

Insight Brief

Humans and Artificial Intelligence Unite

Medical Information organizations are redefining how people and AI can work together to rapidly respond to the surge in customer requests.

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Introduction

Medical Information (MI) is a strategic pillar for any life sciences organization. MI is essential for supporting brands and providing concise product information to the public. Yet the rising flow of inquiries is making it impossible for MI teams to keep up.

Prior to the pandemic, MI teams were already facing an increasing number of requests from new channels and growing expectations for consumer-quality customer service experiences. When COVID pushed the world online, these pressures exploded. Requests for information soared, with up to 40% of them coming on evenings and weekends when there are fewer qualified staff available to field requests.



Experience counts

Adapting current MI workflows to these demands is essential to maintain customer loyalty. A recent industry study found a third of customers would stop doing business with their preferred pharma product after just one bad experience. And when these interactions fail to meet expectations, customers will look elsewhere online for answers. It means pharma companies are losing essential opportunities to best support their customers and raising the risk they will find the wrong information or be drawn to a competitor's products.

To avoid these risks, customers need to be able to find accurate answers to MI questions with ease. They don't want to click through five screens to find what they are

looking for; they don't want to scan a 10-page FAQ; and they don't want to wait on hold for several minutes to be transferred to "the next available agent."

This rising demand is leaving many MI teams feeling overwhelmed and causing inconsistency in service quality and customer satisfaction. These human agents are expected to respond to queries in near real-time, up to 24/7/365, with expert level knowledge and insights that meet all industry regulations.

Even if there were enough MI professionals in the marketplace looking for these jobs (and there aren't), the cost of such resources is not sustainable, which is forcing companies to seek new ways to support ever-increasing volumes of inquiries.



AI and humans on the same team

For many organizations, the solution lies in technology and innovation.

Customers want quick and complete answers, and they don't care if that information comes from a human or an Artificial Intelligence (AI) agent bot. The combination of demand for high quality experiences and openness to digital interactions sets the stage for "conversational" AI agents to become a permanent part of the MI landscape.

The current generation of automated MI technologies now have the capability to handle these demands. These tools leverage AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) to interpret and respond to even the most complex questions. They are able to instantly search relevant databases to generate the correct response using language that feels almost human, bringing a customer-centric approach to every interaction.

AI and NLP have already optimized many other aspects of the life sciences environment, bringing speed, consistency, and new insights to existing workflows. This innovation is now filtering into MI, where companies are rapidly ramping-up conversational AI agents to respond to exploding inquiry demands from customers for better, faster and more engaging interactions.

Humans lead the way

Conversational AI agents merge seamlessly with the human MI team, handling standard inquiry volumes with ease, freeing human agents to focus on more complex tasks. AI agents can understand and support MI across multiple languages and channels, and are available 24/7/365, providing truly 'on demand' support.

However, this is not a plug-and-play solution. Achieving a seamless combination of AI and human MI engagement requires a pragmatic mastery of new approaches to technology, with humans leading the design and delivery at every step in the process. When implementing these solutions, **global and local teams must work together to create a consistent yet customized MI response.** One that focuses on customer experience and safety compliance as the driving standards for the workflow. Similar to designing and implementing a successful human MI model, everything is governed by approved content to help ensure high levels of quality as well as regulatory compliance.

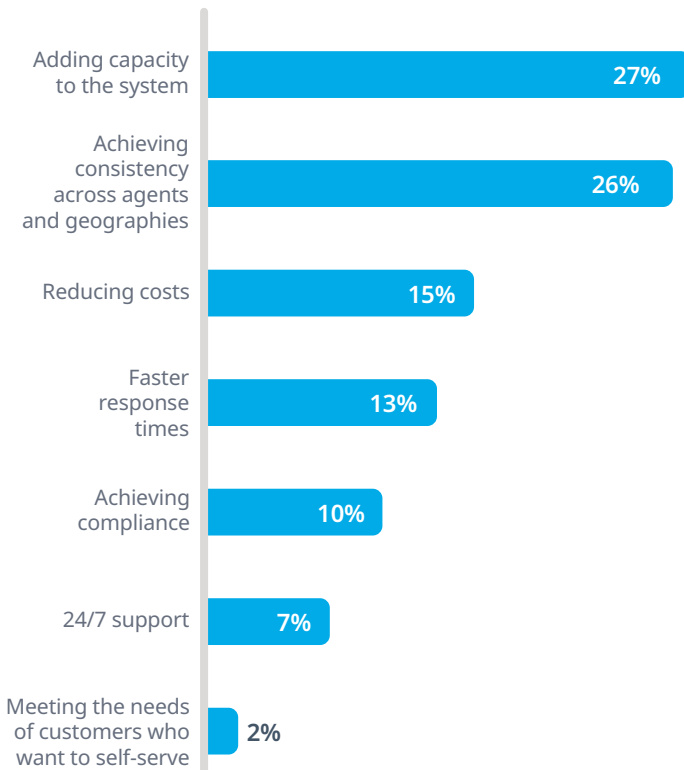
With thoughtful planning, and a robust training and verification process that vets the accuracy of responses, these AI agents can be deployed to field most types of inquiries.

