

THE TRUST CRISIS

HOW PHARMA NEEDS
TO EVOLVE TO ENGAGE
WITH GEN Z HCPS



*Welcome to the second edition
of the Fabric of Pharma white
paper; an annual exploration of the
pharmaceutical sector*



PHIL BLACKMORE, CREATE HEALTH CEO

AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE HELPING COMPANIES NAVIGATE THE INTRICATE WORLD OF HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATIONS, I'VE HAD A FRONT-ROW SEAT TO SOME REMARKABLE TRANSFORMATIONS IN HOW WE CONNECT WITH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS (HCPs). AND I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE A GROWING DISCONNECT THAT COULD PROFOUNDLY SHAPE PHARMA'S FUTURE.

Here's the paradox we're facing: our industry continues to achieve breathtaking breakthroughs and life-changing solutions at an unprecedented pace. But simultaneously, we're witnessing a widening communication gap that threatens to separate pharma companies from a generation of Gen Z HCPs.

This isn't just a generation who grew up with technology. These are young professionals who are jaded. They're unimpressed by the polished marketing campaigns that resonated with their predecessors. Instead, they're actively seeking impact, collaboration, and meaningful engagement that aligns with their values.

Yet much of our industry's communication strategy remains firmly planted in approaches designed for

previous generations of healthcare professionals. We're leaning heavily on what succeeded in the past. But failing to forge meaningful connections with Gen Z HCPs puts us at risk of losing trust and partnership, that we know are crucial for achieving the patient outcomes we're all working toward.

This paper takes a closer look at what Gen Z HCPs want from pharmaceutical companies. The findings are sobering, but think of it as a gentle wake-up call.

After all, this is an exciting time to work in pharma. The watershed moment is coming, and it's ours to shape. Those who will thrive are those willing to open their minds, adapt their approaches, and build genuine connections with this new generation.

FOREWORD

SETTING THE SCENE

Gen Z are the demographic cohort born between 1997–2012. Known to be the first generation of digital natives. By the end of 2025, Gen Z will represent 27% of the global workforce.

2026
2028

THE YEAR WHEN THE
FIRST GEN Z DOCTORS
WILL FINISH THEIR
COMPLETE GP TRAINING.

THE YEAR WHEN THE FIRST
GEN Z DOCTORS WILL
COMPLETE THEIR HOSPITAL
SPECIALISM TRAINING.

Why does this matter for pharma?

They're asking thoughtful questions, forming independent opinions, and bringing fresh perspectives to healthcare challenges. They're naturally inquisitive and remarkably open to new ideas and possibilities. Understanding what drives this audience, what they value, and how to authentically connect with them, is critical to pharma's success.

Their timeline means that we (industry and agency) are now in the strategic and tactical cycle where Gen Z will no longer be resident doctors.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology

We commissioned an independent third-party research company to carry out surveys, to ensure there was no bias. Two comprehensive online surveys were formulated to capture both internal and external perspectives.

Survey 1:
50 senior marketers
from pharma,
MedTech, and
healthcare sectors

Survey 2:
50 healthcare
professionals
under 30 years old

The question we set out to answer is:

Do current healthcare
communication strategies miss
the mark entirely with Gen Z?

And if yes, why?

It's important to note that this is a UK-focused study. While there may be universally applicable statements that apply to other countries, that research needs to be completed.

DO CURRENT HEALTHCARE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES MISS THE MARK ENTIRELY WITH GEN Z?





70%
DISTRUST
PHARMA

THERE IS A
**TRUST
CRISIS**

70% of Gen Z HCPs surveyed
feel they can't trust
pharmaceutical companies

This alarming statistic shows the impact
of this audience feeling unseen and
undervalued by an industry they view
as prioritising profit over all else.
It represents a serious erosion of trust
in a whole generation of current and
future healthcare decision-makers.



GEN Z DECODED

**UNDERSTANDING GEN Z IS KEY
TO EVOLVING COMMUNICATION
APPROACHES, CREATING RELEVANCE
AND BUILDING THAT TRUST.**

BEYOND DIGITAL NATIVES

It's tempting to oversimplify this generation's needs. Some assume that giving them a snappy TikTok reel will somehow satisfy their expectations. But their thinking runs deeper than that. Much deeper.

