd September 2013 from 4-5pm CET, with the same objectives but delivered in both English and Dutch via dual hashtags and concurrent Tweetchats during the ESC Congress, to reach a far broader audience, specifically delivering:

- 35 active contributors during the hour, including healthcare providers, patient advocates, healthcare journalists and pharmaceutical company representatives.
- 206,166 Twitter accounts reached across both conversations.
- Significant engagement for Boehringer Ingelheim, with lots of retweeting (including by accounts such as the patient association @AtrialFibUK and medical experts @stopafib and @maasangela), plus 200+ new followers from the discussion.

Above all, both #ChatAFib Tweetchats delivered amazing insight into the challenges in the atrial fibrillation space and new connections with important stakeholders here. The second #ChatAFib was also used as a case study for the broader pharmaceutical industry around Twitter engagement by Len Starnes, as mentioned previously.³

#COPDchat

The first #COPDchat Tweetchat was conducted shortly after the second #ChatAFib one and was held during the ERS2013 Annual Congress from 5-6pm CET on the 9th September 2013. The focus for this conversation was to:⁸

*"#COPDchat
was used as the basis for
the first ever pharmaceutical
industry case study around
business use of Twitter"*

- Lead discussion on unmet need in chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), specifically with regards to bronchodilation.
- Engage in conversation with key COPD influencers and ensure Boehringer Ingelheim was seen as valuable partner for them.
- Enhance the level of broader Twitter engagement by Boehringer Ingelheim during the ERS 2013 Congress.

Building on the lessons from the earlier #ChatAFib discussions (and specifically the visibility from the latter one a week before), #COPDchat delivered an excellent level of engagement, including:

- 25 active participants during the hour long Tweetchat.
- Exposure to 134,100 Twitter accounts and over 1.5m impressions from the Tweets during the hour.
- Over 400 new followers for Boehringer Ingelheim and engagement with several notable Tweeters of relevance, including @EFA_patients (a patient advocacy group) and @COPDiary, a prominent asthma and COPD journalist.

In addition, #COPDchat was used as the basis for the first ever pharmaceutical industry case study around business use of Twitter published on the Twitter.com website itself, after Boehringer Ingelheim's Tweetchats came to the attention of Twitter via an article written by pharamphorum's CEO (and external moderator for the second #ChatAFib and #ChatNSCLC), Paul Tunnah.^{6,9}

#ChatNSCLC

Conducted on the 14th November 2013 from 5-6pm CET, #ChatNSCLC took a slightly different approach to the prior atrial fibrillation and COPD chats, focussing on the more niche area of non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) and, instead of being aligned to a medical congress, was conducted as more of a standalone activity within lung cancer awareness month.¹⁰

The focus here was to:

- Promote awareness among patient advocates, healthcare providers and the media that lung cancer was not just one disease, but broken down into different genetic subtypes.
- Provoke discussion around tailored treatments for NSCLC and the importance of testing, plus address the challenges around early diagnosis.
- Raise the profile for Boehringer Ingelheim as a pharmaceutical industry partner during lung cancer awareness month and with regards to the broader discussion about the disease.

Although addressing a more niche disease area and lacking the alignment to a specific event, the results were again impressive in terms of reach and engagement, including:

- 26 active participants during the hour long Tweetchat, which included over 200 Tweets.
- Excellent discussion around the genetic variation within NSCLC, associated need for more targeted, personalised treatments and the requirements for early diagnosis (plus barriers to this).
- Over 1.3m impressions from the #ChatNSCLC Tweets and engagement with important influencers such as @WalceOnlus2006 (Women Against Lung Cancer in Europe).

Once again, the combined benefits of better understanding of the disease area, enhanced connectivity with key influencers and increased profile for Boehringer Ingelheim in this area were observed, as for previous Tweetchats.

Another interesting, and unexpected, benefit of conducting Tweetchats has been the value derived by external participants in taking part. Feedback suggests that these activities have helped participating healthcare providers, disease associations and patient organizations to raise their own social media profile and be more confident to engage. For example, Professor Andrew McIvor was emphatic about his involvement in the first #COPDChat, closing off by Tweeting “thank you for joining us, we’re pioneers!” and garnering increased exposure for his Facebook page through taking part.¹¹