Consistency, savings and always on access

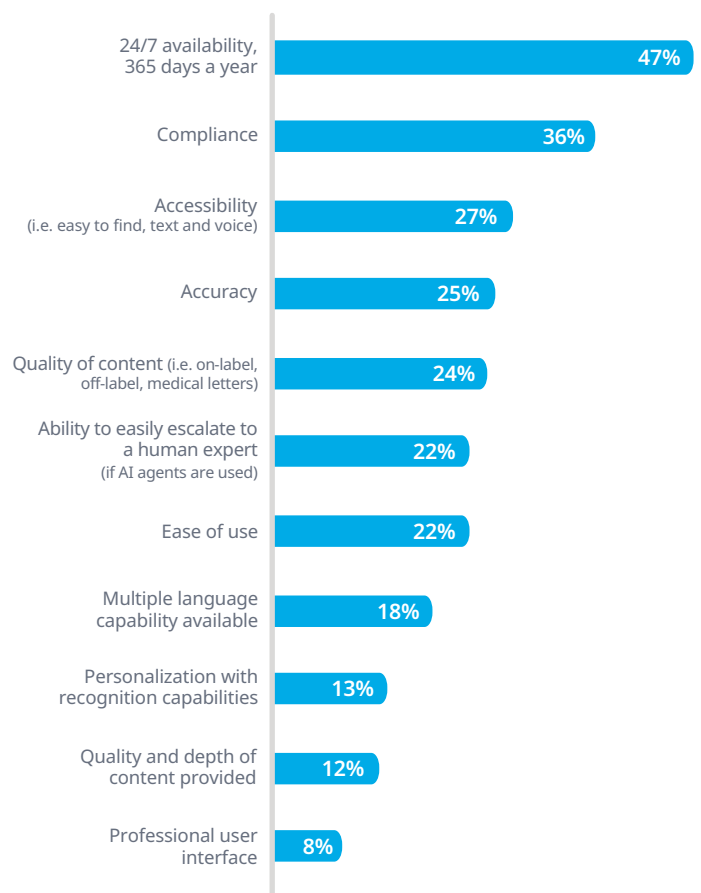
Most life sciences organizations see the benefits these tools can deliver. In a recent survey of life sciences leaders, improved capacity, global consistency, and lower costs ranked as the top three benefits of adding AI agents to their human MI support strategy.ⁱ

While high level leaders placed limited value on 24/7 support, MI professionals saw 24/7 availability as the leading benefit (47%), followed by compliance (36%) and accessibility (27%) and accuracy (25%).ⁱⁱ

Biggest benefit of adopting ai-driven virtual agents



When building Medical Information capabilities, the most important aspect of the customer experience to respondent organization is 24/7 availability, 365 days a year (47%), followed by compliance (36%).



Where do you fall?

The disconnect reflects the varying priorities of decision makers and MI teams. It also highlights the many perceived benefits of AI agents. When these tools are added to the MI workflow, they enable consistent compliant, 24/7/365 support that bolsters capacity while reducing costs.

However, inconsistent adoption is leaving some life sciences companies behind. The survey shows most life sciences companies fall into three categories – AI innovation leaders, those just getting started, and those who are falling behind.

Leaders: About a third of pharma companies plan to build out new AI capabilities for their MI operations at scale in 2022 and 2023.ⁱⁱⁱ These organizations have a clear vision for the future. They want to reinvent customer engagement to maximize the impact of Medical Information activities. To do that, they need to align their people, processes and technologies to function within a seamless workflow.

