Big Pharma Medical Affairs Finds a Cure for Advanced Search in Salesforce

At AstraZeneca®, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, the Medical Affairs and Strategic Development for Medical Inquiry group plays a vital role. The group's Virtual Scientific Managers (VSM) field inquiries from physicians about drug specifications and interactions, sifting through thousands of documents daily to find highly specific information that answer physicians' questions.

When a physician has a question about a drug, he places an inquiry with the Medical Affairs and Strategic Development group. The VSMs use Salesforce to discover whether an approved Standard Response exists. If it doesn't, they create a new Standard Response. Over the course of a year, this process happens thousands of times.

The Challenge

The group hasn't always used Salesforce to manage questions and responses. In 2010, the company set out to build a custom Salesforce application for the Medical Affairs group. The project had significant challenges, and in 2012 the company turned to Enable Consulting (Fort Washington, PA) for help.

When Enable came onto the scene, Salesforce had been up and running for a few months. There were a number of major gaps the team needed to fill, and it fell on Enable to prioritize what would get solved first.

Ralph DeHart, Enable's CTO, found that one central issue kept popping up again and again: Search. "There were constant complaints about the ability to find critical data," DeHart said. "The users couldn't reliably find the content they were looking for. The number of items returned — the results — were insufficient. We'd do a search and get 3,000 results and then do a search three minutes later and get a different set of results. One of the requirements of the application is that you be able to reliably produce consistent results, and that just wasn't happening."

Joe Cellucci, Enable's CEO, said the existing system had some shortcomings. "Out of the box, the Search in Salesforce didn't meet the requirements of the user base. When we came into the project, Search

was the biggest area in need of improvement. There was serious consideration of scrapping the project altogether."

How important is Search to Medical Affairs teams? "A big part of their day is finding and discovering information," Cellucci said. "There's a level of granularity they need from search results to do their job. The system was preventing them from being able to get the level of granularity they needed. The user view was that the system was broken."

Specifically, the users were frustrated by the application's failure to provide relevant, reliable results. "It's a double search problem," Cellucci said. "A lot of the information is not prioritized, not scored. They'd issue a search and get hundreds of thousands of results, which they'd then have to look through manually. If they spelled the term incorrectly, they found nothing. Searches were also taking too long. That just won't work for a business unit that's measured on time and money."

"Users could not find the responses they were searching for," DeHart said. "Everybody was talking about the fact that they couldn't continue with the status quo."

"We were handed a system on life support," said Cellucci. "If these issues weren't addressed, we'd have to go back to the old system."

The Solution

The Client Engagement Director in Information Services for AstraZeneca agreed something had to be done, and he put DeHart on the case. After thoroughly investigating his options, DeHart realized he'd have to find a non-traditional solution.

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"I started by looking for a technical solution within Salesforce," he said. "I talked to the architect at Salesforce who had implemented their search and got a lot of info. I received definitive statements from them that they understood the problems, but these problems were not in the roadmap for updates."

DeHart turned to Salesforce's AppExchange™, where he stumbled upon an app called KonaSearch from Kona DataSearch (Nashua, NH). "The problem as I saw it was that there were lots and lots of documents that needed to be scanned and indexed. When I found Kona, I remember thinking that they understood the problem. I was drawn in by the fact that with Kona, the search results were formatted like Google searches. That they would highlight the results the way Google does was a big thing for my users."

DeHart picked up the phone and called Dave Hall, Kona DataSearch's CEO and Co-Founder. Within a week, a trial version was up and running, lead by Kona's CTO and Co-Founder Andrew McKay. "I showed it to the Client Engagement Director and a couple of the users and everybody was impressed with the speed, with what the user interface looked like, and at that point we were able to convince the Client Engagement Director to go ahead with a pilot" DeHart said. "Once the users viewed the demo, there was a lot of pressure. Everyone was saying, 'Let's go ahead and get this done.'"

The implementation was a multi-phased approach. "We got the first phase up and went into a test environment, where the users finally got to see what the pieces of the app would look like once they were done. We received lots of good feedback, and after three or four iterations we moved the app to production," DeHart said.

The Results

Since Kona DataSearch has been in use, DeHart says conditions in the Medical Affairs group have improved dramatically. "The complaints about Search have disappeared," he said. "That's off my plate. Now, suddenly, there's more funding to fix other problems. Because this is out of the way, the client is confident they can fix other things."

"As far as I'm concerned, Kona is a mature, high performance search mechanism for multiple document types," DeHart said. "It makes it easy to search through large masses of documents and identify keywords and phrases quickly. It's another tool I've got in my back pocket for other search problems that arise."

The AstraZeneca's Client Engagement Director in Information Services agrees that implementing Kona was a success. "The Search issue was fundamental," he said. "It was considered critical enough that we considered replacing the entire system. It was fundamental to the system's usability. I'd characterize it as a make or break feature."

"I've been very pleased with the process," he continued. "Development is always kind of a surprise; you encounter difficulties, you encounter misunderstandings. Kona was very responsive and invested quite a bit of time on their part. It was a real partnership."

What are the Client Engagement Director's users saying? "They want the next set of enhancements!" he said. "It's always about the next thing, and that's a positive sign. If they're talking about the next thing, they're not talking about the last thing, which means the last thing must have been good."

"Medical Affairs is an inherent part of the business," he continued. "It's growing in importance. There's a lot of emphasis on marketing activities, on providing information about the opportunity, but it's when you're actually trying to use the products that you need — that other arm of the business — the arm that provides people with scientific and medical information that is objective."

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Top Kona Features for Big Pharma ROI

The Client Engagement Director of Information Services on the Kona features that matter most to the Pharmaceutical Industry:

- **Search Speed:** "When physicians' questions are urgent, we need to deliver short response times. Before Kona, just turning up results was time-consuming. It was taking anywhere from 30 seconds to minutes. With Kona, we're getting search results in one second."

- **Search Consistency:** "If you're not able to accurately respond to inquiries, a lot of things are at risk, including your reputation as a company."

- **Search Usability:** "There are a lot of different ways to express a search, but that layout of the screen that allows you to see the various filters is key in terms of usability. That's exactly where Kona shined in this case. If our users can't search, then we're failing at informing our customers about the value our medicines have."