



Opinion:

The CRM Disruption can Reshape HCP Engagement. Is Pharma Ready?

By Benedikt Niepötter, Global Head Digital Customer Engagement Consulting, Arcondis

Despite years of striving for customer-centricity and promoting omnichannel strategies, the pharma industry has made little progress. While efforts have been made to integrate patient and healthcare provider needs into their strategies, many companies still struggle to deliver seamless, personalised experiences across channels. What barriers continue to hold the industry back, and how can they be overcome?

I was recently approached by a client. Like so many other pharma companies, they are rethinking their CRM platform, prompted by Veeva's announcement to migrate from Salesforce technology to its proprietary platform.¹ At the same time, Salesforce is launching the Life Science Cloud² to win over Veeva's clients, who account for an astonishing market share of over 80% in the industry.³

Our customer had already begun the discussions about which platform to go with, but the bigger question remained untouched: "Will Customer Engagement in 5-10 years look similar to today?" Or, more importantly, "Can we use this disruption to truly innovate how we engage with HCPs and generate insights improving strategies?"

"For years, the pharma industry has attempted to become customer-centric, pushing for omnichannel approaches. However, despite these efforts, the industry hasn't come very far."

In fact, a recent survey across 82 pharma leaders showed that 77% see the pharma omnichannel engagement models as less effective than other B2B industries.⁴

The separation between Veeva and Salesforce could be the wake-up call that pharma needs to take omnichannel engagement seriously. But that will only happen if companies elevate the CRM discussion from a technical decision to a broader question: "Who in our organisation interacts with HCPs, and how can we ensure that future processes are truly customer centric and data-driven?"

So, how can Pharma use this opportunity?

THREE STEPS FOR PHARMA TO INNOVATE ENGAGEMENT WITH HCPS

1. DEFINE YOUR VISION

Too often, CRM projects focus on meeting today's needs. But if you don't plan for the future, you risk falling behind in an evolving market. Whether you migrate to Salesforce or stay with Veeva, the integration of a new CRM will be a multi-year project. Use this moment to bring together all functions that interact with HCPs—whether in medical, sales, marketing, or clinical—and define your future needs. How will the "customer" evolve in 5, 10, or even 15 years and what will the engagement with them look like?

2. LEARN FROM THE PAST / DISCOVER OPPORTUNITIES

Historically, CRM was seen mainly as a tool for sales teams in the field. However, CRMs should serve as the center of your omnichannel engagement. It should be a system that connects various teams—from publications and medical information to marketing and sales. Imagine how disjointed an HCP's experience can feel when they're treated as a stranger by each department they interact with. This not only leads to frustration but also undermines your goal of providing better medical care. A truly integrated CRM can contribute to higher customer satisfaction and improved healthcare outcomes by using HCP insights to improve education or to close evidence gaps.

3. FOCUS ON PROCESS

The platform you choose matters, but what matters more is the processes you build around it and the people living it. As the saying goes, “a fool with a tool is still a fool.” Use the time during your CRM migration to align the change management strategy and processes across clinical research, medical, and commercial teams, ensuring that every HCP interaction is connected and unified within your CRM. Only then can your new CRM serve as more than a tool — it becomes the foundation for your data-driven engagement strategy.

“So, you may have already started your CRM migration project, but do you know what CRM you’ll need in 2030?”

This moment is more than a simple choice between Veeva and Salesforce. It’s a chance to redefine your future approach to HCP engagement. If you’re only thinking about choosing between two similar platforms, you’re missing the point. This is your opportunity to innovate, ensure a seamless experience for HCPs, and build a system that’s ready to meet your customers and your own needs well beyond 2030.

References

1. <https://www.veeva.com/resources/veeva-unveils-vault-crm-next-generation-of-crm-for-life-sciences/>
2. <https://www.salesforce.com/news/stories/life-sciences-cloud-news/>, <https://www.salesforce.com/news/press-releases/2024/04/08/iqvia-and-salesforce-expand-global-partnership-to-accelerate-the-development-of-life-sciences-cloud/>
3. <https://www2.everestgrp.com/reportaction/EGR-2021-46-R-4439/Marketing>
4. <https://www.across.health/publication/2024-maturometer>

About the author



Benedikt Niepötter

Global Head Digital Customer Engagement Consulting, Arcondis

benedikt.niepoetter@arcondis.com

+41 61 717 82 00

Benedikt Niepötter is the Global Head, Digital Customer Engagement Consulting for Arcondis. He is responsible for leading the specialised consulting group’s focus on improving the engagement of pharma clients with HCPs, patients and other external stakeholders. With a PhD in Chemistry/ Data Science and 10 years’ experience in digitalisation of life sciences, he combines extensive knowledge in digital innovation techniques with a deep understanding of the special needs of pharma engagement.

About Arcondis

Arcondis is a global professional services company exclusively focused on the life sciences and healthcare sector. Owned by a Foundation and committed to healthcare improvement, we accelerate value creation for our clients in R&D, Manufacturing & Supply Chain, Marketing, Sales & Services, to ultimately benefit patients.

Our solutions and services include Digitalisation, Data, IT & Infrastructure; Product Lifecycle Management; Industry Compliance & Managed Services and People & Culture. As an independent solutions and Managed Service provider, we have the flexibility to prioritise our clients' best interests without being constrained by exclusive partnerships. We follow an outcomes-based approach – from strategy to hands-on delivery and beyond.

With a well-established reputation built over two decades, we have earned the trust of leading companies in Pharma, Med-Tech, Healthcare and Start-ups. Headquartered in Switzerland, we employ more than 250 specialists and professionals, with offices in North America, Europe and APAC.

We make healthcare better, globally!

Visit our website to
learn more about us