These pharma organizations are putting customer engagement first and using technology to ensure every interaction with HCPs and patients meets their speed, quality and consistency expectations, while cutting their MI costs.

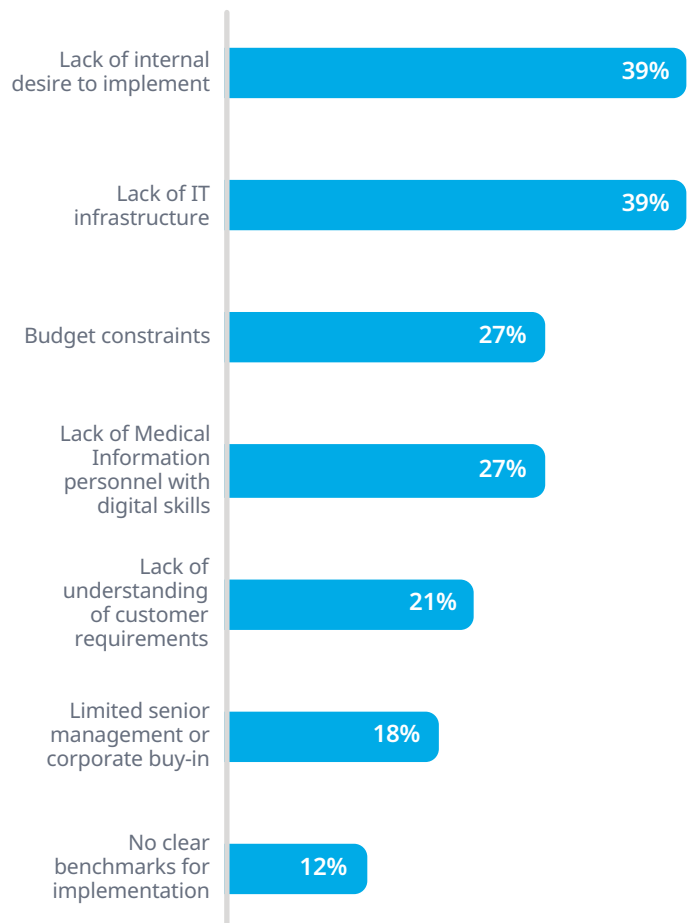
Getting started: Another third of pharma companies are running isolated pilot projects, testing the waters of AI for MI.^{iv} These rollouts are often regional, and while they leverage digital tools, they do not typically take advantage of AI and NLP to meet customers' needs.

These organizations see the value of digital interactions, but they lack a roadmap that links automated MI to optimized customer engagement. That lack of vision and engagement makes it difficult for MI teams to secure substantial funding and resource allocation for the required business transformation activities to drive such change.

Lagging behind: The final third of pharma companies are still sitting on the sidelines, relying on an “analog” approach in an increasingly digital world. For those manufacturers who are slow to adopt AI agents, the primary deterrents are the belief that the human approach is more personalized for customers (52%) and cost (48%), followed closely by the belief that knowledge and personalization of human experts is superior to what AI agents can provide (40%).^v

These are outdated assumptions. Across multiple geographies and markets, HCPs have demonstrated a willingness to engage with digital tools if it means getting quicker access to the information they need, and the cost of the technology can be far outweighed by lower human capital costs, and reduced risks of failing to address customer needs.

Key barriers to using conversational AI agents





Don't fall behind

The companies that are leading the adoption of AI technology see it as a win-win-win for their customers, MI teams and the company itself. They want scalability, customer centricity, and digital first engagements, and they see AI agents as a pivotal way to achieve these goals in their MI interactions. Deploying these tools does take planning and investment, but it can result in better experiences, greater operational efficiency, and confidence that, regardless of healthcare trends and product launches, the company will be able to accommodate every inquiry in every country around the clock.

Learn more at iqvia.com/solutions/integrated-global-compliance/medical-information

References

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Simon Johns has over 24 years of experience supporting customer projects across all stages of drug development and commercialization. He is a member of the IQVIA Lifecycle Safety Leadership Team, providing strategic insight into best industry practices including the application of technology to drive operational efficiencies. Simon has received two IQVIA CEO Awards relating to MI and local PV projects. He was the Gold Winner for the American Business Awards in May 2022 for “Future of HCP Engagement: AI-Enabled Medical Information Teams” and is a member of the DIA Europe Medical Information and Communications training team.



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