

# Optimizing Product Commercialization in Today's IDN Environment

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In recent years, Integrated Delivery Networks (IDNs) have risen in prominence across the healthcare landscape, and today, nearly 70% of all physicians in the U.S. are employed by a hospital, health system or other corporate entity – a significant increase from less than 50% a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> IDNs bring several inherent advantages to healthcare, including the opportunity for:

- Improved collaboration among physicians across different therapeutic specialties
- Improved operational efficiencies through economies of scale and reduced administrative costs
- Stronger purchasing power and contract-negotiation clout
- Improved patient care and clinical outcomes
- Streamlined data integration related to health information technology (HIT) and electronic health records (EHRs)
- Reduced overall healthcare expenditures due to streamlined care coordination

Meanwhile, IDNs often develop and control their own drug formularies and centralize their purchasing efforts, guided by not only efficacy and safety data, but also considerations related to cost-effectiveness, population health priorities and contractual agreements. Similarly, IDNs often develop and implement standardized clinical pathways and treatment protocols that incorporate recommendations for therapies based on established clinical guidelines, efficacy data and cost considerations.

As a result, reliance on traditional field teams to call on prescribers or television to influence patients is no longer an effective launch strategy. While these elements are still relevant in the overall launch and commercialization strategy, today's commercialization strategies require a multifaceted approach, one that acknowledges the various opportunities and challenges associated with the IDN model.

Today, thanks to the IDN's direct role in establishing formularies and treatment protocols, the decision-making process is more complex and involves stakeholders beyond prescribers and the point of care. Field deployment teams must engage with not only prescribers, but also a diverse range of stakeholders within the IDN systems. This engagement requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond brand promotion. Prescribers still need to be aware of the full safety and efficacy profile of nearly 50 new medications that are being introduced every year, as well as understand how existing therapies compare to competitor therapies within the same therapeutic space. Field teams must also assist stakeholders in navigating their own IDN health systems to support informed decisions and improvements in care. By connecting with prescribers and other stakeholders through all available channels, field teams can ensure confidence in their knowledge of the full range of therapy options and provide data-driven insights to advocate for particular therapies considered by IDN formulary decision-makers.

These factors have created more challenges for pharma brand teams in terms of what they must do to formulate and execute the most effective strategy.



## Combine a top-down and bottom-up approach

In addition to a top-down and bottom-up approach, manufacturers must first understand which IDNs to prioritize and characterize how they operate and who is involved in decision-making. Manufacturers also need to design a bespoke customer engagement model (e.g., new roles, different approaches to engagement, different initiatives to focus on for each IDN).

Today, the path to success for pharma brand teams must involve a synchronized two-pronged approach:



**Top-down outreach** — Deliver data-driven information that showcases the full value proposition of the therapy to key executive decision-makers and disease-specific key opinion leaders (KOLs) within the IDN



**Bottom-up outreach** — Deploy a right-sized field team that delivers targeted, value-added messaging directly to physicians and other prescribers; such messaging should clearly showcase the full range of clinical and financial attributes (and competitive advantages) of the therapy to address the needs of both the physician and the institution

Several actionable recommendations are discussed below for how brand teams can expand their strategy to reach these two essential stakeholder groups.

**Outreach to IDN decision-makers:** For certain disease states, IDNs have more influence on decision-making than independent physician practices, thereby shaping which therapies physicians can prescribe at the point of care. While one-to-one engagement between sales reps and physicians is still essential, the newer launch and commercialization strategy must incorporate efforts to engage meaningfully with key IDN decision-makers as well.

While decision-makers within the IDN are – of course – focused on patient care and clinical outcomes, the IDN is also committed to initiatives that can help to reduce overall healthcare expenditures. As such, outreach aimed at clinical and administrative decision-makers within the IDN must provide data-driven information that illustrates how access and adherence to the therapy can provide overall cost savings for the institution.

Keep in mind that the goal is not to merely promote the drug; rather, it's to educate the pivotal IDN decision-makers and KOLs on the demonstrable advantages the therapy can provide – for both the patient and the healthcare system overall.

