

Scientific information groups of the R&D-based pharmaceutical industry assembled at the AGM of the Pharma Documentation Ring.

PDR Focuses on Intranets

by Y. Dubosc
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SOME 40 DELEGATES from 27 member companies of the Pharma Documentation Ring (PDR) met for their 38th Annual General Meeting September 25–27, 1996, in St. Albans, U.K. This year's successful meeting was hosted and well organized by Glaxo Wellcome.

The PDR, a corporate-based organization, consists of representatives from the information departments of its R&D-based member companies who conduct an intensive exchange of experience on nonconfidential matters of mutual interest, for example, internet/intranet applications, pharmaceutical development product files, document delivery services, coverage of chemical, patent and biomedical databases, etc. Reports on the activities of this organization have already appeared in this publication.^{1,2}

The ongoing mergers within the pharmaceutical industry are, of course, reflected in the PDR corporate membership, which will be affected when Novartis—resulting from the Ciba Geigy/Sandoz merger—becomes offi-

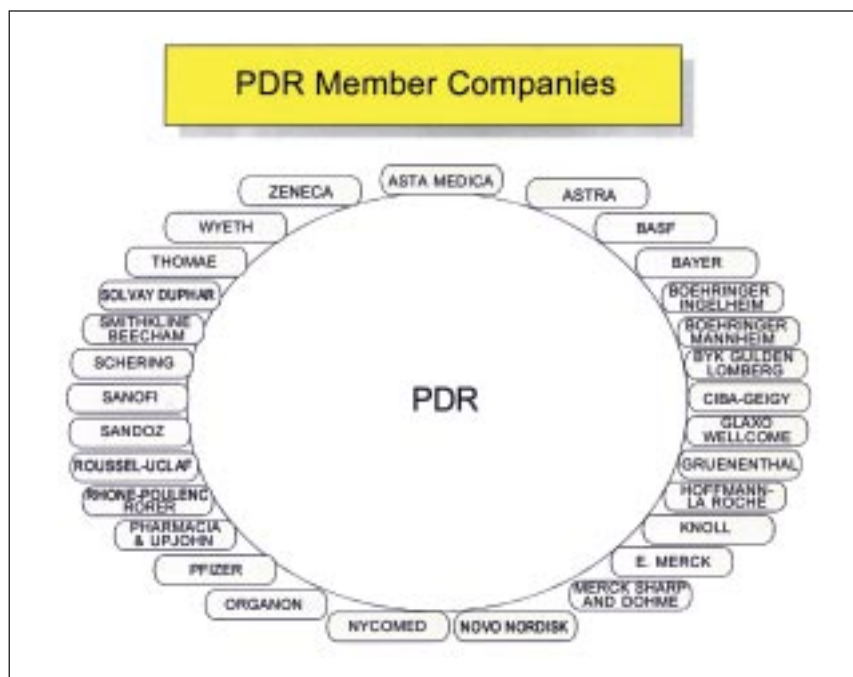


Fig. 1. PDR member companies.

cial. However, in the meantime, Merck, Sharp and Dohme has joined the ranks of the PDR while Hoffmann-La Roche has assumed Syntex's place. Consequently, the membership currently stands at 29 companies or corporate groups, the

present organization being depicted in the Figure 1.

The awareness of the importance of information technology is underlined by a recent German government program to invest some DM 2 billion

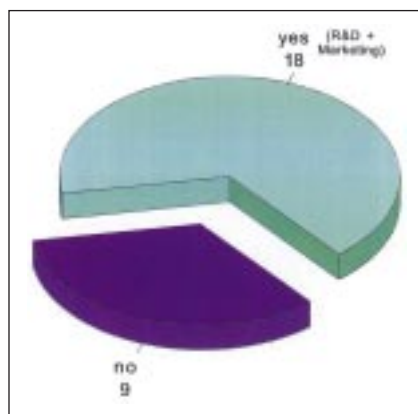


Fig. 2. Use of intranet technology within PDR companies.

to 1999 to facilitate access to scientific and technical information. "Information as Raw Material for Innovation" is one of the projects to be supported, along with others such as the networking of libraries and electronic publishing. A press release³ on this project also cited that each working day over 20,000 scientific/technical publications are produced and, in addition, it was claimed that the volume of available scientific information is doubling roughly every five years.

The full impact of HUGO—the International Human Genome Project, mid-way through its realization—will be felt far beyond the year 2005, when we will glean further insights into the mechanisms of disease, understanding of targets and the design of suitable diagnostics and therapeutic agents. Information technology will play a major role in the exploitation of these findings.

