

How the pandemic transformed the Pharmacy retail landscape

Over the past 22 months a greatly impactful, once in a lifetime event occurred as consumers embraced new shopping behaviours, leading pharmacists to review all aspects of their retail business.



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Consumers gravitated to online shopping in record numbers since March 2020 and according to Forbes this eCommerce boom will continue.

The global healthcare e-commerce market is estimated to reach \$435.8 billion in revenue by 2025, therefore it is clear that there is both a want and a need for online health products and services among businesses and the general consumer population.

Covid-19 forced a sharp learning curve in the eCommerce sphere for many pharmacists. It's increasingly evident that the recent wisdom gained, should

be converted into enhanced shopping experiences to meet the evolving expectations of their customer base.

OMNICHANNEL RETAIL

To be successful, savvy pharmacists should merge their 'bricks and mortar' and 'eCommerce' strategies, into one overall framework, envisaging holistically how consumers may want to shop with them at any given time, or for any given reason.

Assessing how your online channels can maximise customer footfall into your store, rather than that of a rival pharmacy, is incredibly beneficial. Online services such as booking Flu/Booster vaccine appointments, Online Doctor Services and Submit a Prescription Request are all effective methods of engaging your customers online, driving them to

browse your product catalogue, and order products for delivery or instore collection.

For multi-outlet pharmacies, facilitating customers in checking product availability online, across all your stores is a massive advantage - it secures a visit, when they know what they want is in your store. And while there, additional items will likely be purchased.

Integrated Gift and Loyalty programmes are proven to be major incentives for consumers and the option of redeeming gift vouchers online or instore, heightens the overarching shopping experience.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

It is the responsibility of individual pharmacists to adhere to regulatory standards, as set by the PSI, on what can be sold online in Ireland and under what conditions.

It's crucial that your eCommerce solution:

- includes Checkbox validation on certain products, proving the customer agrees to specific terms and conditions i.e. age etc before they purchase;
- limits the quantity of certain medicines that can be sold in one transaction, and isolates the regions specific medicines can be sold to;
- gathers information from the customer before they make a purchasing decision;
- provides multiple and flexible product fields so that you can provide adequate descriptions; and
- incorporates relevant reporting responsibilities.

An eCommerce platform that ticks the regulatory boxes and proactively seeks to understand the online pharmacy environment, gives confidence in promoting your online channel.

CUSTOMER RETENTION

The challenge in 2022 is to continue to acquire new clients but also retain and reward those customers secured during the pandemic. We recommend developing a 12 month digital marketing plan that encapsulates customer acquisition and retention strategies.

Utilise Digital Marketing tactics such as Paid Search Advertising, Paid Social Media Advertising, Google Shopping and Influencer Channels to acquire new clients and reach those external to your geographic reach.

Turning customers acquired during the pandemic and through paid media into repeat sales is key. Show your customers you care by having multiple quality touchpoints e.g. email, sms, social media, online store, instore messaging and offline advertising featuring a consistent message, both online and offline. When customers visit your store, have attractive incentives available to opt them into your email marketing or SMS database.

Customer relationships are a two-way street; you need to engage with your customers in a way they wish to be engaged with in order for them to engage with you.

And remember, always go that extra mile with trusted delivery and returns terms, high quality environmentally friendly packaging and exceptional customer service.

WHY MAGICO & AB COMMERCE

With 30 pharmacy retail clients, an onboarding and account management team dedicated specifically to the sector, and integrations with prominent pharmacy EPOS/ERP systems, Magico is undoubtedly Ireland's leading pharmacy eCommerce specialist.

Our robust eCommerce platform, AB Commerce, enables Magico's pharmacy retailers to get online fast and grow fast, without undertaking a complex custom design and development project.

Developed in direct consultation with Irish pharmacy retailers, the dedicated AB Commerce Pharmacy module is tailored specifically for the Irish pharmacy industry and delivered with regular upgrades, at no additional cost.

