Launch Excellence Playbook: What 2024 Taught Us and How to Adapt for 2025

Unlocking AI-driven insights for smarter, faster market readiness

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Introduction

If you want to understand the pharmaceutical industry – the market opportunities, the challenges, and the strategic thinking required to prepare a new therapy for launch – then you need to speak to the people on the front lines. In October of 2024, Within3 and Impatient Health cohosted two strategy-based workshops with leading pharma representatives from around the world. Our Vienna workshop convened 10 pharma leaders alongside experts from both Within3 and Impatient Health, while in London, our internal thought leaders were joined by 15 leading pharma representatives.

Both of these workshops asked the same questions: How do pharma teams prepare a new therapy for launch? How do they develop their launch strategies, and what challenges do they encounter along the way? And finally, how can AI-powered insights reporting support these strategies, and help pharma teams accelerate market readiness?

Let's examine the outcomes of these two workshops, and consider what we can glean from them.

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The Premise: A simulated drug launch environment

In each workshop, we proposed a simulated drug launch environment that would mirror the real-world challenges and opportunities faced by pharma companies looking to bring a new therapy to market.

For the purpose of these workshops, our imaginary product X was Gasterol – a revolutionary oral therapy for IBS and Crohn's Disease. It's a drug with true blockbuster potential: an enormous global market, positive indications from both customers and patients, and strong clinical trial results. But what interested us was how our participants would prepare to take such a drug to market. What would their strategies look like? How would they ensure agility, and overcome the challenges every new therapy inevitably faces? How would their approaches differ, and what commonalities would emerge?

The answers to these questions would provide real insights into the 2024 pharmaceutical market landscape.

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL ROADBLOCKS

"In our view, many factors contributing to missing [launch] expectations can be mitigated with meticulous planning, innovative approaches to market intelligence and customer engagement, and disciplined execution." - *DELOITTE*

In our London workshop, we asked participants to identify potential roadblocks that might stand in the way of Gasterol's successful entry into the market. Then, we got them to sort these roadblocks by priority: High; medium; low; or not a priority.

Some high-priority roadblocks, such as ensuring alignment between medical and commercial strategies, were expected. "This doesn't surprise me at all," says Sylke Anderson, Senior Director, Client Strategy Lead at Within3. "In most pharmaceutical companies, medical and commercial are extremely siloed. Medical affairs is a little more data-driven, patient-centric, and educational-based, whereas the goal of commercial is to sell. A cultural disconnect is a good way of putting it."

However, one compelling and more unexpected insight to emerge from our sessions was that attendees considered the identification and understanding of patient preferences to be a low priority. Participants suggested that such analysis would be difficult to perform at this stage of launch, and as Gasterol is an oral therapy, it's likely to have broad patient appeal anyway.

Identifying and prioritizing roadblocks such as these is crucial to inform launch strategy, and ensure potential challenges can be overcome with the minimum disruption.

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"Launch excellence requires optimal alignment of launch strategy and execution to drive efficiency; effectiveness; compliance; consistency and best practices across countries, therapeutic areas, and management; all while allowing flexibility to accommodate market changes. It is critical that a launch strategy be in place, is understood, accepted, and applied throughout the organization to ensure clarity of the steps to be taken."

– *MEDICAL AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY*

Each workshop ran a session focused on developing launch strategies for Gasterol, with participants breaking into groups to develop their own, separate approaches. And while each group's strategy was unique, there were a number of recurring themes from which we can extrapolate launch best practices:
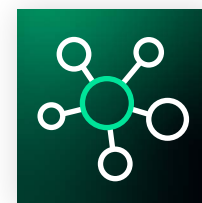
Creating a medical outreach narrative:
Groups from both the Vienna and London workshops focused on owning the Gasterol narrative – emphasizing the importance of content creation and marketing. Clarity and consistency were key for this strategic element, as were detailed congress planning and the effective communication of patient stories. "It's medical affairs that creates the narrative," says Sylke Anderson. "Then, they ensure the commercial teams are armed with the data they need to perpetuate that narrative".
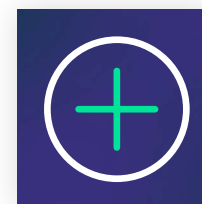
Prioritizing patient centricity:
Patient centricity formed a large part of many groups' medical strategies, with participants highlighting the importance of under-standing existing treatment barriers and assessing patient preferences. Other groups discussed developing patient personas, and mapping and optimizing the patient journey.

"You own a medical narrative by making sure that it's grounded, and based on actual data. It needs to be data-driven, but it also needs to resonate. The data should be grounded in what the HCP, patient, and caregiver communities care about."

