

UNDERScore MARKETING:

The “How-to” Product Launch Guide

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Setting the Stage for a Successful Product Launch

Only two-thirds of all drug launches in the United States meet launch expectations, according to a 2023 report by Deloitte. The report analyzed 284 new biologic and small molecule drugs launched in the US between 2012 and 2021. Of these, 98 had a poor performance at launch. The most important factors contributing to a product missing its launch forecast? Market access issues and a failure to adequately understand customer needs.

Mid-level pharma and biotech companies are in a unique position when launching a new product. Limited by resources, funding, and smaller (or non-existent) sales teams compared to larger companies,

they face the same regulatory hurdles and competitive pressure as big pharma, often without the benefit of extensive experience or deep pockets. In this environment, omnichannel and media planning plays a decisive role in the success of a product launch. However, media partners are often engaged too late in the launch process to fully maximize their potential to boost media's effectiveness.

When engaged close to launch, media planning timelines are compressed, forcing the media plan to retroactively fit into predetermined budgets and targeting schematics. Late engagement with media often necessitates adopting existing planned creative assets. This limits the ability to tailor content for channels that could otherwise prove more effective. **Ideally, media strategy should be developed as part of the go-to-market process, involving a media partner early and consistently throughout.**

A proactive approach to media planning minimizes the risk of overlooking critical elements when it's time to launch. It ensures that media amplifies the brand's message at every stage. The most successful launches require not only a solid plan, but also a solid contingency plan. All cross-functional team members must work from the same playbook to handle potential shifts in the launch.

In this whitepaper, we've tapped into the knowledge of Underscore's leaders—luminaries with decades of combined experience in pharma and biotech marketing, omnichannel strategy & media planning, data analytics, and optimization. Their insights, distilled into **this comprehensive guide, will help you navigate the complexities of bringing a new product to market in ways that maximize effectiveness and increase the odds of success.**



The following topics are included here:



5 Strategic Considerations for a Successful Launch



Importance of Collaboration: Aligning Stakeholders and Budgets



How Data Improves Planning



The Underscore Difference



Key Takeaways and Next Steps



5 Strategic Considerations for a Successful Launch

The pharma & biotech media landscape encompasses two key targets – healthcare professionals (HCPs) and consumers. This requires a nuanced media planning approach that **considers the distinct needs and behaviors of each audience – as well as the limitations of targeting.** For example, a patient might see an ad for a breakthrough treatment on TV, but if their HCP isn't aware of it, this could cause confusion and frustration. A strategic media plan ensures that ads and information effectively reach and engage both HCPs and consumers in a way that work together to improve impact.

The Role of Omnichannel Planning

The pharmaceutical industry has made strides in data aggregation but still struggles with effective data activation, particularly in marketing and promotion. The concept of omnichannel planning is widely discussed, but often poorly implemented.

The industry has progressed from data lakes to multi-channel engagement, identifying customer journeys, and focusing on the next best action. Integrating digital and salesforce data to inform sales interactions is now common. AI technologies allow for advanced analysis of variables influencing behavior, leading to better sales impact conclusions. Despite these advancements, many pharma companies still face challenges in realizing the full potential of omnichannel investments.

True omnichannel connects data from various customer interactions and channels compliantly to enable customer-centric strategies. At Underscore, **our Pinnacle Planning Suite, comprising a data engine, strategic consultants, and business intelligence tools, helps derive actionable insights to inform tailored brand strategies that can evolve over time.**

"Logically, the initial focus should be on healthcare professionals. Launching a consumer-driven brand with a significant direct-to-consumer push through print and TV too early, before healthcare

professionals have had the chance to learn about the product, understand its clinical profile, and get comfortable with it, can cause significant challenges," said Brandi Ascione, EVP & Managing Director at Underscore.

If a patient learns about a new treatment but their healthcare provider is unaware of it, it can lead to frustration. This is why **ensuring that HCPs are informed about new treatments before a direct-to-consumer campaign is so important.**

Data is key here – it informs the media planning process by providing detailed insights into target audiences, competitive landscapes, and market trends. Underscore uses data to tailor media efforts for product launch, tying specific objectives to media strategy and approach.

