

# ENGAGEMENT PLANNING IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL OPINION LEADERS

# OPINION LEADERS ARE CRUCIAL

That's been the consensus for as long as healthcare marketing has existed. But when it comes to engaging and identifying the external experts you need to deliver your brand message, there might be some experts you're overlooking.

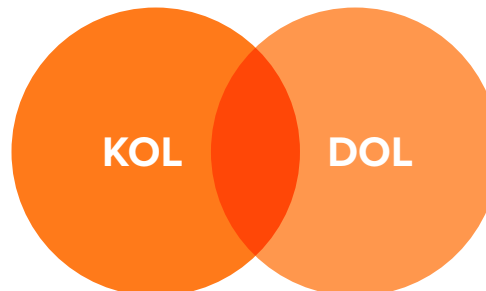
Our traditional Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) are top researchers, academics, and indispensable experts who advise a brand and speak on its behalf through engagements like advisory boards, congresses, and speaker programs. However, only around 20% of KOLs have a social media presence.

## That's where Digital Opinion Leaders (DOLs) come into the picture.

Masters of scientific communication in the digital space, DOLs are HCPs who may have large followings on social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube. They may play the role of content creator, engager, or amplifier. As more HCPs use social networks in their professional lives, the DOL is important due to their unique voice and ability to create, engage, and amplify messages on these platforms.

DOLs can be KOLs, and vice versa, but they don't have to be. Many of the DOLs we see today are committed, tech-savvy HCPs who have synthesized the latest medical literature and provide keen insights into, and share important information about, new therapies and disease states.

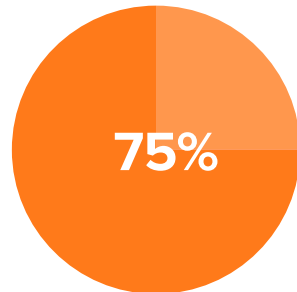
There is overlap between KOLs and DOLs, but each group is unique.



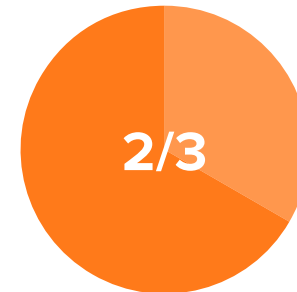
# WHY SHOULD MY BRAND ENGAGE WITH DOLs?

**DOLs can deliver content in a way that meets the needs and channel preferences of HCPs.**

While DOLs have grown in prominence and influence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, pharma is just beginning to consider how to optimize their DOL relationships. In the following pages are some tips on how to expand your peer-to-peer strategy to incorporate DOLs.



**By 2025, 75% of the global workforce will be digital natives: Millennials who have not only grown up with social media, but bring it into their professional lives<sup>1</sup>**

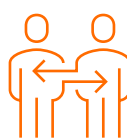


**Two-thirds of physicians spend at least one hour a day on social media with the average daily use of two hours and 22 minutes<sup>2</sup>**

STEP ONE:  
**UNCOVER  
 THE RIGHT  
 EXPERT**



Before engagement begins, work with your analytics partner to identify the right DOL for your brand using a variety of metrics from therapeutic area, to level of expertise, to follower count on various social media sites



Know that data alone is not sufficient; you need to partner with an agency who understands the brand strategy and uses that to inform recommendations



Additionally, try to keep an open mind—you may be surprised by who is a good DOL for your brand; or you may even find that one of your KOLs has a strong social presence that you didn't know about!

## STEP TWO: **CONSIDER THE ENGAGEMENT APPROACH**

### **STRUCTURED ENGAGEMENT**

In this approach, an agency partner will work with DOLs as advisors to help craft content on various platforms. It is crucial that the agency partner knows exactly what you're trying to accomplish with each DOL engagement.

- Who are you trying to reach?
- What actions do you expect users to take when they encounter your content?

Answering these questions will help pharma marketers get the most out of their structured DOL relationships.

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### **ORGANIC ENGAGEMENT**

In this arrangement, pharma creates an organic relationship with a DOL who then proactively communicates updates, in their own words, based on what they learn from pharma. This comes with advantages.

- Any activity that arises from an organic engagement effort will be marked by authenticity
- The activity's reach will be unrestricted by most compliance guidelines as you don't have to contract or pay the DOL for the engagement
- However, this method can be unreliable, with infrequent posts and a lack of control over what and how the DOL shares the content

STEP THREE:  
**ALIGN  
 THE DOL's  
 STRENGTHS  
 WITH YOUR  
 STRATEGY**

Being both content creators and sharers, DOLs understand social currency and can provide insight into the most viable/engaging content to accomplish your strategic objectives.

When engagement planning, pharma companies and their agency partners need to keep in mind that each DOL has his or her own unique communication style and audience. Consider the opportunity to “map” your brand’s needs to the DOLs strengths and find opportunities for synergy between the two.

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**HOW DOLs CAN SUPPORT YOUR PLAN**

- Organically fostering connections through social media with a niche audience (eg, rare disease HCPs)
- Participating within closed HCP platforms like SERMO for peer discussion
- Acting as an advisor and providing input on digital, social, or non-linear content development

# EXPANDING YOUR OPINION LEADER STRATEGY

DOLs desire regular and valuable communication in their partnerships with pharma companies. It is crucial that you work with an agency partner to coordinate communications from various stakeholders and ensure DOL communication is delivered compliantly.

Expanding your opinion leader strategy to include both traditional KOLs and DOLs may translate into real opportunities.

**Are you looking for clarity on opinion leader engagement while building a strategic plan? Let's talk.**

**Avant Healthcare<sup>SM</sup>** develops breakthrough medical education for breakthrough medicines. We are a medical and marketing communications agency partnering with pharmaceutical, biotechnology, and diagnostic clients to engage and educate healthcare professionals.

#### References

1. <https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/the-millennial-workplace-of-future-is-almost-here-these-3-things-are-about-to-change-big-time.html>
2. [http://s.sermo.com/rs/239-PZX-356/images/Sermo\\_The\\_Digital\\_Day\\_of\\_an\\_HCP\\_2019.pdf?utm\\_campaign=klickhealth&utm\\_medium=klick\\_wire&utm\\_source=klickhealth&utm\\_content=kwire\\_hcp-day\\_20190520](http://s.sermo.com/rs/239-PZX-356/images/Sermo_The_Digital_Day_of_an_HCP_2019.pdf?utm_campaign=klickhealth&utm_medium=klick_wire&utm_source=klickhealth&utm_content=kwire_hcp-day_20190520)

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