The uncomfortable truth underpinning everything about Gen Z is that they are genuinely scared. Scared about the world they're inheriting and

the future they're facing. This is a generation coming of age in a world that feels fundamentally unstable. Unstable politically, financially, socially, emotionally, and environmentally. They're dealing with a housing market that's priced them out, wondering if AI will impact their career prospects, and grappling with environmental challenges that seem increasingly insurmountable.



**GEN Z ACTIVELY PURSUE
POSITIVE IMPACT.
THEY WANT TO KNOW WHAT
GOOD PHARMA
IS DOING FOR THE WORLD.**



Gen Z HCPs aren't just looking for employers or partners. They're searching for allies to create meaningful change. They want to work with companies who are committed to making a positive impact on both people and planet.

They want to understand how pharma is making healthcare more accessible for underserved populations, investing in prevention alongside treatment, and whether environmental impact is genuinely considered in decision-making. And they won't be satisfied with virtue signalling. They want concrete evidence of authentic commitment to the causes that keep them awake at night.

IT'S EASY TO FALL INTO THE TRAP OF TREATING HCPS AS PROFESSIONALS ONLY, AS IF HAVING MEDICAL INITIALS BEFORE OR AFTER YOUR NAME CHANGES HOW SOMEONE THINKS AND FEELS.

Sure, they have a serious job to do, but they're just human like everyone else.

They have hopes and dreams, emotions and stresses. They consume, share and trust information in the same way as their non-HCP peers, opting for social-first, peer-driven and creator-influenced, as highlighted in the Edelman Trust Barometer 2025.

Furthermore, when we look at the Top 10 trends within the Reputation, Risk and Resilience report by Rod Cartwright, it's clear that HCPs trust behaviours in the same cultural, social, and economic headwinds as their peers – they're all affected, regardless of job title.

The next generation of HCP decision makers want to be educated and entertained (edutained) and right here, right now pharma communication is as interesting as watching paint dry.

86% of Gen Z doctors think the communication they see outside of pharma (i.e. in their personal lives) is better than pharma communication.

They're not interested in dry details and a stuffy tone, you need to engage them with punchy, visual messages and messaging that resonates. You need to respect their time and intelligence if you truly want to drive impact.

"More interactive, visual presentation and more up to date"

"More visual. Concise, clear display of data"

"Entertaining style and memorable style"

**ARE YOU NOT
EDUTAINED?**

TRANSPARENCY

**THIS GENERATION
HAS GROWN UP WITH
UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS
TO INFORMATION, AND
THEY'VE DEVELOPED
REMARKABLY
SOPHISTICATED FILTERS
FOR DETECTING
AUTHENTICITY.**

They want to partner with companies that communicate openly and honestly about their work, companies that embrace transparency as a core value.

For Gen Z healthcare professionals, the marketing campaigns of the past feel hollow. They want to meet the real scientists, the genuine patient advocates, the people behind environmental initiatives.



Gen Z is genuinely driving the call for meaningful change. They're 200% (2x) as likely as millennials and 300% (3x) more likely than Gen X to believe that brands can actively make the world a better place.

**76% SAY THEY
PRIORITISE BRANDS
THAT STAND FOR A
GREATER MISSION
OR PURPOSE WHEN
MAKING PURCHASING
DECISIONS.**

In healthcare, this means a generation of professionals who are making career decisions, prescribing choices, and partnership decisions based on value alignment. Yes, they're asking "Does this treatment work?" but they're also asking "Does this company share my commitment to making healthcare more equitable, sustainable, and accessible?"

OVER POLISH

MISSING



**100% GEN Z
PROFESSIONALS
SAID PHARMA
COMPANIES APPEAR
EXCESSIVELY
'CORPORATE'**

Communication from pharma companies is not yet resonating with this audience. 100% of surveyed Gen Z doctors feel that pharma companies come across as corporate in their communications and, as a result, feel inauthentic and difficult to connect with. They see a marketing approach designed to support commercial goals while completely lacking the human element they're seeking.

This disconnect is marked by the fact that 66% feel entirely left out of the conversation.