- Sylke Anderson, Senior Director, Client Strategy Lead, Within3

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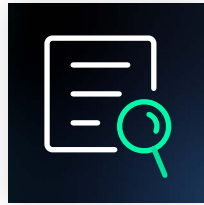
Evidence-based KOL engagement:
Multiple teams considered how to take an evidence-based approach to key opinion leader (KOL) engagement strategies. These teams focused on developing evidence-based communications to fill gaps in scientific knowledge – supporting KOLs' understanding of Gasterol's unique benefits. One team even suggested building a commercial playbook to further inform and support the sales force.
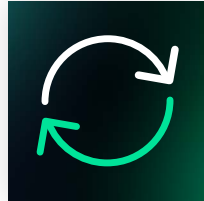
Omnichannel market outreach:
Several teams also strategized an omnichannel approach to marketing and sales – enhancing accessibility through broader outreach.

The fact that there was such overlap between teams and even across the two workshops suggests clear best practices to follow for launch success – but it isn't all plain sailing. Our pharma experts pointed out how challenging it can be to align commercial and medical teams – particularly when multiple data sources and conflicting objectives are involved. And while they agree that detailed data and insights can guide decision-making and ensure stakeholder engagement, fragmented data systems and departmental silos mean integrating new data tools – such as insights reporting technologies – can prove frustratingly difficult.

"Medical and commercial teams are very siloed – not only in the way that they operate, but also in the tools that they use," explains Sylke. "Plus, the amount of training required – especially in big pharma – can sometimes be a real hurdle when it comes to incorporating new technology."

> "Commercializing a drug is not an easy task. In fact, nearly two-thirds of launches fail to meet expectations."
>
> *– JIM LANG, CEO, EVERSANA, VIA PHARMAVOICE*

To quote Robert Burns, "the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry." As such, pharma teams understand that their medical and commercial strategies must be adaptable enough to adjust for unexpected challenges and find alternative paths to success.

The next phase of our London and Vienna workshops stress-tested participants' strategies with a 'breaking news' section, which saw the teams receive randomly-selected cards representing unforeseen market changes: Competitor announcements, changing HCP sentiments, safety concerns, etc. How could their strategies be adapted to respond to these market forces?

Interestingly, there was almost universal alignment in how these challenges were approached across teams and between both workshops – suggesting a clear industry best practice in how strategies can be adapted and refined:
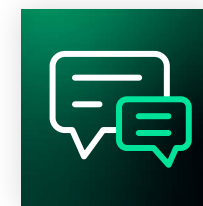
Releasing testimonials:
Two teams suggested that patient testimonials could be used to strengthen patient engagement and reposition the Gasterol narrative in response to market changes.

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Engaging patient influencers:

Two teams also suggested engaging patient influencers to improve awareness of the new therapy, and to increase outreach through social media. Engaging digital opinion leaders (DOLs) such as these patient influencers can help commercial teams to reach new audiences within specific therapeutic areas.
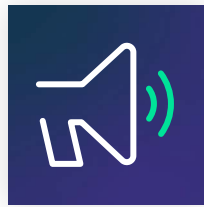
Pivoting commercial messaging:

Unsurprisingly, a number of teams suggested that they would adjust their commercial messaging in light of any unexpected market changes – training sales teams on the patient-centric benefits of the drug.
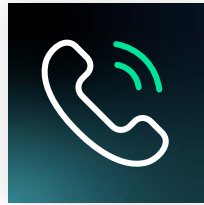
Focusing on telemedicine:

Several teams planned to focus on telemedicine as a means of delivering accessible treatment, and to enhance the patient experience in response to new market challenges.

Focusing on the oral administration benefits to younger demographics

Finally, at least two teams decided to pivot their strategies to focus on how Gasterol's oral administration would benefit younger demographics. While this strategy is more specific to this particular launch example, it does demonstrate how a thorough understanding of patients and customers can present strategic opportunities to commercial and medical teams.

"Using social listening, we can surface some of those conversations that are coming out of the patients and advocacy groups," Sylke explains. "Identifying the people that are talking in a social realm, and engaging the experts and patient advocates outside of the social realm, is critical – and the Within3 platform really facilitates that."

We found it fascinating how closely aligned our participants were in how they adapted to challenges – across all teams and both workshops. And while all participants agreed that adaptability is critical when preparing a launch strategy, aligning departments under a single, unified narrative and with clear decision-making responsibilities was considered to be just as important – particularly when preparing to adopt and implement new AI-powered tools.

STEP 4: INTEGRATING AI TOOLS

"Without an AI insights reporting solution, organizations are flying blind in terms of their medical and commercial strategies, and whether they're impacting the market in a positive way."

– LANCE HILL, CEO, WITHIN3

Both workshops included a detailed discussion of how AI-powered insights reporting tools can break through data silos and unify diverse data sources – including field reports, social listening data, patient advocacy data, and more. These tools are capable of supporting launch strategies with real-time data analysis; by processing data through strategic frameworks to provide actionable insights; by 'weighting' data sources based on strategic relevance; and by enhancing stakeholder communication through digestible, on-topic outputs.