"Product launch is really dependent on data alignment," explains Chris Tuleya, Underscore's EVP, Managing Director. **"What resources do we have? What do we need to go out and find and how do we use this data to inform our strategy and approach?"** It's all about understanding what data we have access to versus what we need to fill in. If we don't have a lot of data, there are places we can go out and buy data. This data piece is a real linchpin in understanding and driving our strategy."

**In our experience,
the most successful
product launches
incorporate the
following elements:**

- 1 Early involvement and planning
- 2 Data-driven decision making
- 3 Comprehensive omnichannel and media strategy
- 4 Flexibility and adaptability
- 5 Strategic guidance and support

1. Early Involvement and Planning

Marketing teams often engage media agencies later than they should. It's not unusual to be brought on as the go-to-market strategy for a disease state awareness campaign is locked and loaded, creative concepts almost done, and field force hired and mapped to their respective HCPs. This compresses media planning timelines which can force the media plan to retroactively fit into predetermined budgets and targets.

Engaging a media partner like Underscore **at least 12 months before launch not only allows for meticulous planning but also provides a competitive edge by anticipating market trends.** It's an approach that sets your launch up for success. Early involvement allows for the identification and mitigation of potential roadblocks to launch. Early involvement also gives you time to check and double check the "weeds" of your media plan. That is, it ensures no critical element is overlooked. It helps avoid missed opportunities. It absolutely sets the stage for a successful launch.

The ideal process is historically media versus creative—the media always comes in late to the table.

"Realistically, you can have the greatest creative in the world, but if you don't know where to put it and what the right channels are based on your audience behavior and potential for impact, then the creative may look fantastic but it's not going to help you. Media has to be involved from the very beginning, so once a brand launch is happening, we see the product and what the goals are. It's about having a seat at the table earlier on," said Jay de la Cruz, SVP Global Media at Underscore.

2.

Data-driven Decision Making

Underscore leverages data to provide deep insights about target audiences, competitors, and market trends. This data-driven approach informs the media strategy, but it can also impact creative development by ensuring that every aspect of the campaign is tailored for the best possible outcomes. Data helps pre-launch by:

- Identifying the right audiences and the optimal channels to reach them
- Providing information about audience size, specialty, and a target's likelihood to engage with various media channels
- Enabling scenario planning to optimize the media mix
- Giving you a holistic view to drive better decisions (e.g., by integrating data across media, sales, and other functions)
- Providing guidance on funding and budget recommendations
- Determining which tactics and functional areas are responsible for driving success

Think of data as the GPS for your product launch journey – it guides you to your destination efficiently and effectively. Data informs every aspect of a successful product launch, from strategy to execution. ***“If a brand has historical data, we can ingest it and model different scenarios to predict promotional impact,”*** explains Ascione. ***“Even without historical data, there are analogs from other brands and categories that we can use to inform our strategy.”***

3.

Comprehensive Omnichannel and Media Strategy

A well-rounded media strategy involves more than just selecting the right channels. It requires a deep understanding of the brand's objectives, the competitive landscape, and the unique needs of the target audience. This is one of the main reasons that engaging with media early on translates to a more successful product launch.

Programmatic media buys are often seen as a solution for better customer engagement and efficiency. However, these buys commonly focus on channels like banners and emails, which have historically had less impact compared to deeper educational engagements. There needs to be **a balance between leveraging programmatic tools and applying strategic insights to develop a comprehensive omnichannel approach that resonates with audiences effectively.**

A comprehensive strategic media plan ensures that every dollar spent on media has the potential to drive sales impact. Getting media involved from the start allows you to integrate channels, messaging, targeting, and creative in a way that supports the new product's overall marketing strategies, goals, and in-market dynamics. It enables an effective omnichannel approach that moves beyond just mapping customer journeys to activating insights across channels.

