



solli x docereeTM

solli x Doceree Global Programmatic Roundtable Series

**Roundtable 1 - Past, Present and Future:
Exploring Global Programmatic's Impact
on Pharma**

BARCELONA

REPORT

ROUNDTABLE

Roundtable 1 - Past, Present and Future: Exploring Global Programmatic’s Impact on Pharma

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INTRODUCTION

In Barcelona this April, the solli Roundtable - supported by Doceree - convened global (Ex-US) pharma leaders for a frank and forward-looking discussion on the evolving role of programmatic.

Rather than questioning its relevance, participants focused on unlocking its full potential: breaking down educational barriers, rethinking legacy planning

models, and fostering cross-functional alignment to drive smarter HCP engagement.

The message was clear-programmatic is no longer emerging; it holds a vital place in the omnichannel mix, and its impact will only be realised through proactive, collaborative efforts to overcome shared challenges.



1. BREAKING THE MYTH: WHY PROGRAMMATIC DESERVES A SEAT AT GLOBAL PHARMA'S TABLE

Global pharma's relationship with programmatic advertising has long been a complex one tinged with hesitation, compliance fears, and a perceived disconnect between the digital precision of programmatic and a compliance-led fear that fell back to a traditionally rep-driven sales model. But as this roundtable proved, this hesitation is no longer sustainable in an industry that is rapidly evolving.

The historic lack of investment in programmatic stems largely from three entrenched dynamics: compliance fears, an over-reliance on face-to-face HCP interactions and a well-trodden route of direct to publisher deals. But as digital transformation accelerates across the life sciences, programmatic is stepping into the global spotlight not as a disruptor, but as an enabler.

The participants spoke how programmatic offers scalability, efficiency, and targeting sophistication that direct buying can't match. As Nick Beckingham put it: *"We're still paying £400 CPMs on some publisher buys for basic banners. Banners are great and they'll do a great job, great for awareness, great for scaling and reaping frequency but from my consumer buying days... it actually makes me feel a bit nauseous, I'm paying that much money."*

Despite its value, programmatic remains misunderstood, often conflated with its consumer counterpart. As one participant remarked, *"Just the word 'programmatic' makes compliance teams nervous."* That perception is a major barrier-one that must be addressed through transparency and storytelling.

“It's not either/or.
Programmatic
complements
direct buys.”

– Maria Antoniou Hughes,
Vice President, Global Business
Development, Sermo



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“Medical programmatic is not just display banners, it is also email newsletters, content and more.”

– Harshit Jain, Founder & Global CEO, Doceree



“**Programmatic democratises media buying and gives us a more competitive landscape.**

– Nick Beckingham, Specialist Director, Health & Pharma, Space & Time

2. EDUCATION AS THE CATALYST FOR CHANGE

If one refrain was heard throughout the session, it was this: education is the lever for progress in global pharma.

Legal, compliance, procurement, and even local marketing teams often lack the foundational understanding of programmatic necessary to evaluate its benefits. One client-side lead noted, *“I consider myself as one of the more digitally mature people in my organization, and through this hour I learned a lot.”*

Programmatic doesn’t just require technical buy-in, it requires mindset shifts across functions. The most successful

pharma teams have tackled this head-on: running cross-functional training sessions, co-writing SOPs with agencies, and even embedding educational content into onboarding for internal stakeholders. As Jonny Walsh shared: *“You can’t just drop programmatic into a media plan and expect approval.”* Plus recognizing the role of agencies in this shift: *“We need to do a better job of educating everyone involved so those hurdles don’t come after all the work’s been put in.”*

Education isn’t a luxury - it’s a prerequisite. And it must happen across silos, before briefs are even written.



“

As an industry we need to do a better job of educating everyone involved so those hurdles don't come after all the work's been put in.

– Jonny Walsh, Head of Investment & Activation, Havas Lynx



3. AUDIENCE FIRST, PLATFORM SECOND: SHIFTING PHARMA'S DIGITAL MINDSET

The traditional planning model in global & local pharma has long been platform-first. Know the journals, buy the space. But in a world where physicians are digital natives, that approach is rapidly changing.

Reframing the planning model around audience behaviour opens up a significant opportunity. This means targeting by specialty, geography, time of day and even device preference, plus historic behaviours should they be available. Just like most digital audience members, HCPs are digital nomads and go to multiple platforms for different needs, and are not stuck to one single place. Therefore, approaching the media planning to match this is crucial if there is to be a more connected relationship with the HCPs.

This shift requires better briefing processes, deeper behavioural insights, and the willingness to challenge historical norms.

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We're often briefed on what platforms we should be on, not who we're trying to reach.

– Jiten Jain, Vice President & General Manager (UK & Europe), Doceree



4. COMPLIANCE, CONSENT & CONTENT: MANAGING THE MID-FUNNEL

The mid-funnel remains one of pharma's most complex battlegrounds - where initial awareness must convert into deeper engagement, registrations, and eventual consented relationships. Yet this critical stage is often where campaigns stumble, primarily due to compliance fears and misalignment across internal teams.

At the roundtable, participants agreed that while awareness campaigns are relatively straightforward, driving HCPs to register, interact, and consent requires a far more sophisticated and collaborative approach.