How Tweetchats can deliver for pharma



1. Define the theme, audience and alignment with associated groups / events

2. Secure internal support and participation

3. Proactively reach out to participants ahead of the Tweetchat

4. Conduct Tweetchat!

Understanding

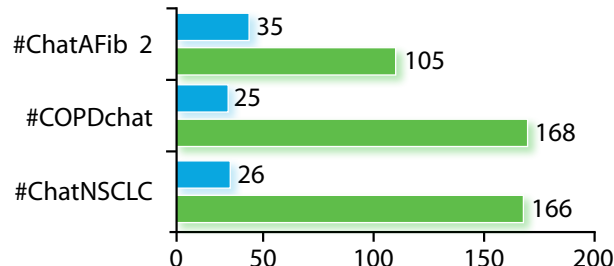
Connections

Visibility / trust

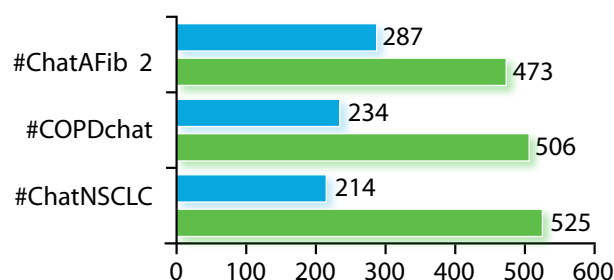
#ChatAFib 2	2nd Sep 2013	4-5pm CET
#COPDchat	9th Sep 2013	5-6pm CET
#ChatNSCLC	14th Nov 2013	5-6pm CET

■ Tweetchat hour ■ 1 week ahead of Tweetchat

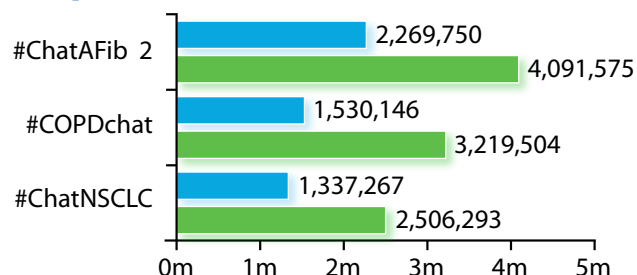
Participants



Tweets



Impressions



Looking to the future of Tweetchats

In simple terms, a Tweetchat is really just an extension of the Twitter network – a particular way to use this global channel, which itself is just one of a number of platforms allowing for social interaction online. Fundamentally, we are all social beings and the natural need to communicate goes back far beyond the rise of digital social media.

“We are all social beings and the natural need to communicate goes back far beyond the rise of digital social media”

So while we can see some clear trends emerging in how Tweetchats will develop as an engagement tool for the pharmaceutical industry, the principles behind these are true for many other online and offline interactive channels and hinge on the ability to conduct more inclusive communication activities, specifically:

- Acting as a facilitator of dialogue across multiple stakeholder groups involved in healthcare.
- Being open and transparent with external stakeholders around the intentions of, and mutual benefits from, communicating.
- Conducting more regular, aligned engagement, to allow feedback loops to be implemented and external stakeholder input to shape the discussion.
- Using communication channels more for listening and understanding than pushing messages out.

This is particularly critical for the pharmaceutical industry, given the complexity of healthcare stakeholders with which it must interact and the increasing need for greater collaboration across them all to find better solutions around disease prevention and management, which often go beyond drug intervention alone.

With this in mind, we see three factors driving the evolution of Tweetchats (also illustrated in [figure 3](#)):

1. Regular ‘series’ Tweetchats aligned with particular disease areas

The real value of online interactive engagement is the ability to implement rapid feedback cycles, whereby the topics discussed and questions raised in one Tweetchat can be used to ensure that subsequent engagement is more focused and relevant, addressing the areas which are identified as being important to all stakeholders, rather than being assumptive around the issues.

“The real value of online interactive engagement is the ability to implement rapid feedback cycles”

This means that while a one-off Tweetchat on a particular disease area holds tremendous value alone, even further value is unlocked from conducting regular Tweetchats, allowing ongoing engagement with all those with a vested interest in finding health solutions. Used in this way, Tweetchats can mimic the kind of valuable interaction that has historically been confined to

less frequent physical activities, such as large disease congresses or advisory board meetings, both of which present logistical challenges that Twitter can help to circumvent.

We are not saying that Tweetchats will replace such real-world discussion, as there is always tremendous value in face-to-face dialogue, but they can help fill in some of the gaps and keep the conversation going. Building on the initial Tweetchats we have already conducted in the atrial fibrillation, COPD and cancer areas, our plans certainly factor in more regular use of this channel to keep in touch with external stakeholders.