Susan Quinn, Underscore's VP of Global Media, notes, ***"Working across several launches, our most successful relationships have been those where all stakeholders are immersed in the process collaboratively. A media strategy and plan have to be more than the sum of its parts. True immersive collaboration is the only way for us all to succeed and do right by our clients."***

4. Flexibility and Adaptability

The media landscape isn't fixed. It's constantly in flux with new tactics, channels and consumer and HCP behaviors that must be considered. The ability to adapt to change is crucial. We can't understate the importance of flexibility when it comes to optimizing and maximizing media.

"Flexibility is probably the second most important factor in media planning because things are going to change," said Stephanie Carman, Underscore's SVP of Client Services. ***"We all have to be prepared to jump and move, potentially altering plans or being flexible to bring something up that we may have suggested later to a sooner point. We need to stay focused on the ultimate goals and brand objectives, adjusting as necessary to ensure we meet our launch goals and business objectives."***

Data plays a huge role here too. Underscore's approach emphasizes flexibility, allowing for adjustments based on real-time data and market feedback. Adaptability is what ensures that campaigns remain effective even as market conditions shift. Being able to pivot based on what's working in real-time give us – and our clients – confidence that the goals of media are being realized.

5. Strategic Guidance and Support

When media is viewed as an integral part of the overall marketing strategy – brought in early and considered throughout the entire go-to-market timeline – it significantly enhances the impact and effectiveness of the launch.

By involving media partners from the start, messaging and creative assets can be optimized for the channels where they will be deployed, avoiding costly mistakes and delays. Early collaboration between media, creative, and strategy teams allows

for a more cohesive and integrated approach, where each element of the campaign works together seamlessly to drive desired outcomes.

At Underscore, we view our role as extending beyond media planning and execution. As a strategic partner, we offer ongoing guidance and support, helping clients navigate the intricacies of the media landscape.

Per Underscore's EVP & Managing Director, Brandi Ascione, ***"We have extensive experience in product launches, especially for rare diseases and innovative products. Our expertise with behavior change models is crucial, utilizing mass media and non-personal communications with healthcare professionals to effectively bring concepts to life. This omni-channel approach ensures a cohesive strategy, unlike simply using the same ad across multiple media streams."***

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION: Aligning Stakeholders and Budgets

Collaborating with media teams early offers a distinct benefit in product launch scenarios – it helps secure appropriate funding for media and advertising. By working together from the start, early engagement allows for alignment of key messaging, creative assets, and media channels. All of this helps avoid costly misalignments and delays close to launch.

"To secure appropriate funding for media and advertising, it's essential to demonstrate the potential return on investment to key decision-makers," explained Ascione. ***"We want to make sure we're working with companies who are funded – you need funds to go into market."***

To achieve appropriate funding, you **need a clear, data-driven media plan that outlines how media investments will support overall business objectives and drive measurable results.** Showcasing the value of media in the context of the broader launch strategy helps to secure the resources needed to execute a plan effectively.

Developing this type of comprehensive plan requires open communication and collaboration with every stakeholder involved with the launch process. Said Ascione, ***"It's a level of partnership that's critical to the success of any product launch. And it's what enables brands to navigate challenges and optimize their efforts for maximum impact."***



How Data Improves Planning

Data is the backbone of successful product launches, providing the structure needed to support every strategic decision. At Underscore, we use data to gain deep insights into target audiences, competitors, and market trends. ***"It's all about understanding what data we have access to versus what we need to fill in,"*** said Tuleya. ***"If we don't have a lot of data, there are places we can buy data for a deeper dive."*** Data helps identify the right audiences to target and the optimal channels to use. Data-driven media planning is particularly important in the pharma and biotech space, which is why working with experienced pharma marketers is critical for launch scenarios.

Brands can only analyze data based on what they've executed, which limits their ability to answer broader strategic questions about budget setting, promotional mix, and communication needs. Our goal is to help clients understand their business holistically, identify critical questions, and design market tests to gather necessary insights for optimizing omnichannel strategies.

"We're able to say to clients, even if the products are in completely different therapeutic areas, such as respiratory and another specialty, if they're both rare diseases, we can use one as a benchmark for the other," notes MacKenzie Jones, VP, Client Services.

Data also plays a vital role in creative development. **By understanding audience preferences and behaviors, media teams can craft messages and assets that resonate with target audiences.** The role of data in media planning has grown significantly in recent years. The wealth of data at our fingertips enables us to make more informed decisions for our clients.