Learn more by contacting Orla via ocooney@magico.com or visit [Magico.com](https://www.magico.com)

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Topic Team Training - Coughs

This series of articles is designed to assist community pharmacists in training their teams across a range of healthcare topics. Staff development is a key component of CPD, as well as the best means of ensuring patients receive the best possible advice. This month's topic is brought to you by the team at totalhealth and Haven Pharmacy.



Coughs

While coughs are common at this time of year, we must be cautious of symptoms of COVID-19, which include coughing. Patients experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should not attend the pharmacy and should contact their GP to determine if testing is necessary or arrange a PCR test. Coughing is also associated with the spread of infection; patients should be reminded about the importance of coughing etiquette; pharmacy staff must ensure appropriate infection-prevention measures are taken.

Causes

Coughing is an immune system defence mechanism that protects the lungs by clearing air passages of phlegm or other irritants. Common causes include colds or flus, allergies, and heartburn, but coughing may also be a sign of more serious conditions or infections, a side-effect of medication, or the consequence of unhealthy behaviours like smoking or vaping. As such, pharmacy staff must gather as much information as possible to make appropriate recommendations by following the *WWHAM* protocol.

Treatment

Coughs can generally be categorised as being either *productive* (chesty, wet, loose), where phlegm or mucus is present, or *non-productive* - dry, tickly coughing. Symptoms usually improve without the need for a GP visit, and can be eased in most cases with suitable OTC products and self-care. OTC treatments for chesty coughs include *mucoytics*, which help loosen mucus making it easier to cough up, and expectorants, which are believed to help bring up phlegm. Dry coughs may benefit from *cough suppressants*, designed to reduce the body's need to cough – suppressants should not be used for productive coughs as they may worsen symptoms.

Decongestants will improve other symptoms such as post-nasal drip or colds. *Paracetamol* or *ibuprofen* will ease any associated pain and reduce fever. Sore throats can be soothed with honey or lozenges. Regardless of cough type, everyone will benefit from rest, hydration, and avoiding smoking or smoky environments. Again, all recommendations must follow the *WWHAM* protocol, referring to the pharmacist where necessary.

Referral to Pharmacist

The pharmacist must always be consulted for patients on prescription medication, with long-term or chronic conditions, or who are pregnant, but also if the cough:

- Lasts longer than two weeks without improvement
- Does not respond to treatment
- Causes chest pain or breathing difficulties
- Produces blood
- Is associated with unexplained weight-loss.

Coughs in Children

All OTC staff should be familiar with guidance on cough remedies for children under 6 years of age, for whom some expectorants, decongestants and antihistamines are not recommended. Children with cough can be helped by increasing fluids, raising child's head slightly in bed, paracetamol or ibuprofen for fever or pain, or the use of suitable cough remedies where necessary. Remember *WWHAM*, paying close attention to the age of the child. Symptoms of whooping cough or croup should be referred to the pharmacist.

Consider:

Reflect on the following in assessing your own knowledge and your team's training:

- Is your knowledge up-to-date on cough treatments, and medications causing cough?
- Does the team follow *WWHAM* protocol at all times?
- Can you identify cases where GP referral is necessary?
- Are all staff confident and comfortable making treatment recommendations for all types of coughs and associated symptoms?
- Do all members of staff know the cough remedies not suitable for children under 6 years of age?
- Are COVID-19 Protocols up-to-date and staff trained?

Key Points:

Ensure your team understands and is confident explaining the following:

- The importance of COVID-19 testing for people with coughs
- The importance of infection-prevention measures in the pharmacy, and what advice to give to people presenting with cough
- The various causes of cough
- *WWHAM* protocol and the situations where requests for cough advice must be referred to the pharmacist
- The difference between treating a productive and non-productive cough
- Additional advice or products that can help with other symptoms
- The products that are not suitable for children under 6 years.

Actions:

Your checklist for Cough advice should include:

- COVID-19 protocols are consistently adhered to, with appropriate patient communication about symptoms
- Your own knowledge is up-to-date, on cough treatments, causes and associated conditions
- The appropriate training has been provided to all team members, and assessed, for example through observation or role play
- You have the appropriate range of products available
- *WWHAM* Protocol forms the basis of all interactions at the OTC counter
- Update your CPD record.