

# REPORT



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## The Effective Use of AI in Pharma Media

## A solli Roundtable

2026



# THE EFFECTIVE USE OF AI IN PHARMA MEDIA A SOLLI ROUNDTABLE

July 29, 2026

## PARTICIPANTS



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Addressable Health



**Matt Holland**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Healio



**William McMahon**  
Director, Omnichannel Strategy  
AstraZeneca



**Jason Brenner**  
RVP, Healthcare and Life  
Sciences



**Rodney Ford**  
Digital Product Line Owner - DTC/P  
Advanced Analytics & AI  
Sanofi



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Sr. Director, Product  
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DeepIntent



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## INTRODUCTION

**Artificial intelligence is redefining practically every aspect of pharma media—from internal processes to audience profiling and personalization to employee training and expectations.**

For the roundtable discussion on “The Effective Use of AI in Pharma Media,” solli convened leaders from across the pharma media landscape, spanning drugmakers, agencies, tech companies and publishers. In a closed filmed conversation in New York, they talked through four key topics on the agenda: operationalizing AI inside pharma media organizations, implementing AI in planning and strategy, using AI to create more human experiences and proving the value of AI in pharma media.

Throughout the conversation, the participants swapped best practices, shared wins and commiserated over the challenges of keeping up with the fast pace of AI development. In final one-on-one interviews before they left for the day, many commented on how beneficial

it had been to hear about actual AI use cases from their peers in the industry, suggesting that collaboration and open conversation are and will continue to be key pieces of the AI adoption process in pharma media.

Underlying the entire discussion was a thoughtful optimism toward the potential of AI in pharma media. Though the panelists repeatedly emphasized how human expertise and judgment are still non-negotiables across the industry, they expressed a unanimous excitement about the many ways in which AI can meaningfully improve the work they do for patients and HCPs.

Through it all, one thing was made more than clear: AI is here to stay, and it’s upending the entire industry as it settles in.

Read on for six overarching themes that repeatedly emerged throughout the roundtable.



## AI AS AN EFFICIENCY ENGINE, NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR EXPERTISE

A frequent point of discussion throughout the conversation was the common concern that AI is on track to steal jobs and phase out human workers completely. That's absolutely not the case—instead, the roundtable participants agreed, if used correctly, the technology should in fact make humans more efficient and help them do their jobs better.

To that end, the leaders described several ways that they and their teams have incorporated AI to bolster their work. It's helping them monitor market movements and speed up decision-making, build prototypes to more clearly illustrate early-stage ideas and analyze communications for insights that can then improve employee coaching, among several other real-world use cases.

In those and other applications, adding AI to the mix can have the added benefit of ensuring a level of standardization or consistency across repeated tasks or workflows.



That said, AI isn't a silver bullet capable of solving every inefficiency in pharma media. As Joetta Gobell put it,

“There can be this overexcitement of, ‘It makes everything that was hard easy.’ And it’s like, no, no, it makes some things that were hard easy, and some things remain difficult, and we should focus on tackling those problems, too.”

– Joetta Gobell, SVP, Data Strategy & Insights, People Inc.

It's a necessary reminder of the overarching point that AI isn't here to completely upend every piece of every workflow, but instead can be slotted into certain areas to augment human expertise and accelerate or condense existing processes.

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“How do we get the whole team to really understand where we’re using AI, use it consistently and create those efficiencies in a repeated manner?”

– Lea Wester, Managing Director, Addressable Health

## KEEPING HUMANS IN THE LOOP

Following on from the previous point's assurances that AI is a productivity booster for humans rather than a job stealer, the participants also repeatedly reiterated how, even as AI-assisted processes become increasingly automated, humans remain a very necessary component.