"I wish that it was more authentic and human"

"Feels very inauthentic, like they're driven by profits"

THE

MARK

WHEN ASKED TO DESCRIBE
PHARMA COMMUNICATION,
THIS AUDIENCE IS MOST LIKELY
TO CHOOSE WORDS LIKE:

CORPORATE

FORGETTABLE

UNINSPIRING

**GEN Z ARE HAPPY TO BE ENGAGED
THROUGH MORE TRADITIONAL CHANNELS;
MEDICAL JOURNALS, CONFERENCES,
E-LEARNING PLATFORMS AND EMAIL ALL
HAVE THEIR PLACE.**

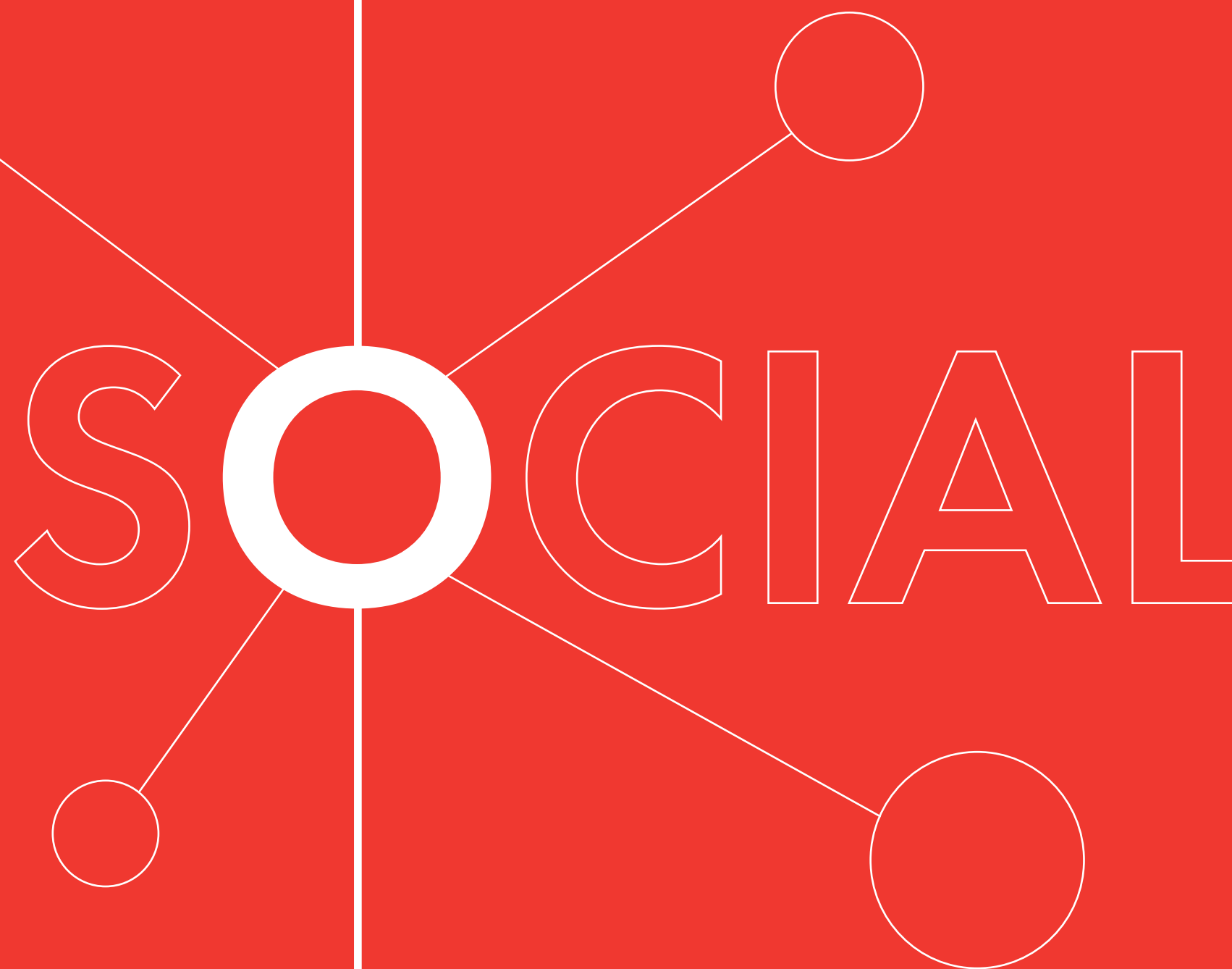
But they also see opportunity for pharma to engage with them through social media and digital touchpoints. After all, it's a place they spend considerable time in professional conversations.