AI also helps teams to reliably measure the evolution of their strategies by providing detailed metrics that offer a true indication of market influence – going far beyond basic activity metrics like publication data or in-person visits. Our workshops discussed the technology's enormous potential for life science – saving time and human effort by automating data harmonization, and allowing teams to focus on strategy development. The future of AI isn't just about gathering data – it's about unlocking its potential.

The message from participants

While the promise of AI-powered insights technologies may be immense, our workshop participants had a message for technology companies. Ease of integration is a major priority for these pharma leaders – AI tools need to offer seamless integration with CRM systems and other existing technologies to ensure high levels of user engagement. They're also interested in AI tools that go beyond mere automation, and are capable of surfacing subtle trends and insights that human analysis might overlook.

"What makes Within3's offering different is it's easy," Sylke explains. "It's intuitive, and we have the client success team to support you through it. It also negates the need for multiple platforms, so instead of having to learn a handful of different tools, you've just got one."

STEP 5: REFINING STRATEGIES BASED ON INSIGHTS

"Effective launch leaders are adept at using both quantitative data and qualitative insights to shape their strategic decisions. They communicate with a range of stakeholders, ask thoughtful questions, and listen carefully to the answers."– MCKINSEY

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The penultimate step for our workshop participants was to roleplay how AI insights could help them further refine their launch strategies with a focus on measurable outcomes. Our participants defined various KPIs that could help them measure the performance and impact of their strategies, and identify where refinements could be made.

As in previous sessions, there was significant alignment across groups and between both workshops on the best metrics to track success:

Adherence:
Groups recognized that adherence metrics could help them determine the effectiveness of their educational programs in minimizing the patient burden. Several groups identified digital portal engagement and program reach as significant KPIs here.

Social engagement:
One group in each workshop flagged social media engagement and telemedicine adoption as two important metrics to assess the effectiveness of their strategies, and to track patient retention and satisfaction.

Content effectiveness:
Two teams focused on content effectiveness metrics, helping them assess market readiness, and measure the reach of their safety communications strategy.

All participants recognized that the value of AI tools lay in actionable insights – and that these insights must be measurable via quantifiable success metrics. They also highlighted the value of AI insights reporting tools in harmonizing multiple, diverse data sources to provide clear, effective data analytics. To these pharma experts, the importance of AI insights is clear.

STEP 6: ENTERING THE SHARK TANK

The final phase of these workshops saw our pharma experts stress test their launch strategies in the 'Shark Tank' – a series of pitch presentations to other attendees and thought leaders from both Within3 and Impatient Health. Sharing their work among a jury of their peers allowed our experts to assess their launch strategies in the cold light of day, and explore how AI-driven insights can support strategic planning pre-, during, and post-launch.

Key takeaways:

1   Teams recognized how AI insights and intelligence can help to sustain momentum post-launch, providing actionable insights on strategy engagement and effectiveness.

2   Participants re-emphasized the need for maintaining a unified narrative across all departments for consistency and clarity.

3   The pharma experts saw value in combining measurable, quantitative metrics with qualitative success stories that demonstrate the tangible impact of the product.

4   Participants underlined how organizations need a clear process for translating insights into actionable strategies that align with business objectives.

5   Teams recognized the importance of adaptability, patient-centric communications strategies, and innovative solutions to data challenges.

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Concluding thoughts

> "One-third of today's drug launches miss expectations."- *DELOITTE*

Even after the careful winnowing of the clinical trial process, drug launches are still unpredictable and far from guaranteed to succeed. However, our Within3 and Impatient Health workshops have shown how pharma experts can rely on tried-and-tested methodologies to identify potential roadblocks, develop effective strategies, adapt to any challenges they encounter and then pivot their strategies based on the real-world insights provided by tools such as Within3's Insights Management Platform.

"Ultimately, all launch strategies take a similar path," adds Sylke. "We always need to understand what the unmet needs are – not only from an HCP perspective, but also from a patient perspective. We need to appeal to that with strong data."

"The Within3 platform provides access to real-time data and the resulting insights at your fingertips. It's automated, to a near-instantaneous process. You have the ability to pivot your narrative, to understand immediate responses to things that are happening in the market, how the market is responding to those changes, and what your potential action should be."

Our generative AI-powered insights solution provides real-time insight reports informed by the client's strategy – helping to take the uncertainty out of the launch process. We aggregate diverse, siloed data sources to help you better understand and refine your medical and commercial strategies – leading to better launch outcomes. And, we save you countless hours processing, understanding, and communicating insights across your organization.

Optimize your launch strategies with the Within3 Insights Management Platform. Book a demo today.

ABOUT WITHIN3

Within3 empowers life science organizations to make smarter, faster decisions by delivering actionable, real-time insights from diverse sources like field data, social listening, KOLs, and patient engagement. Trusted by all 20 of the top 20 pharmaceutical companies, our proprietary, life science-trained AI ensures our customers deeply understand their markets, connect with the right audiences, and drive better product development and launch outcomes. To learn more about the insights management platform or to request a demo, visit www.within3.com.

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