There are simply some things that can't be replicated by an algorithm, they agreed, like human judgment, preference and taste. In practice, that may look like using an AI tool to analyze availability and propose a media plan, but keeping a human in the loop to pass final judgment. Mike Rancourt said,

**“It still requires somebody that deeply understands the deal structure, understands the publisher relationships to really give that green light for that media plan to be actioned on.”**

—Mike Rancourt, Sr. Director,  
Product Management, DeepIntent

In essence, as the panelists discussed, AI technologies lack the context typically needed to make final decisions in professional situations. When considering their choices, humans factor in a wide range of information and continuously expand that context with data gleaned from conversations, observations, research and other daily interactions. But even the most sophisticated AI agent can only draw on the specific data sources it's been trained to use, and it may end up filling in any gaps with its own “hallucinations.”

The roundtable emphasized the importance, then, of building checkpoints into AI-moderated workflows: points where humans are required to look over, sign off on or take over an otherwise automated process, ensuring that human judgment stays very much in the loop.



**“A lot of the tools that we currently use for AI are only as good as the context we provide into it, whereas a human—we are always taking in new context.”**

—William McMahon, Director, Omnichannel Strategy, AstraZeneca



## BETTER AUDIENCE UNDERSTANDING THROUGH RICHER, CONNECTED DATA

In recent years, technological advancements have led to a massive increase in the availability of health data, often to an overwhelming degree. Thankfully, the parallel influx of AI tools are extraordinarily equipped to analyze such enormous stores of data and pull out the most interesting or significant insights—and, as the roundtable participants discussed, those insights are in turn helping health and pharma marketers gain a deeper understanding of their target audiences.



The panel offered up a range of examples. For one, according to Lea Wester, using AI to model patient journeys can help identify touchpoints where they may be most receptive to a media placement. Jason Brenner, meanwhile, explained how deeper, smarter access to huge datasets can help marketers pinpoint the marketing messages, placements, cadences and more that are truly impacting audiences.

On top of getting to know target audiences better, AI tools may also help marketers identify even more members of those audiences, according to Rodney Ford, who discussed the ongoing “transformational change” as life sciences companies increasingly bring data assets and AI analysis tools in house. He said,

“What ends up happening is you end up finding prospective patients for your biologic that either aren’t on those third-party health data lists or are not prioritized properly. You actually find incrementality, which is the gold you’re looking for anyway.”

– Rodney Ford,  
Digital Product Line Owner, DTC/P Advanced  
Analytics & AI, Sanofi

Essentially, as the roundtable suggested, the enduring deluge of health-related data contains ultra-valuable insights for marketers about their patient and HCP audiences—and AI tools are a crucial key for unlocking those findings.