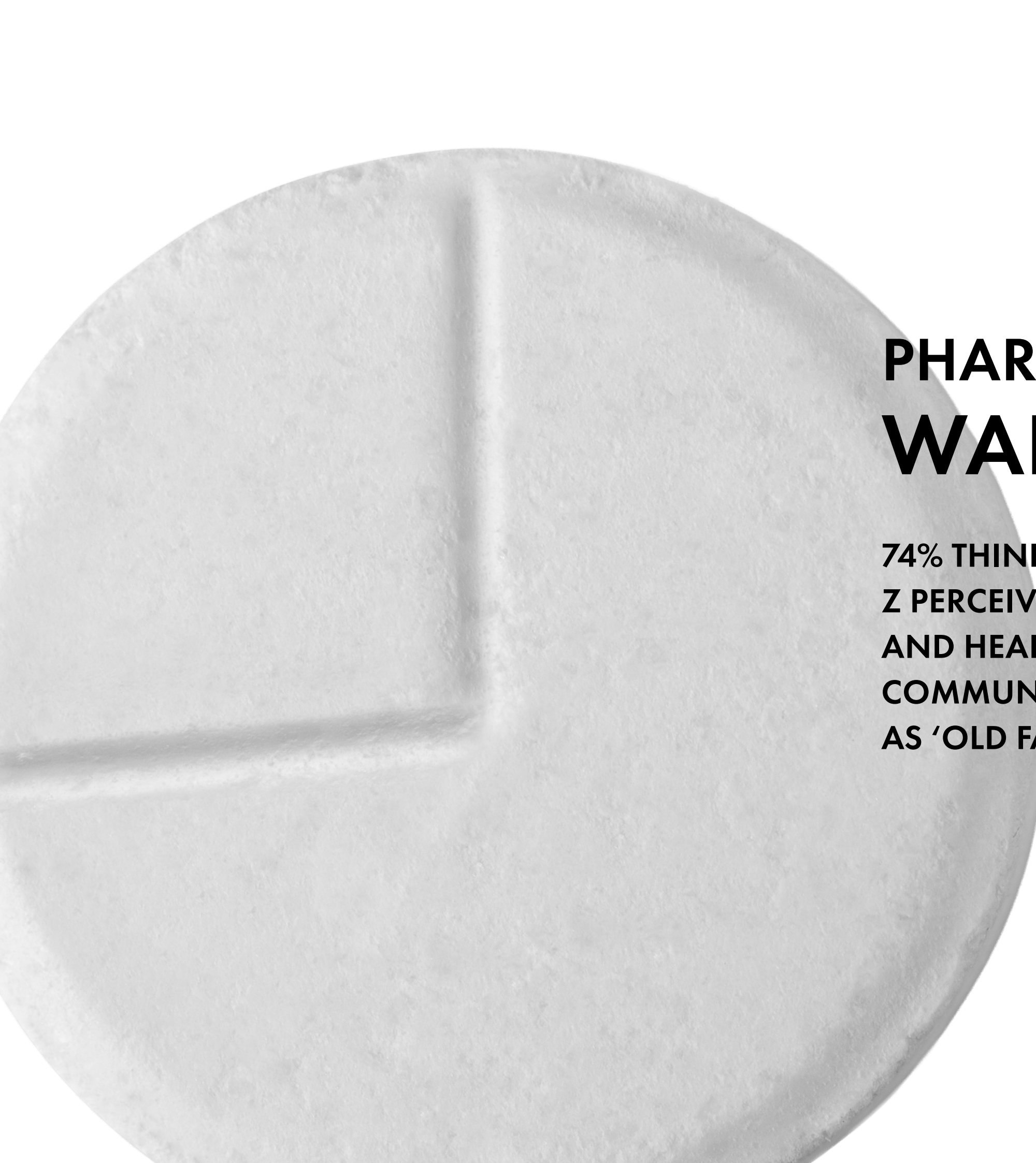
"Continue to innovate and focus on modern methods of communication. Social media, short bites about new innovations to see the inner workings of the pharma company and in particular their latest release"

Emergency Medicine Physician

"Perhaps use less jargon and utilise social media to enhance engagement. A lot of young doctors and other healthcare professionals are all over social media many hours a day!"

