



## How can you win the Pharma digital race



**When Kay Wesley moved from the world of dot com to work as global digital director at AstraZeneca, she realised that pharma was transforming for digital at a rather different pace.**

Years later, Wesley founded her own global digital agency, Kanga Health, to offer as she puts it “the international digital partner and full-service agency I wished I’d had at AZ”. We spoke to Kay to find out how she believes pharma can make great digital leaps and deliver true digital transformation.

**What made you move from digital leadership within pharma to forming your own digital agency?**

I came back into pharma from the dot com world in 2002, joining AstraZeneca as the global digital director across all therapy areas. I thought I would just be able to work in the same way as I had in my dot com work life, but that wasn’t the case at all. It was a bit of a shock to the system. It wasn’t just the fact that pharma lacked experience in doing marketing and med comms in the digital space – we also didn’t have the culture, the infrastructure, the platforms, the mindset, the processes, the approvals or the regulations that would fit a digital world.

Over the next five years I assembled a team, from inside and outside of pharma, and created those platforms and processes. It was interesting to come from outside with fresh eyes and challenge a lot of the accepted practices.

People said to me, “What you did in your dot com world will never work here.” But within a few years, it was all working there! We had local and global platforms and the right digital processes, core digital ecosystem strategies, with brands that were truly global and were, most importantly, engaging customers.

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When I started Kanga, I wanted to create the agency that I wished I’d had back in my AstraZeneca days. Back then we worked with a lot of medical, med comms and marketing agencies that didn’t really understand digital, as well as digital agencies that didn’t understand pharma, and I felt that I was constantly training them on one topic or the other. I ended up juggling about ten different agencies, because in those days the market was very fragmented and there were no full-service digital agencies.

Has pharma improved its approach to digital since then, or do you think there is still a long way to go?

It is a mixed bag. It can be quite frustrating to find that we are sometimes having the same debates we were having five or ten years ago.

One of the challenges is that pharma companies are often very large, complex organisations that go through almost constant reorganisation, and often have difficulty with organisational learning and moving forward with capabilities. Quite often we see pockets of excellence and promising developments, that then get unpicked by the next administration.

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That said, while companies often have a nice strapline related to patient centricity, or even a chief patient officer (which is still quite rare), whether that thinking has really been implemented across the organisation is another question.

Often, I still see a mindset that ‘digital’ just involves pushing the same sales messages through more channels, which is really missing the point.

***“I don’t need to look any further than Google to know if a company is doing well with digital – because if a pharma company has got its act together, then whatever question I ask Google about that company’s brands, therapy areas, or business, I can get an answer. That sounds simple, but for most pharma brands and companies I cannot do that.”***

## **What would an ideal digital pharma company look like to you?**

An ideal digital pharma company has reorganised how it works with the customer and the patient in the centre.

We still see in some of the big companies that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. Brands are working in silos, and teams are not thinking in terms of HCPs and patients – they think in terms of their product. The first question for a company that wants to succeed should be, “How can we service our HCPs and patients and where do our brands fit into that?”

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Many pharma brand managers are not aware of how many searches for their brand go through Google each month. If you asked Procter & Gamble the same question, every single brand manager would know about their Google profile and a lot more.

Pharma can often ignore that their customers expect the same digital experiences in pharma that they do across their lives – shopping online for groceries, using insurance services, searching for information etc. For example, I get asked a lot by pharma brands if they need their content on a website or not, as if its optional!

Often, we find that clients are surprised by what patients want when it comes to digital. When Kanga worked with prostate cancer patients in their 70s and 80s, the general assumption from the client was that they wouldn’t want to use an app because of their age. But the first thing the patients said when we ran a co-creation workshop with them was, “If only this was on our smartphones, it would be much more convenient.”

### **It seems like pharma is missing out on some intuitive digital solutions.**

It is intuitive, yes, but there is plenty of evidence behind it too – we’ve done studies in the past where we’ve measured costs per interaction and change in behaviour over time and shown that it’s more profitable to have a multitude of digital touchpoints in your mix.

Even so, we see that while customers spend more than 90% of their information-seeking time in digital channels, the industry is still spending 80% of its marketing budget in traditional channels – or at least it was before the COVID crisis. Now companies are scrambling to digitise as fast as they can because this is the only way to support customers and patients at the moment.

### **What do you think pharma can learn from other industries?**

Digital transformation requires a lot of courage and expert change leadership for it to permeate down through the levels of the organisation, removing silos the way it has done in other sectors, such as banking, automotive and commerce.

Many senior leaders in pharma started their careers as scientists or field sales reps, so transformation and experimenting with new business models is not always familiar territory for them.

Companies are addressing this by appointing a chief digital officer (CDO) or customer experience officer (CXO) to drive change. They recognise that digital is not a channel or a marketing tactic – it is about transforming the way companies work, right across the business, from drug discovery to clinical trials, medical, marketing and sales.



## About the interviewee

Kay Wesley is CEO of Kanga Health. Kay is a thought leader in global healthcare digital communications with 20 years' experience across the pharmaceutical industry, as well as non-pharma digital business leadership experience as a 'dot com' leader in the 1990s. She created and led AstraZeneca's award-winning global digital marketing team for 5 years and built McCann Health's digital agency, before founding Kanga Health.

## About Kanga Health



Kanga Health is a global digital agency, providing end-to-end services to help health and pharma organisations with successful digital transformation. From strategy to development, implementation and beyond, our experts guide pharma teams and customers every step of the way to deliver projects that are always value-driven, on time and excellence derived.

If you want help to 'win the pharma digital race', Kanga Health is running a free series of six short webinars on quick wins to 'get digitally fit' and develop a multi-channel approach at pace. Starting on Tuesday 2 June 2020.

A full list of webinars and timings can be found at: [www.kangahealth.com/webinar-sign-up/](http://www.kangahealth.com/webinar-sign-up/).

Or get in touch with Kay to discuss any of the points raised above direct at: [kaywesley@kangahealth.com](mailto:kaywesley@kangahealth.com).