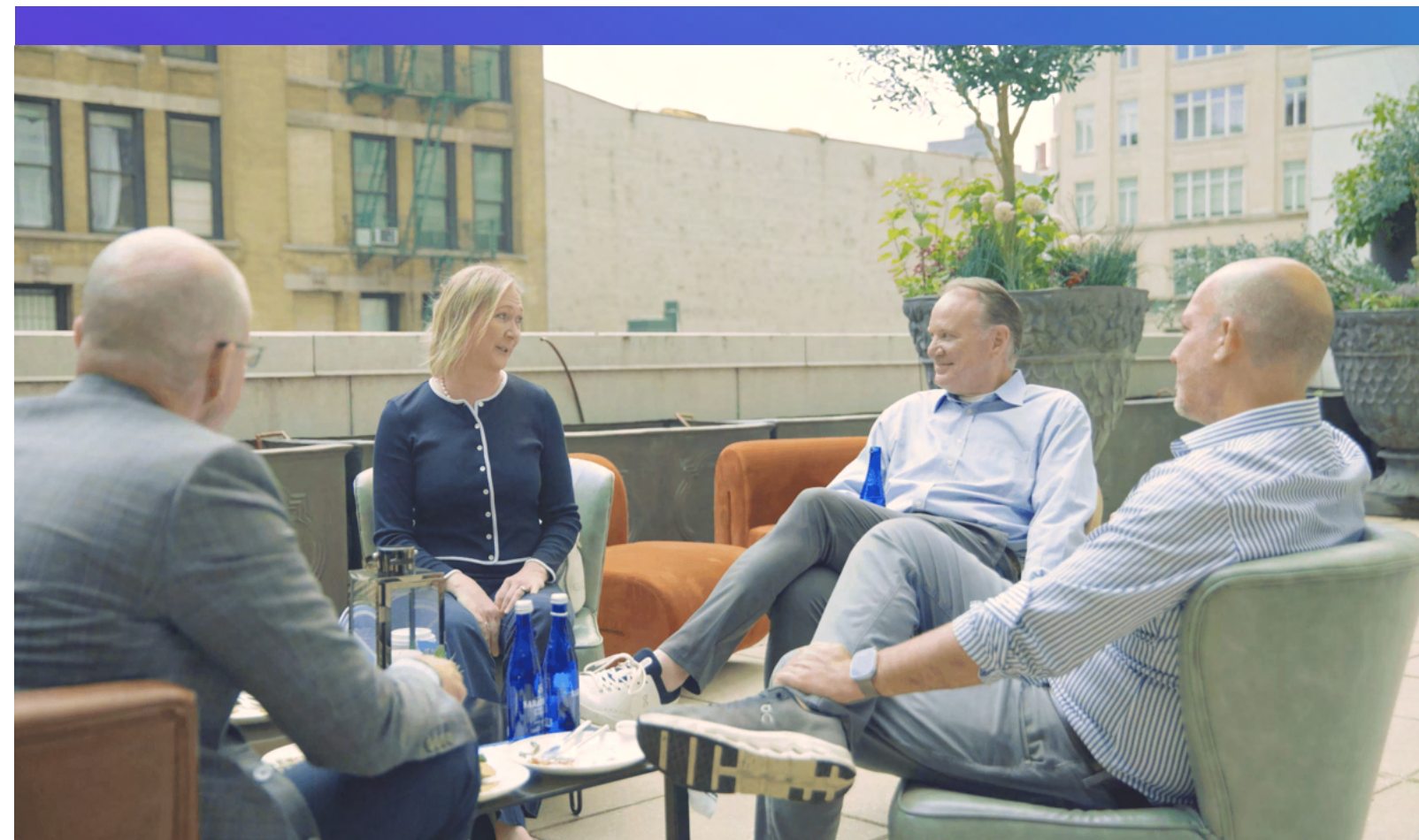
## PERSONALIZATION AND RELEVANCE, BALANCED AGAINST PRIVACY

Continuing on from the previous discussion point, the roundtable’s members shared the ways in which, after enriching their knowledge of target audiences, AI tools can then assist marketers in reaching those individual audience members with highly personalized, potentially more engaging outreach.

An AI tool, for example, can uncover insights about when and where is the best time to reach a specific person or group—or when they’re already being inundated with messaging and a brand

should therefore exercise restraint, the panelists noted. And when the time is right to send out content, AI can ensure that it’s quickly, compliantly tweaked depending on who’s seeing it, whether that’s a patient, caregiver, clinician or the general public.

On a more interactive level, an AI-powered chatbot like Healio’s can directly answer users’ questions and direct them to relevant materials, using each prompt as a jumping-off point for greater personalization.



“It’s sort of this idea of meeting them where they are at, but doing it in a trusted, transparent and very credible way, because you can’t get it wrong.

– Matt Holland, Chief Operating Officer, Healio



Woven into this wide-ranging conversation was a closely related one about the need to balance deeper audience insights and personalization with privacy requirements, as pharma marketers must be careful to ensure their campaigns remain at all times within the bounds of regulatory rules.

AI may even be able to help on the compliance front, as the panelists suggested that automated tools could potentially aid in running compliance checks and ensuring audience privacy throughout the marketing lifecycle.