Bank SHO Doctor





PHARMA IS ALREADY WAKING UP

**74% THINK THAT GEN
Z PERCEIVE PHARMA
AND HEALTHCARE
COMMUNICATIONS
AS 'OLD FASHIONED'.**

The professionals we surveyed are already aware that their current strategies aren't going to cut it with Gen Z.

Overwhelmingly, industry professionals already sense the need to start communicating in more modern, engaging, and relevant ways that align with this audience's needs and values.

"Physicians are burnt out with paperwork and patient care so quality vs quantity will be the way forward."

Medical Affairs Professional

"Engaging, personalised communication catering to the individual's audio-visual preferences, yet short and transparent."

Marketing Professional (Industry)

66% SAID THAT PHARMA
COMMUNICATIONS SHOULD BE
PURPOSE-LED WHEN TARGETING
GEN Z HCPS IN FUTURE.

66%

"I'd just add that the future of pharma and healthcare communication hinges on our willingness to embrace bold, human-centred transformation."

Commercial & Sales

"To better engage Gen Z healthcare professionals, pharma and healthcare companies should prioritise transparent, authentic communication. This generation values purpose-driven work, so companies that clearly articulate how their products, research, and partnerships improve patient outcomes will stand out. Micro-learning opportunities. Quick, digestible updates on new medications, protocols, or studies can keep Gen Z clinicians engaged without overwhelming them. Ultimately, it's about showing up as a partner in their mission to provide better care, rather than just a vendor or information source."

Commercial & Sales

FACING INTO THE TRUST GAP

Pharma professionals are very aware of the trust challenge among this audience. When asked how much Gen Z HCPs trust information from pharma companies on a scale of 0 to 100, the average was only 50, and they have already started to consider how this trust might be rebuilt over time.

"Be useful to them — it doesn't have to be sales, sales, sales. Build the relationship by giving them info that is useful to them but doesn't have to be about us!"

Digital Transformation

"Genuine two-way feedback where the HCP can post questions about marketing materials and receive a near instant answer with follow-ups within 24 hours."

Marketing Professional (Industry)

"What you can do is be a trusted scientific partner for the prescriber, learn what are their needs and do your best to address them."

Launch Excellence Manager

KNOWLEDGE



The pharma specialists we interviewed shared their insights on their processes and practices that could be contributing to this Gen Z communication misfire.

66% of the pharma specialists only measure short-term communication impact, leaving only 33% who measure long-term impact. Seeing as building trust isn't a quick fix, perhaps the standard approach misses the opportunities to chart the success of building a relationship with this audience?

Others suggest there isn't enough audience insight to properly steer the creative process. Only 50% gather data and insight from target audiences before briefing new work. Without this, it is very easy to overlook the specific needs of those you're trying to engage.

"We need to focus on their needs instead of the story we want to tell."

Commercial & Sales

"Think about how retail, tech, and even hospitality have redefined customer experience: they've moved from transactional relationships to community-driven, personalised ecosystems. The same shift is overdue in healthcare."

Commercial & Sales

"Pharma can't operate on a 'push' model anymore. Active listening, co-creation, and continuous education are the new baseline"

Commercial & Sales



ACTION

While the data focus within this report is on UK doctors, perhaps we should also acknowledge that our broader healthcare professional stakeholder group also includes nurses, pharmacists, payers, and other allied professionals who are likely to share at least some of the same perspectives.

For example, Gen Z nurses and pharmacists may reach decision-making influence earlier than their doctor peers, because their training is shorter.

In the UK, of course, pharmacists already have expanded prescribing rights, and this will change further in 2026. This widens the urgency argument: trust-building with Gen Z is not a future challenge, but a present-day imperative.

An opportunity you can't afford to ignore

For those willing to move beyond surface-level engagement and genuinely embrace the deeper values that drive Gen Z healthcare professionals, there's an extraordinary opportunity.

