



**KELLY D. MYERS**

*Co-Founder and CEO of Qforma*

# UPCLOSE

**With Kelly D. Myers, Co-Founder and CEO of Qforma**

BY JON BRULLOTHS

Kelly D. Myers is Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Qforma. He applies 23 years of Fortune 100 pharmaceutical and technology domain expertise to providing healthcare organizations with tools that identify useful patterns in complex data and deliver actionable information.

**PM360: What issues are your pharma company clients seeking help with today that they were not addressing a few years ago?**

**KELLY MYERS:** Pharmaceutical/biotech sales and marketers are being asked to establish and grow markets and market share with fewer and fewer resources. Five or ten years ago—even up to the last 36 months—the basic business model with pharma and biotech sales and marketing has been “more results with more resources.” That is to say, “if we invest more into sales and marketing, how can we grow the top and bottom line?”

The loss of key blockbuster drug exclusivity for so many companies has led to fundamental industry changes. Now sales and marketing are asked to continue market development, growth, and expansion initiatives but with far fewer resources. Pharma and biotech companies are now seeking to reframe their business models to identify and tap into physician networks in a highly leveraged way.

**What can you point to as the reason Qforma has been able to break through some preconceived ideas about what the data can and cannot deliver?**

Technology companies in this analytic space were historically of two methodologies, either data suppliers or analytics/theory-based. Companies with a data-derived origin provided data, and left it to clients to glean insights. Companies with a theory- or analytics-derived methodology provided analytics tools, and minimal to no data interpretation.

We wanted to build a different

kind of company from the beginning, and we've built Qforma around three core competencies. We started with a handful of physicists and mathematicians who were experts in finding patterns in disparate data sets. Additionally, they had a lot of experience in working with imperfect data. All data has holes in it—the trick isn't to build an algorithm via an academic exercise that would work only when you had perfect data; rather, the value is in the ability to build solutions that will deliver key, actionable insights, even when the data isn't perfect. Delivering actionable insights from imperfect data is one of our core competencies.

Another resides in our deep domain experience. Many of our people have been in the client's shoes—pharmaceutical and biotech sales, and marketers. We also have analytics experts ranging from a physician, to several individuals with Ph.D.s in math and physics.

The delivery of effective data visualization is our third competency. While an excellent algorithm is critical, and you will gain insights from data, if information is not presented in a visually engaging way, the information and insights probably won't be fully utilized. Our focus is to present insights in a way that enables pharma or biotech sales and marketers to immediately and intuitively know what to do with the information and insights.

**What are some of the new ways pharma companies are applying data analytics?**

Four or five years ago, most clients had a national strategy and message.

There wasn't much done from the home office to customize a message, or consider how to address a market at the local level. Now, we're seeing increased regional and local marketing initiatives. We are finding that more and more companies want to fully leverage and partner with their local community opinion leaders, or COLs, as opposed to primarily relying on national key opinion leaders.

There are probably a few hundred nationally well-known physicians looked to for insights in any given disease area. What we've found is that there are thousands of community-level physicians who are local medical leaders. These are the physicians in each disease state, looked to by networks of peers for therapy insights. Treatment options are explored and discussed every day in every community, and treatment decisions are often the result of shared experiences between peers. It is interesting to see how insights vary from geography to geography, based on differences in patient demographics, or differences in the way certain payers operate within geographies.

Most organizations we work with have a significant interest in local networks to create more informed and effective regional and local sales and marketing programs. It is fulfilling to watch our clients successfully partner with local physician networks and in doing so, realize increases in sales numbers from 5 to 40 percent over national averages.

### **What are other ways that physician social networks are important to the industry?**

The industry is investing substantial resources toward building a broader, more diverse base of professional advocates. This enables them to address one of the biggest problems they face: physicians are decreasingly accessible to local sales representatives, and their

traditional marketing programming is experiencing diminishing returns.

Moreover, using new technologies to create more powerful strategies makes sense. Engaging COLs identifies the framework to a broader, more diverse base of professional advocates and connects them with actionable, established network relationships “on the ground.” This enhances positive effects across numerous initiatives, from speaker programs to PR to managed care pull-through, by establishing relationships with the brand’s most effective local communicators.

We have witnessed extremely innovative tactics come from the visibility of who influences whom, including tactics that enable indirect access to key customers who are “no-see” physicians via the network.

**Instead of targeting 250,000 physicians for a primary care drug that would apply to a lot of patients, we're seeing pharma marketers targeting niche markets of 10,000 to 20,000 physicians.**

### **Using your commercial model, who are the most important audiences for pharma sales and marketing promotion?**

Most past sales and marketing efforts went to the highest prescribers in a given geography, and virtually all organizations know their highest prescribers. What we find particularly interesting is that almost one-third of high-influence community physicians, in most therapeutic classes or diseases, are low to mid-level prescribers.

This creates high probability that

many highly influential physicians are either not on their radar, or if they are, they're a low priority target.

### **How do you see data analytics improving the commercialization model and launch success in the changing healthcare marketplace?**

We're seeing more niche and other specialized markets, smaller target universes, and a stronger desire to identify the optimal physician universe—those offering the most opportunity based on their brand goals, strategies and resources. Instead of targeting 250,000 physicians for a primary care drug that would apply to a lot of patients, we're seeing pharma marketers targeting niche markets of 10,000 to 20,000 physicians.

As sales and marketing teams tackle the challenge of accomplishing more with fewer resources, solutions that enable effective, leaner sales teams and slimmer budgets are a new reality.

In many disease areas we have found patterns in data sets that allow a targeted universe to be honed. For example, in movement disorder specialists, there is a subset of about 2,000 physicians who are extremely important to a brand's overall success. Looking at metrics like referral data, we find that 15 percent of all movement disorder referrals are from neurologist to neurologist. Essentially, that is a specialist voting (using referrals as a vote) to say there is a super sub-specialist within their network— sales and marketers may need to focus their efforts on the identification of such key physicians.

### **How will pharma apply data and analytics in the near future?**

The industry is interested in practical, real-world application of data and data analytics. Pharma and biotech sales and marketers have a need to act quickly with insightful information. There isn't a lot of patience for academic or theory-based approaches. ○