



solli x doceree™

solli x Doceree Global Programmatic Roundtable Series

Roundtable 2 - Breaking the Myths, Building the Future: Reframing Programmatic for Real-World Pharma

LONDON


REPORT

ROUNDTABLE


Roundtable 2 - Breaking the Myths, Building the Future:
Reframing Programmatic for Real-World Pharma

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2025, the second installment of the **solli x Doceree Global Programmatic Roundtable Series** convened at The British Academy in London. Bringing together senior leaders from across the pharmaceutical, healthcare media, and technology sectors, the event focused on a critical question: how can programmatic advertising deliver smarter, more effective engagement with healthcare professionals (HCPs) in real-world, non-U.S. markets?

The session, themed “*Breaking the Myths, Building the Future*”, challenged entrenched mindsets and outdated practices that continue to limit innovation in pharma marketing. Participants

explored not just the potential of programmatic-but also the cultural, organizational, and regulatory hurdles that must be addressed for its success.

What emerged was a clear consensus: meaningful progress depends on collaboration, education, and reframing. Programmatic must be understood not as a buzzword or isolated channel, but as a strategic enabler of precision, agility, and scale within an omnichannel framework. This report captures the most pressing insights, hard truths, and forward-looking ideas that emerged from the discussion-setting the stage for a smarter, more connected future in pharma marketing.



1. SHIFTING HABITS: THE BATTLE BETWEEN COMFORT AND INNOVATION

The roundtable opened with a candid truth: the pharmaceutical industry remains steeped in habitual marketing practices. Despite years of discussion around digital transformation, many organizations continue to rely on traditional media partnerships and familiar platforms. The concept of “audience-first” planning often gets lost beneath a stack of legacy systems and outdated mindsets.

Adam Aruede of MSD summed it up succinctly: *“Just as HCPs may have habitual prescribing, the industry sometimes falls foul of habitual marketing.”* His experience piloting programmatic for the first time at MSD revealed just how deeply these patterns run. Even when internal research supports an audience-first approach, introducing a new media strategy often triggers resistance - not necessarily to the idea, but to the unfamiliar processes and

governance structures around it.

The discussion highlighted that experimentation in pharma tends to live within a narrow band - usually 10% or less of the overall media mix. But as Stephen Glynn from Haleon pointed out, *“The burden of proof for value of that 10% is way higher than the burden of proof for the value of the 90%.”* The irony is hard to miss: innovation is subjected to tougher scrutiny than the very tactics it’s trying to improve upon.

The challenge isn’t only organizational - it’s psychological. Fear of compliance breaches, budget risk, or even reputational damage can stifle progress. Yet participants agreed: change is possible. It begins with small pilots, stakeholder engagement, and-critically-internal champions who can build credibility across functions.



“The burden of proof for value of that innovative 10% is way higher than the burden of proof for the value of the habitual 90%.”

– Stephen Glynn, Global Expert Lead
– Channels, Haleon

“Just as HCPs may have habitual prescribing, the industry sometimes falls foul of habitual marketing.

– Adam Aruede, Digital Marketing Specialist, MSD



2. DEMYSTIFYING PROGRAMMATIC: MOVING BEYOND THE WORD

If there's one message the group returned to repeatedly, it was this: the word “programmatic” is holding the industry back.

The stigma attached to the term - often tied to outdated notions of remnant inventory, lack of brand safety, or shady ad placements-persists. For many in the room, particularly those working with legal or regulatory teams, invoking the term derails conversations before they begin.

Mary Faul of Initiative Health was frank: “The word itself is a blocker.” She added, “The moment I say the word, I lose the room.” It's not the technology that's problematic - it's the perception.

“HCP Programmatic is very different to Consumer Programmatic.”

– Harshit Jain, Founder & Global CEO, Doceree

“More transparency into what is included in programmatic is essential.”

– Keith Gentry, Director EMEA Marketing Procurement, Europe Regional Category Advertising & Media, AstraZeneca



Several participants shared stories of getting much further with internal stakeholders by describing the function of programmatic (targeted, real-time media delivery) without ever naming it explicitly. In fact, rebranding or reframing the concept - such as “*automated audience delivery*” or “*data-driven*

media orchestration” - has helped move projects forward.

This linguistic challenge isn’t trivial. In a heavily regulated industry, perception shapes governance. The need for clearer, more neutral vocabulary emerged as a tactical necessity - not just a semantic debate.



“Automated buying is already part of our everyday roles.”

– Mary Faul, Director, Initiative Health

3. EDUCATION IS NOT OPTIONAL: CROSS-FUNCTIONAL BUY-IN IS CRITICAL

Education isn’t just helpful-it’s mission-critical. Without a baseline understanding across departments, programmatic strategies stall before they begin.

Multiple participants shared that success depended on demystifying the technology for stakeholders outside of marketing. That includes procurement, legal, medical, and compliance teams—none of whom are likely to have prior exposure to programmatic mechanics.

Jiten Jain from Doceree described the painstaking process of taking one client through a 12-month education journey. “We had to break it down, make it simpler, make it more conducive for a procurement person and a legal person to address it,” he said.