In exchange for proving the good you do in the world, and in showing your understanding of their needs, you can build solid, loyal relationships with these future healthcare leaders. Based on shared purpose, rather than transactional exchanges. It requires a genuine commitment to authenticity, transparency and human connection.



SO, THE REAL QUESTION ISN'T WHETHER
PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES CAN
AFFORD TO INVEST IN AUTHENTIC,
PURPOSE-DRIVEN COMMUNICATION
TO BUILD TRUST WITH THIS GENERATION.
IT'S WHETHER YOU CAN AFFORD NOT TO.

TRUST =
ENGAGEMENT
= OUTCOME

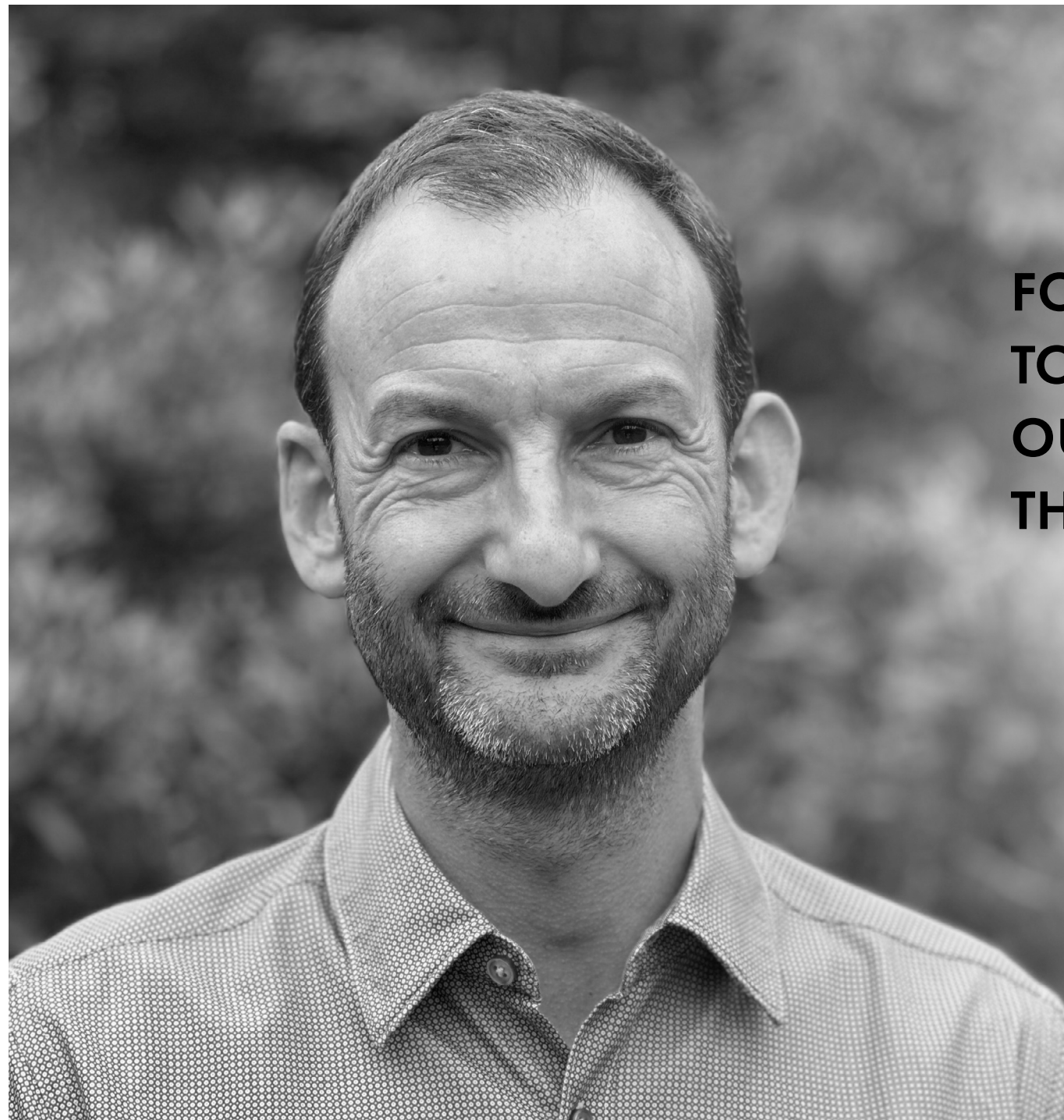
TRUST TODAY DETERMINES ENGAGEMENT TOMORROW

NEIL FLASH, IGNITION CONSULTING

This white paper shines a much-needed light on the widening trust gap between the pharma industry and Gen Z healthcare professionals.