2. More collaborative Tweetchats

The Tweetchats Boehringer Ingelheim has conducted have mostly been aligned with relevant medical congresses or external disease awareness campaigns to help make them more inclusive and encourage participation. In addition, we have actively encouraged particular disease area experts to get involved, even providing support on how to use social media for them where their experience of Twitter is limited.

Moving forwards, the level of collaboration in Tweetchats will probably progress even further. Rather than being sponsored and run solely by a pharmaceutical company, perhaps there is value in having collaboratively run Tweetchats that involve disease associations, patient advocacy groups and pharmaceutical companies (or indeed any number of other relevant organizations)? In a sense, this could reflect the kind of collaborative working that is already seen between healthcare systems and pharma in tackling difficult or undermanaged disease areas, e.g. joint working to bring vaccines to emerging markets.

The good thing is that each party both brings and receives unique value from the collaboration. So while disease associations and patient advocacy groups have a tremendous need to keep on top of the real challenges in their therapeutic areas, as does the pharmaceutical industry, they may lack the resources and expertise to manage Tweetchats on their own. And such collaboration around Tweetchats is likely to lead to further beneficial partnership beyond the realms of Twitter.

Len Starnes also sees mutual value here and says, “some of the societies are considering having Tweetchats. Pharma could show them how their events could become more virtual, more open and participatory, to add value”.

So will we see, for example, a joint ASCO-pharma Tweetchat soon? Maybe not this year but there is definitely value in such activities in the future and Boehringer Ingelheim is certainly open to this kind of collaboration.

3. Integration of Tweetchats with other communications

As we have already explained, the principles behind successful Tweetchats are the same as those underlying successful communication through many other channels and reflect the fundamental human desire to share ideas and information. So as the pharmaceutical industry becomes more comfortable with applying these principles to Tweetchats – and other social media engagement – we can expect to see these activities become less siloed and more integrated.

Rather than having specialist teams lead on Tweetchats, which are managed outside other communication activities, they will become integrated into broader medical communications and research. The successful strategy of the future involves a single plan covering multiple activities, offline and online, within a disease area with the objective of increasing understanding and communicating key issues. We believe that Tweetchats will become a regular tool alongside medical congresses, bespoke meetings, advisory boards and all other activities designed to maintain open lines of communication. For example, we are already experimenting with integrating channels such as YouTube, Facebook and even Instagram in conducting medical communications.

***“We believe that
Tweetchats will become a
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advisory boards”***

Does this mean that the role of being a ‘social media expert’ within a pharmaceutical company will be confined to the history books? Probably not, at least in the short term, but these roles will become more about providing specialist advice to communications and brand teams, rather than leading on specific activities. This structural evolution around medical congress communication is certainly endorsed by Len Starnes, who says “in the future we need a new type of conference function, one that is much more holistic and aware of the digital virtual aspects as well as the physical aspects”.