Real-world evidence (RWE) that is developed over time from studies of real-world data (RWD) plays an important role. Wherever possible, the IDN engagement team should use RWE studies to demonstrate to IDN stakeholders how the drug:

- Optimizes patient care and improves clinical outcomes
- Affects healthcare expenditures
- Stacks up against other therapy options in the same therapeutic space (using comparative effectiveness studies, where available)

The effort to build trusted relationships within the IDN framework should begin at least one year prior to launch. The initial effort should focus on understanding the following:

- The internal process for evaluating and approving drugs with within the formulary system
- The specific strategic objectives designated for the health system
- The patient populations they serve
- The specific diseases they manage
- The patient outcomes they are trying to achieve at lower costs

Additionally, the IDN engagement team should seek to identify the KOLs within each therapeutic area.

Laying the groundwork early will help the brand team to deliver targeted insights that will be most effective. The goal is to create and deliver a data-driven narrative that will resonate across the IDN. For instance, when RWE insights demonstrate how improved outcomes associated with a given therapy can reduce hospitalizations and medical interventions, the IDN will be more compelled to ensure access to that medication.

**Outreach to prescribers:** For field deployment teams, gaining access to prescribers is already challenging, as physicians are busier than ever and



have less bandwidth for meeting with pharma sales reps. However, as the underlying science associated with today's sophisticated and costly therapies – such as novel treatments for oncology, cell and gene therapies, and other complex biologic specialty therapies – continues to advance, the role of field teams and related multichannel outreach from the brand are more important than ever. The underlying goals are to educate physicians about the therapy and to help them to understand which ones provide a comparative advantage (through data-driven RWE studies) over other options in the therapeutic space.

Meanwhile, it is incumbent on the field sales reps to know which physicians in their territory operate within each IDN and to understand how those IDNs function. The ability for field reps to inform and educate individual physicians about the full clinical and economic value proposition of the drug has an added benefit: It puts that physician in a better position to help advocate for inclusion of the breakthrough or lifesaving medication on the IDN's formulary so that patients are not denied access to it.

## Getting Started

Today, as brand teams plan their multifaceted launch and commercialization strategies, they should:

- Synchronize a two-pronged approach with top-down, bottom-up outreach to align with the product's compelling value proposition
- Understand the unique buying process of each IDN and independent physician practices
- Understand who the key stakeholders are in any given IDN and the hierarchy of decision-making related to formulary development
- Structure the data-driven messaging in ways that directly address the IDN's key clinical and business objectives
- Design a field deployment model that can be adjusted for different IDN structures

In short, pharma needs to find a way to stand out and bring unique collaboration that goes above brand to align to the IDN's most strategic priorities.

## Closing Thoughts

As the IDN model has drastically reshaped the healthcare landscape in recent years, pharma/life sciences brand teams must continue to evolve in terms of how they develop the best engagement strategy to ensure access to their lifesaving medications, using the top-down, bottom-up strategy discussed here.

One hidden upside of the IDN model is that it can provide economies of scale to the brand team. Once a drug has been approved on an IDN formulary, hundreds of prescribers operating under the same IDN umbrella can be educated in a systematic way, and patients under their care will have access to the medication at the point of care.

Pursuing an impactful IDN engagement strategy that yields results requires a team of experts across the entire commercialization spectrum. Brand teams should engage with knowledgeable partners that have demonstrated experience, infrastructure and established relationships with IDNs. Consider selecting a partner that has launched complex pharma/life sciences products and has a vested interest in maintaining those relationships. The goal is to effectively communicate how a new treatment should fit within the IDN formulary and what value it brings to patients and to the institution. Otherwise, it will be costly and time-consuming to build your own team from scratch.

At EVERSANA, our end-to-end commercialization model seamlessly integrates Market Research and Insights, Field Deployment, HEOR, Value and Evidence, and Professional Services, creating a robust and comprehensive IDN engagement strategy. This unique and cohesive approach empowers drug manufacturers to navigate the complexities of the market with precision, ensuring a successful product launch and sustained impact on the healthcare industry.

1 <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/providers/more-and-more-physicians-are-working-under-hospitals-corporate-entities-report-finds>



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