Abbi Smith from GSK noted that many pharma marketers today aren’t trained marketers. Rotational roles often bring in commercial talent without media or digital experience. This lack of foundation exacerbates the sense of complexity and risk.

The panel agreed that successful teams are embedding education into onboarding, creating function-specific playbooks, and bringing cross-functional stakeholders into the strategy process earlier.

Importantly, this isn’t about turning everyone into media experts. It’s about building enough familiarity so that the unknown doesn’t equal a red flag.



Education within publishers & clients on what programmatic is is incredibly important.

– Marc Clifford, Head of Global Advertising Sales, BMJ Group



“Marketing roles aren’t taken on by marketers. They’re taken on by all sorts of people that want to rotate into a commercial role and don’t really understand or have the media background knowledge.”

– Abbi Smith, Launch Director, GSK



“We had to break it down, make it simpler, make it more conducive for a procurement person and a legal person to address it.”

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

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4. DATA, INTEGRATION AND THE POWER OF PRECISION

Pharma companies invest heavily in research, segmentation, and persona development - but too often, those insights fail to influence actual media activation.

The disconnect is striking. Companies develop sophisticated customer journey maps and precise audience segments, yet fall back on broad-reach tactics at the point of execution. The problem isn't lack of data - it's integration. Many teams lack the tools, processes, or internal alignment to translate strategic insights into real-time media actions.

The roundtable pointed to programmatic as a natural solution. With better onboarding of CRM data and cross-platform orchestration, campaigns can become more tailored, timely, and efficient. But that potential remains largely untapped.

The group emphasized the need to view data activation not as a future aspiration - but as a present capability waiting to be unlocked through better planning and collaboration.



“Even when one has journey maps, without concerted effort, by the time it hits media planning, it becomes just another standard plan.

– Stephen Glynn, Global Expert Lead - Channels, Haleon

5. COMPLIANCE AND TRUST: EARLY AND OFTEN COLLABORATION

Compliance is often cited as the biggest hurdle to innovation in pharma media - but the room pushed back on that assumption. The problem, several argued, isn't compliance - it's how and when compliance is engaged.

Delaying compliance engagement until the final stages of planning only increases friction and confusion.

In contrast, Jiten Jain shared a success story from one client, where compliance

teams were brought in early and actively co-developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for programmatic activation. *"That changed everything,"* he said. With joint ownership came shared understanding and reduced fear.

Several participants stressed the value of real-world case studies, clear frameworks, and decision-making transparency as tools for building trust. The message was clear: collaboration isn't a formality - it's the foundation.

“All it needs is one person championing it within the organization.”

– Harshit Jain, Founder & Global CEO, Doceree



6. THE OMNICHANNEL IMPERATIVE: PROGRAMMATIC AS PART OF THE WHOLE

“How do we integrate programmatic to double down on our key HCP audiences for a brand?”

– Matt Durham, Vice President, Global, CMI Media Group



A recurring theme throughout the session was the need to situate programmatic within the larger context of omnichannel engagement. Treating it as a standalone tactic diminishes its value - and sets false expectations.

Participants shared examples of successful campaigns that blended direct media buys, sponsorships on trusted HCP platforms, and programmatic delivery to create seamless HCP experiences. In rare disease or high-specialty areas, programmatic often proved critical in reaching niche audiences at scale. In broader public health campaigns, it provided reach and speed.

Programmatic isn't a panacea - but when layered intelligently with other tactics, it can dramatically elevate the impact of a media plan.





“**Programmatic should be used as part of a wider omnichannel approach.**

– Dan Linton, Director, Health Media Four Agency

7. REDEFINING VALUE: BEYOND CPMS TO TRUE IMPACT

Perhaps the most fundamental shift discussed at the roundtable was the move from volume-based metrics to outcome-based measurement.

CPMs and impressions, while still relevant, offer limited insight into the true value of media investment - particularly in an industry that ultimately seeks to change clinician behavior and improve patient outcomes.

Procurement leaders echoed the need for transparency - but warned against chasing cost efficiency at the expense of strategic value. Print, for instance, remains popular in some European markets, despite being nearly impossible to measure. In contrast, programmatic offers granular insights - but only if value is defined beyond cost per click.

The new imperative? Prove impact - not just reach.

“**We might not be able to track scripts in every region, but we can measure ‘intent to prescribe’ as a meaningful proxy.**

– Harshit Jain, Founder & Global CEO, Doceree



“It’s hugely efficient, and gives you so much control as well.”

– Zowie Boiardi,
Associate Media
Director,
Inizio Evoke



“Being able to connect programmatic with other channels’ engagement can drive real impact.”

– Kamya Elawadhi, Chief Client Officer, Doceree



CONCLUSION: SHAPING THE FUTURE, TOGETHER

The London roundtable closed on a note of cautious optimism. While barriers remain - cultural, educational, procedural - the will to evolve is evident.

Programmatic's future in pharma will depend on a collective commitment to:

- **Break entrenched habits.**
- **Elevate education across departments.**
- **Challenge outdated narratives.**
- **Measure what matters.**
- **Build with - not around - compliance.**
- **Position programmatic as an enabler, not an outlier.**

And critically, it will require people to lead the charge.

The momentum is real - and growing. Now it's about sustaining it.

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