Navigating Challenges and Pitfalls

Setbacks like unexpected shifts in timelines, delays in FDA approvals, bottlenecks around decision-making, and inadequate funding can derail even the most well-planned launches. One of the most significant challenges is the failure to make timely decisions. Brands often get bogged down in the process of trying to gather the perfect data and insights, which can lead to costly delays. Every time a decision is postponed during a launch, there are downstream implications for both creative and media teams.

Unexpected issues, such as a delay in FDA approval, can also throw a wrench in the launch process. In these situations, **brands may be tempted to continue refining their strategy or creative assets, but this can lead to a domino effect of delays and a less cohesive campaign.**

To help clients navigate these challenges, Underscore takes a proactive and adaptable approach. By scenario planning and building flexibility into the media plan, the team ensures that campaigns stay on track even in the face of unexpected changes. We work closely with clients and creative agencies to establish clear timelines and dependencies, minimizing the risk of last-minute surprises. **Ultimately, the key to successfully navigating launch challenges is to stay focused on goals and remain agile.**



The Underscore Difference

At Underscore, our combination of deep expertise, data-driven insights, and a passion for pharma and biotech, set us apart from other media agencies. We bring a level of curiosity and adaptability to every launch we support.

"We love a good challenge," says Tiffany Marg, SVP of Strategy. "Every launch is so different, and they are never simple. It's the nuances in the insights that excite us, and our team is full of curious minds trying to find the best solutions." This curiosity drives the team to dig deeper, ask the right questions, and uncover opportunities that others might miss.

By rooting our approach in data and analytics, we can make informed decisions and optimize campaigns for maximum impact. As Ascione explains, "We take an audience-first approach

to media. At the end of the day, we are dealing with real patients, real providers treating those patients, and they are individuals that require a nuanced approach."

This commitment to understanding audiences and crafting targeted, effective campaigns has helped Underscore achieve impressive results for our clients.

Another key differentiator is our adaptability and willingness to pivot. Susan Quinn, VP of Global Media, explains, "We're not a set-it-and-forget-it company, and good is never good enough. There is always something we can optimize and improve to continue delivering value for our clients." It's this combination of expertise, data-driven insights, and adaptability that truly sets Underscore apart.

When you partner with Underscore for your product launch, you can expect a team that is dedicated to your success, willing to put in the hard work, and always looking for ways to improve.