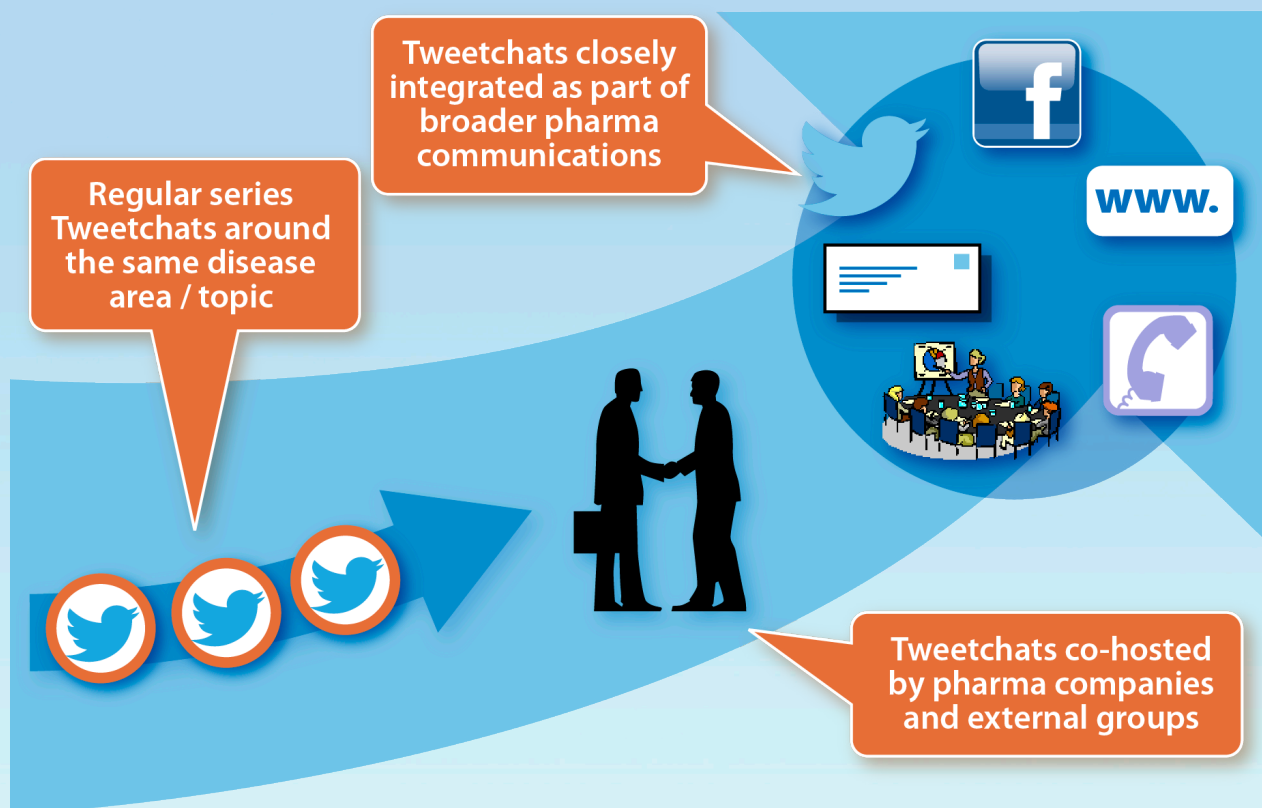


Figure 3: Over time, pharmaceutical company hosted Tweetchats will become more frequent, collaborative and tightly integrated with broader corporate and disease area communications.

Tweetchats reflect the evolution of the pharmaceutical industry

“Successful Tweetchats, as with any engagement, require extensive planning and communication”

In concluding, Tweetchats present a valuable opportunity for the pharmaceutical industry to engage with many different healthcare stakeholder groups on their own terms, delivering valuable feedback and disease area insight that can help direct future activities to develop better solutions.

Based on our experience, the following are the most important points for the pharmaceutical industry to bear in mind with respect to Tweetchats:

- Other healthcare organizations and individuals are already using Twitter, and Tweetchats, as a way of regularly communicating. If the pharmaceutical industry does not also join in it risks being less informed by being left out of the conversation.
- Successful Tweetchats, as with any engagement, require extensive planning and communication, both internally and externally, to ensure they deliver value while managing risk.
- The way in which the success of Tweetchats is measured cannot be in simple financial ROI metrics, but instead on the level of engagement, which can lead to closer collaboration and downstream health solutions that are of value to pharmaceutical companies, providers and patients.
- Tweetchats should not be seen as standalone activities, but instead need to be integrated with the way the pharmaceutical industry communicates via other channels, both at a corporate and disease area level.

When it comes to the latter point, we know there is still a long way to go before communication activities are truly coordinated over channels and time, but it is something we aspire to. Judith von Gordon sums it up neatly, stating that, “according to the strategic goals of our communication we will not only use Twitter and Tweetchats but we will try to play the topic over the full digital scope with photos on Instagram, videos on Youtube and, if legally possible, content on Facebook”.

We have derived clear value from our Tweetchat activities in listening to other organizations and individuals that share our common interest in addressing areas of unmet need for patients. In addition, these online conversations have helped to build trust and conduct ‘virtual handshakes’ that have opened the door for further dialogue.

The lessons learned from doing Tweetchats have also helped Boehringer Ingelheim to evolve internally, triggering new ways of communicating key issues and understanding the areas in which we operate, which in turn will help us become more efficient at developing novel solutions. Now, as with our very first Tweetchat, we are constantly learning and trying new approaches, in line with our motto of ‘value through innovation’.

Ultimately, we believe that a pharmaceutical industry that effectively delivers innovative health solutions is best driven by one that is innovative in the way it engages.

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About the authors



The Corporate Social Media Team at Boehringer Ingelheim comprises of [Patricia Alves](#) and [Jaclyn Fonteyne](#). Between them, they spearhead the planning and implementation of Boehringer Ingelheim's social media activities across the global organisation, working with internal teams across all of its different therapeutic areas and liaising closely with communications, marketing, medical and legal.



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