If the industry is serious about building lasting relationships, now is the moment to act.

By 2026, Gen Z doctors will be fully qualified GPs, and by 2028, many will be specialists. We are in a last-mover risk window: waiting — or worse, avoiding the issue — risks losing the trust of an entire generation of healthcare professionals.



FOR UK PHARMA, TRUST ISN'T JUST "NICE TO HAVE", IT'S A LEADING INDICATOR OF OUTCOMES ACROSS THE BUSINESS AND THE WIDER HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.

If Gen Z doctors disengage, we risk slower clinical trial recruitment, reduced openness to branded medicines, and declining quality of dialogue with MSLs, access teams, and sales, etc.

The impact also extends to medical education and influence: lower attendance at congresses,

weaker participation in activations, and diminished peer-to-peer advocacy. Longer term, as this cohort moves into senior roles, mistrust could shape policy influence, prescribing behaviour, and payer decisions. In short, trust today determines engagement tomorrow and ultimately affects both patient access and commercial success.

CLAIRE VINCENT, STRATEGY DIRECTOR, CREATE HEALTH



DR. AZMAIN CHOWDHURY



IF PHARMA TRULY WANTS TO BUILD TRUST WITH MY GENERATION, IT'S TIME TO STOP TALKING ABOUT THE PROBLEM AND START ACTING ON IT.

Gen Z healthcare professionals aren't just the future — we are already the present. Every day, we're making executive decisions about patient care and population health. The question is: is pharma really paying attention to this shift?

I sit on the cusp between Gen Z and Millennial. That gives me the privilege of seeing both perspectives — and the frustration of watching the communication gap grow wider. Too often, pharma (like many traditional industries) still defaults to outdated, corporate strategies that fail to resonate.

As a clinician and content creator with a community of over 400,000 followers, I've built my platform on one principle: connection. I wanted to break beyond the four walls of my clinic and speak directly to people about their health. And I know many of my peers in Gen Z feel the same — we value being real, transparent, and relentlessly focused on a better future.

When I've spoken at pharma conferences, I've glimpsed the passion that drives you: the scientists, the strategists, the patient advocates. Meeting you in person makes me care — but most Gen Z HCPs haven't been given that chance. They don't yet see the human side of pharma.

That's why authentic communication matters. Transparency matters. Social media is not a gimmick; it's where the next generation of HCPs live, learn, and connect. My fear is that once conferences end, we retreat back into silos, citing "compliance" as a barrier to innovation. But compliance and creativity are not mutually exclusive.

If pharma truly wants to build trust with my generation, it's time to stop talking about the problem and start acting on it. Don't just meet us where we are — partner with us. Be real, be open, and embrace new ways of engaging. Because Gen Z isn't waiting. We're already here.



IDEAS MADE FOR STRONGER RETURNS

AN IDEAS LAB

At Create Health, we ignite bold ideas that make a difference in the world of health.

We partner with people, companies and organisations that deserve to be heard and help them stand up and stand out.

To get noticed.
To make change happen.

We think think big, move fast, and spark unexpected ideas to raise awareness, inspire action and spark conversations that matter.

Whether that's in rare disease, chronic conditions, women's health or lifestyle-driven illness — we don't just deliver messages.

We make positive change happen in health.