On that note, William McMahon said,

“I’m waiting, optimistic, to see where AI starts to augment or supercharge some of those capabilities as well.

–William McMahon,  
Director, Omnichannel  
Strategy, AstraZeneca

## AI ADOPTION AS ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, NOT JUST TECHNOLOGY DEPLOYMENT

As evidenced by the countless actual use cases the panelists swapped throughout the discussion, AI tools have quickly become a regular and often-necessary piece of daily workflows in pharma media.

The eye-watering speed of adoption and deployment, however, may mean that not everybody on the team is fully comfortable with or up-to-date on the latest AI tools, as many of the participants stressed.

“One of the barriers is people’s confidence in utilizing the AI tools. If you go in and assume everybody has a baseline level of AI knowledge, that tool is going to fail.

–Mike Rancourt, Sr. Director,  
Product Management, DeepIntent

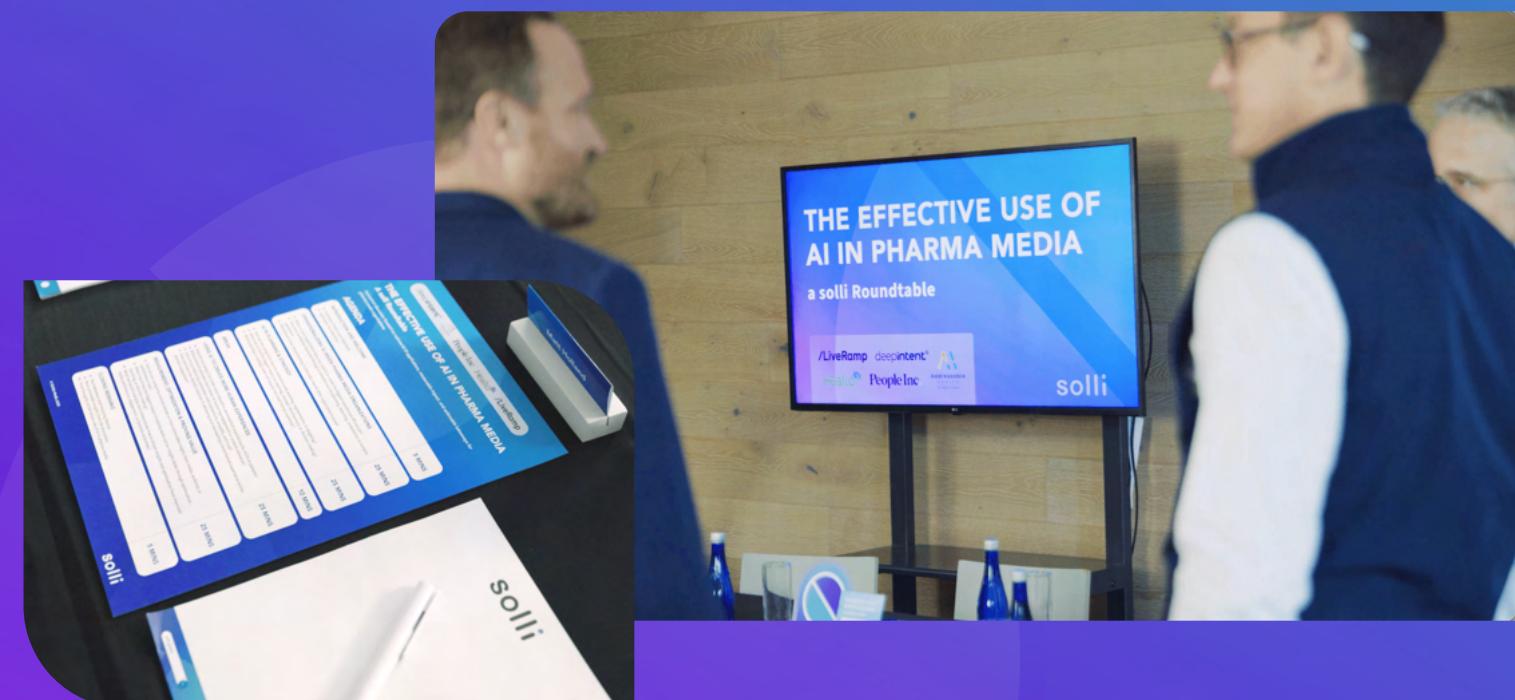
Several of the panelists shared that their organizations have created benchmarking assessments to ensure a certain level of AI knowledge across teams.