“When you put the
‘re-’ in front of targeting,
compliance are
completely panicked.”

– Yazan Iwizat, Global Omnichannel
Experience Standards Associate Director, MSD

A major barrier lies in the technical knowledge gap between marketing and compliance departments. Many legal teams remain unfamiliar with basic programmatic concepts like cookie-based targeting, encrypted IDs, or gated content strategies.

“Explaining the technology architecture of programmatic to people with a legal background who don’t even know what a cookie is... it’s extremely difficult,” Yacin Marzouki shared, highlighting the scale of the challenge.



“We co-wrote the SOPs with
compliance. That changed everything.”

– Yazan Iwizat, Global Omnichannel
Experience Standards Associate Director, MSD





However, the room's mood was optimistic. Far from seeing compliance as an immovable obstacle, many marketers are finding ways to proactively involve legal and compliance teams in the planning process earlier and with greater transparency.

Success stories were shared where marketing, compliance, and agencies worked together to co-create Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that defined approved tactics from the outset.

Ultimately, the challenge isn't programmatic itself - it's how the internal processes and trust-building are managed.

With the right frameworks, education, and collaboration in place, pharma brands can transform the mid-funnel from a compliance minefield into a true opportunity for deeper, sustainable HCP engagement.

5. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY, DATA & INTEGRATION

Technology and data were not just buzzwords at the roundtable - they were the foundation of a deeper concern: pharma's underutilisation of programmatic's full capabilities.

While programmatic offers sophisticated targeting and real-time optimisation, many organisations are still running on fragmented data systems and manual reporting. The familiar scenario? Weekly PowerPoints. Basic metrics. Little connection to actual brand impact.

“ Unless the tech stack talks to each other, we can't prove real value.

– Yacin Marzouki, Omnichannel & Customer Engagement Lead, AlfaSigma



A central issue is integration. Many teams lack proper APIs between demand-side platforms and internal dashboards. That makes it nearly impossible to track how specific segments are responding, let alone tie media to conversion or engagement metrics. Others noted that shared DSP accounts muddy campaign insights, reducing transparency and precision.

The solution? A clear and collective investment in infrastructure. Clean data. Dedicated instances. Real-time dashboards.

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**Programmatic allows
 efficiencies tenfold...**
**I can de-dupe, I can control
 the frequency and I can
 optimize at pace**

– Jonny Walsh, Head of Investment & Activation,
 Havas Lynx



“
**Auto-login can drive more
 conversions down the funnel through
 programmatic.**

– Kamy Elawadhi, Chief Client Officer,
 Doceree

6. BUILDING THE FUTURE: COLLABORATION & OMNICHANNEL EVOLUTION

One of the roundtable’s strongest points of alignment was this: no one media channel can deliver alone. The days of siloed campaigns - one for programmatic, one for social, another for reengagement - are numbered.

The industry is shifting toward a more integrated, omnichannel approach, where programmatic isn’t just a line on the media plan; it’s part of a broader customer journey strategy.

This future requires cross-functional collaboration. Getting legal, compliance, brand, tech, and media in the same

room-early and often-was repeatedly highlighted as key to success.

Measurement frameworks need to evolve too. It’s not just about impressions or CTR-it’s about understanding how different channels move HCPs through awareness, engagement, and ultimately action.

Some organisations are already building cross-functional steering groups to bring alignment to omnichannel rollouts. These groups are shaping content strategy, media planning, and measurement collaboratively, not sequentially.

“You can’t leave media planning to one siloed team anymore... The journey is too complex for that. It has to be a connected conversation across stakeholders.”

– Jamie Leach, Executive Vice President, Head of Pharma International Media, Publicis Media



7. TIME FOR A REBRAND: PROGRAMMATIC NEEDS A NEW NAME

If there was a single word that can cause discomfort within global pharma meeting rooms, it is “programmatic.”

In pharma, where compliance and control are non-negotiable, “programmatic” still evokes visions of unfiltered ad placements, brand safety issues, and open web chaos. And while none of that applies to the verified, physician-targeted environments available today, the perception problem remains.

Participants floated several alternatives - “audience-first media,” “curated HCP networks,” and “identity-based activation” - as a way to more accurately describe what pharma is really doing when it runs programmatic campaigns.

Reframing the language could be more than semantics; it might be the key to bringing skeptical stakeholders to the table.

“...audience-first media...
...curated HCP networks...
...identity-based activation...”





“
Let’s stop defending the word and
start describing the value.

– Harshit Jain, Founder & Global CEO, Doceree

CONCLUSION

The conversation highlighted both the barriers to programmatic adoption in global (ex-US) pharma, but more importantly, the significant opportunities waiting to be unlocked.

From updating outdated media workflows to repositioning programmatic as a core strategic enabler, the tools-and the will-to move forward are already in place. With clearer terminology, stronger cross-functional collaboration, and audience-first thinking, brands within global pharma can take the lead.

What lies ahead for programmatic in global (ex-US) pharma isn’t slow evolution, it’s accelerated integration into the heart of omnichannel strategy. However, with the right partners, people, and tech power leading the way.



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