LET'S DISCUSS IDEAS:

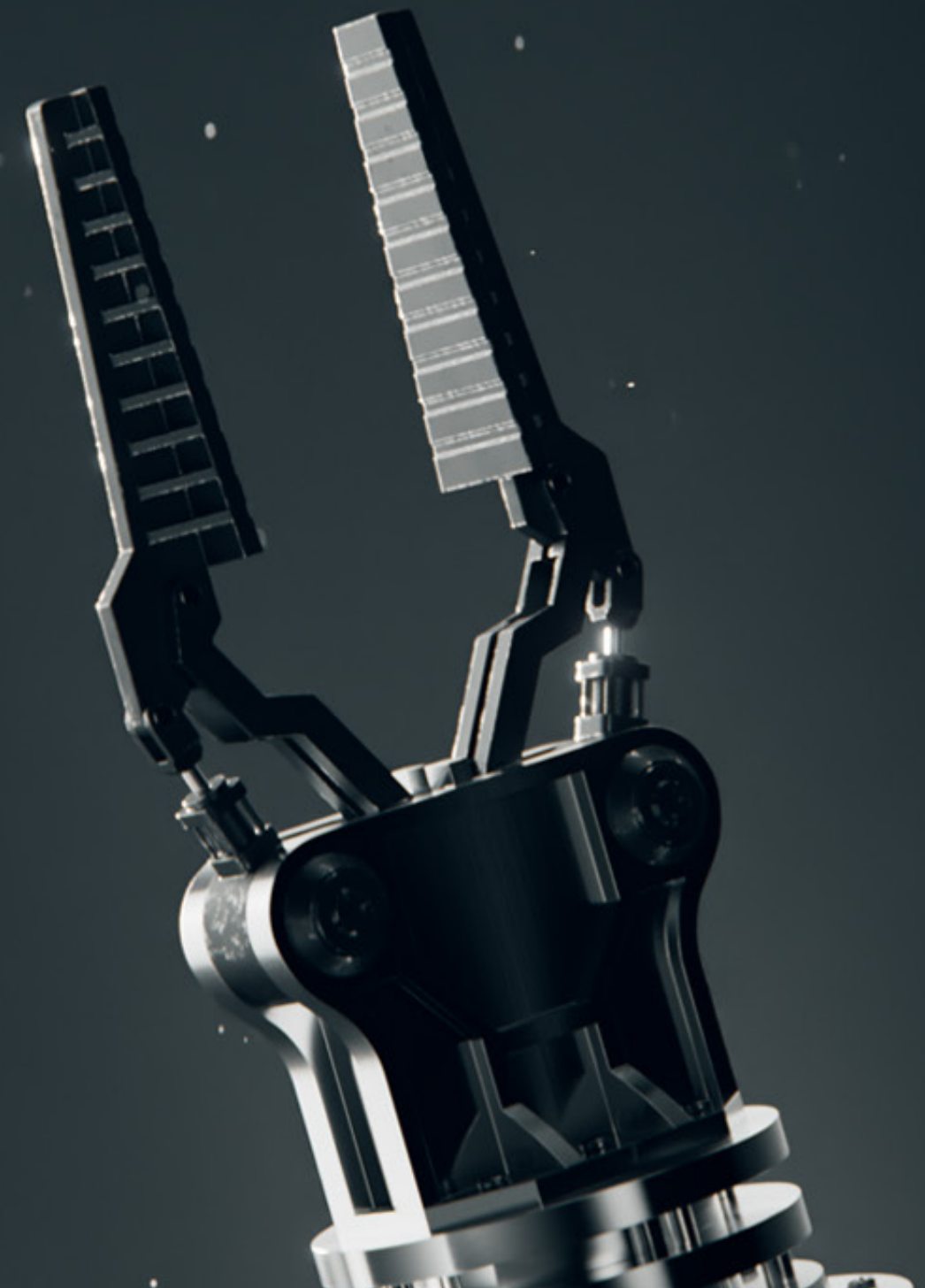
Charlie Culverhouse
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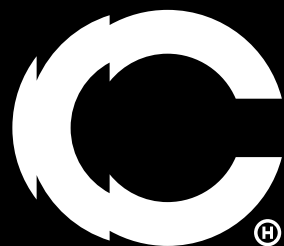
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Or let's connect on [LinkedIn](#)



Scan this code to watch the full Red Thread Film.





CREATE HEALTH

Thank you to everyone who took part in the surveys, M3 Research, and the brave souls who offered an opinion on this thought piece.

Thanks to our Gen Z Clinical Creator community and the team at Create Health for the words, wisdom and epic design.

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