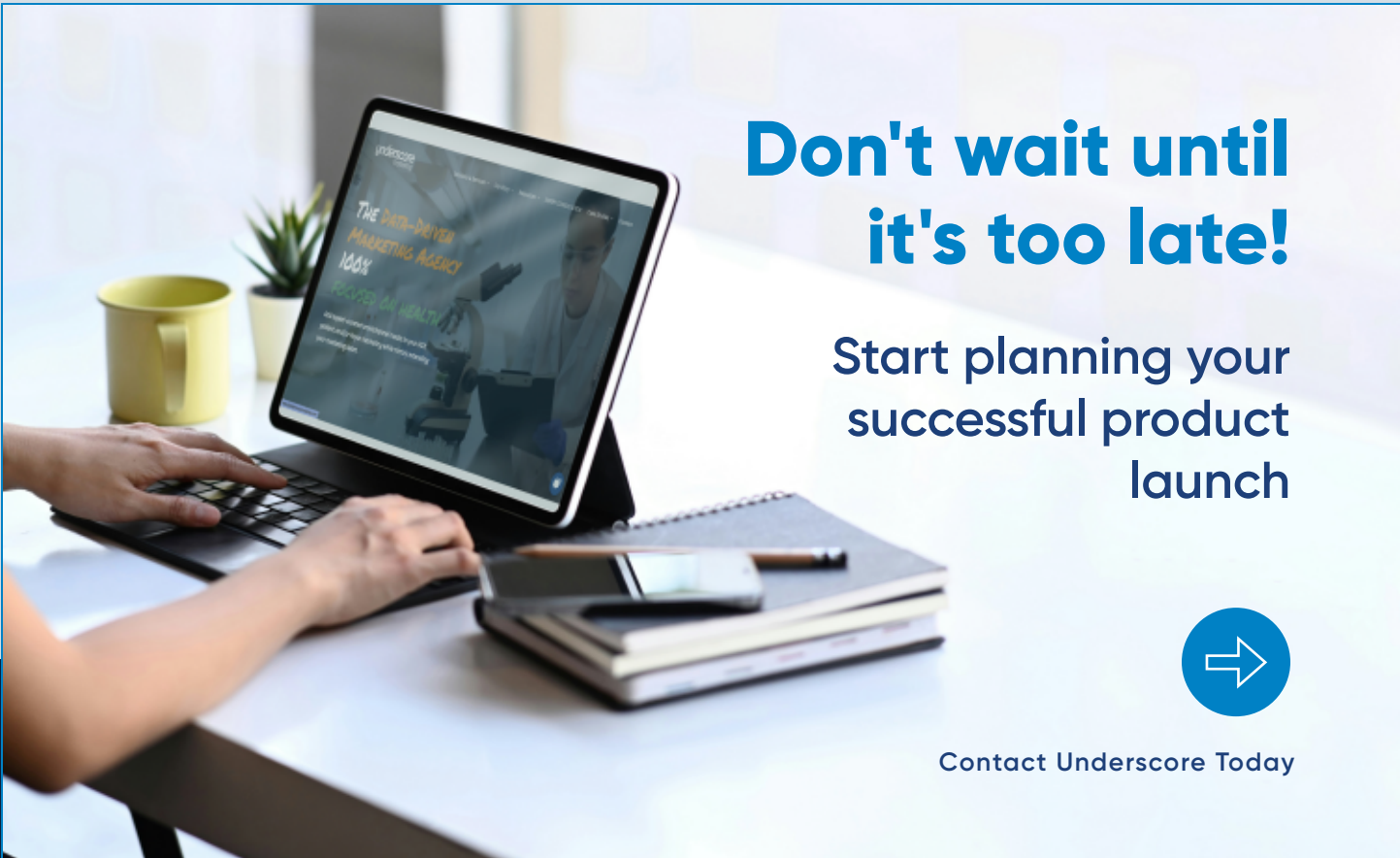


Key Takeaways and Next Steps

Launching a new pharma or biotech product is complex. It requires careful planning, strategic decision-making, and the ability to adapt to unique challenges. By partnering with a skilled media agency like Underscore, **brands can navigate this process with greater confidence.** Here's a quick checklist of things to consider as you embark on your launch:

- **Engage media partners early.** Get media involved as early as possible – ideally, 12 months or more before launch, to ensure a cohesive strategy and secure appropriate funding.
- **Data is your friend.** Leverage it to inform decision-making around target audiences, media planning strategies, and creative development.
- **Get every stakeholder involved.** Foster collaboration with everyone involved in the launch including internal teams, creative and marketing agencies, and media to ensure alignment and minimize delays.
- **Embrace adaptability.** Be willing to pivot when faced with challenges or unexpected changes in timing, targeting, and creative development.

If you're preparing to launch a new product and want to explore how Underscore can help you achieve success, we invite you to reach out to our team. We'll work with you to develop a customized plan that **leverages our expertise, data-driven insights**, and proven strategies to help your launch succeed.



Don't wait until it's too late!

Start planning your successful product launch



Contact Underscore Today

ABOUT UNDERSCORE

Underscore Marketing provides strategic omnichannel media & analytics solutions for highly targeted HCP & Patient audiences. It serves US and Global emerging and newly launched brands in pharma, biopharma, medical devices, and life sciences, with specialty in rare diseases and oncology therapies. Since our founding in 2002, we have focused on reducing the complexity of media planning and execution for DSE and branded communications to patients, HCPs and payers

with our consultative and "team extension" approach. We pride ourselves on maximizing media impact by synergizing human-led insight and data-driven media solutions with actionable business analytics.

If you're looking for a strategic partner to help you craft, execute and optimize media campaigns that drive your brand and return value to the business, reach out to us today to request an **expert consultation** ⇒



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