Others also noted that leaders should pay attention to the reasons why adoption may be so low. If it’s not merely a training issue, it could be that a specific AI tool isn’t actually useful for certain teams. Joetta Gobell described multiple “real reasons” for a lack of adoption:

“The tool you think solved the job, maybe the experts who do the job don’t agree, and they have feedback. Or maybe there’s friction in a part of the process that is less defined that they weren’t able to communicate and is missing from your solution.

– Joetta Gobell,  
SVP, Data Strategy  
& Insights, People Inc.

Ultimately, even the most skilled, efficiency-boosting AI agent can’t make a difference if the humans behind it aren’t fully on board. The roundtable proved that it’s absolutely crucial that leaders prioritize training, upskilling and educational sessions to keep everyone up to speed, and that they pay attention to other underlying reasons for lagging AI adoption.



## FROM PROVIDING INFORMATION TO PROVIDING ANSWERS AND INSIGHTS

With all of the pieces discussed throughout the roundtable in place—from well-trained teams to human-in-the-loop processes to strong compliance frameworks—AI tools can go beyond merely surfacing data points to instead generate more profound and potentially impactful analyses about audiences, media strategies and more.

Rather than simply carrying out prescribed tasks or spitting out requested information, automated agents may proceed through an entire workflow without requiring regular prompting and can quickly pore over mountains of data to produce insights that might take humans days or weeks to uncover, if at all.

As Jason Brenner described, injecting AI into LiveRamp's data collaboration cleanroom platform

**“is helping accelerate the ability to gain insights, so that what once was quarterly and became monthly is now weekly or hourly, depending on how you set up your insights and your intelligence layer in order to look at the patterns of behavior.”**

– Jason Brenner, RVP,  
Healthcare and Life Sciences



AI tools are becoming more advanced, and teams are becoming more familiar with what the technology is capable of, leading to an expectation of greater results from the tools. Adding speed and efficiency to a specific process isn't necessarily enough, per the panelists, who emphasized how their teams are now looking for AI offerings to improve accuracy, analyses and other next-level attributes.

That shift was summed up by Matt Holland, as he described how a new AI-powered tool at Healio is now aimed at

**“not only supplying information, trying to be more of a solutions-oriented effort.”**

– Matt Holland, Chief Operating Officer, Healio



## ● WHAT THE ROUNDTABLE REVEALED

The “Effective Use of AI in Pharma Media” roundtable exemplified the overwhelming attitude toward AI in the industry today: enthusiasm over its potential to bolster workflows and output, tempered by the firm belief that the technology is assuredly not an all-out replacement for human expertise, taste, judgment or context.

The leaders in the room delighted in sharing what’s working when it comes to deploying AI in their organizations, and they were thorough in their discussions of the challenges that have cropped up along the way.

The conversation followed along the winding road of AI adoption that will surely be familiar to anyone in pharma media. These new tools can hugely speed up operations but must have human oversight sprinkled in throughout. They can generate drastically deeper insights from massive pools of data, but they can’t do so without a concerted effort toward training and upskilling across an organization. They can aid in creating more personalized and engaging audience experiences, but that boundless potential for personalization must abide by privacy and compliance concerns.

It’s a veritable juggling act but, as the roundtable showed, the industry is well-equipped and eager to take on the challenge, with an eye toward strengthening its connections with patients and HCPs.

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