The increasing workload faced by information departments of the pharmaceutical industry means that there is less time available for extramural activities. Nevertheless, as the PDR is very pragmatic in its outlook, it will continue to be a challenge to focus on matters of high relevance, ensuring that any efforts on behalf of the PDR are of real, measurable benefit to everyday work.

Some selected results of PDR surveys were presented at recent Nîmes

International Chemical Information Meetings,^{4,5} as well as at the 1996 Spring ACS Meeting.⁶ Two publications, partly based on PDR work in the "Drug Development Product Files" area, are due to appear shortly.^{7,8}

Highlights from the AGM

There was an unusually high turnout of guest speakers at the meeting.⁹ Representatives from the British Library, Current Drugs, DIMDI, FIZ-Karlsruhe, STM Publishers International Association and TFPL all presented new upcoming projects and major developments as well as discussing joint initiatives with the PDR group.

Information management

The core topic of information management was ably managed by Muriel Levenbach (Duphar) and Irmgard Fischli (Sandoz), covering both strategic and technical aspects of information management such as:

- strategic planning concepts for the next five years;
- knowledge management;
- coordination of end-user feedback and internal marketing of information services;
- promotion, distribution and constant reassessment of information services—the slogan being "promote or perish"; and

- total quality management (TQM) concepts and their implementation within the corporate environment of the pharmaceutical industry.

Intranet/Internet activities

While the World Wide Web is being used as an additional information source within PDR companies,⁵ the main attention of PDR companies is clearly focused on intranets (corporate-wide webs²), which offer tremendous potential for rationalization and ease of access to data. Figure 2 illustrates the present level of implementation of intranets among the 27 PDR companies present at the AGM.

While two thirds of PDR members are already operating intranets, most of the remaining companies plan to move into this area by the end of 1996 or in early 1997. Browser software (e.g., Netscape Navigator, Microsoft® Explorer) is already part of the standard software package of most PDR companies. One member company reported that "intranet use is exploding within the corporate environment," while another stressed "intranet will form the future strategic framework for the dissemination of information within the company." Another survey indicated that about half of the PDR companies were using Lotus Notes, but only about 15% of the members were using it intensively within R&D.

TABLE I: PDR TOPICS AND STATUS, SEPTEMBER 1996

PDR TOPIC	COORDINATORS
Biological Science-Systems and Databases	Boehringer Mannheim/Byk Gulden
CD-ROM Databases	Knoll/Pharmacia & Upjohn
Chemistry Systems and Databases	Pfizer/Zeneca
Copyright Issues	Glaxo Wellcome/Wyeth
Document Delivery (conventional + electronic)	Thomae/SmithKline Beecham
Drug Information Systems on Development Products	Bayer/Schering
Economic and Commercial Data	Astra Arcus/Glaxo Wellcome
Information Management	Sandoz/Solvay Duphar
In-House Management of Databases	Astra Medica/Astra Charnwood
Intranet/Internet	Boehringer Mannheim/Nycomed
Library Affairs	BASF/Gruenthal/Novo Nordisk
Patents	Rhône-Poulenc Rorer/Roussel Uclaf
Records Management	Boehringer Ingelheim/Merck KGaA

The importance of intranet developments to the R&D-based pharmaceutical industry is underpinned by two events:

- a PDR Focus Group was established to approach specific database producers/publishers to stress the need for services (e.g., pharmacopeias, drug compendiums, etc.) in “structured” HTML formats for corporate intranets, to replace the present networking of CD-ROMs; and
- a planned special PDR Intranet Meeting in the spring of 1997 to study needs as well as approaches to technical problems together with discussing the results of the above survey.

Selected PDR topics presented at the AGM

An overview of the current list of PDR topics and their coordinators is shown in Table I. Comments on some of the presentations of these topics are summarized below.

CD-ROM databases

A survey on the relative merits of CD-ROM vs. intranet applications produced interesting results which clearly favored intranet applications, CD-ROMs being regarded (in the future) as a possible convenient delivery medium for intranets. Some PDR companies have already adopted this strategy. The elimination of networking problems with CD-ROMs through the widespread use of intranet technology was a prevailing theme.

Copyright

In particular, the legal aspects of electronic publishing, digitization issues and internal use were discussed at length with a representative of the STM Publishers International Association with a view to establishing closer links between STM and PDR.

Document delivery

Due to the numerous activities and different approaches made by suppliers, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain an adequate critical

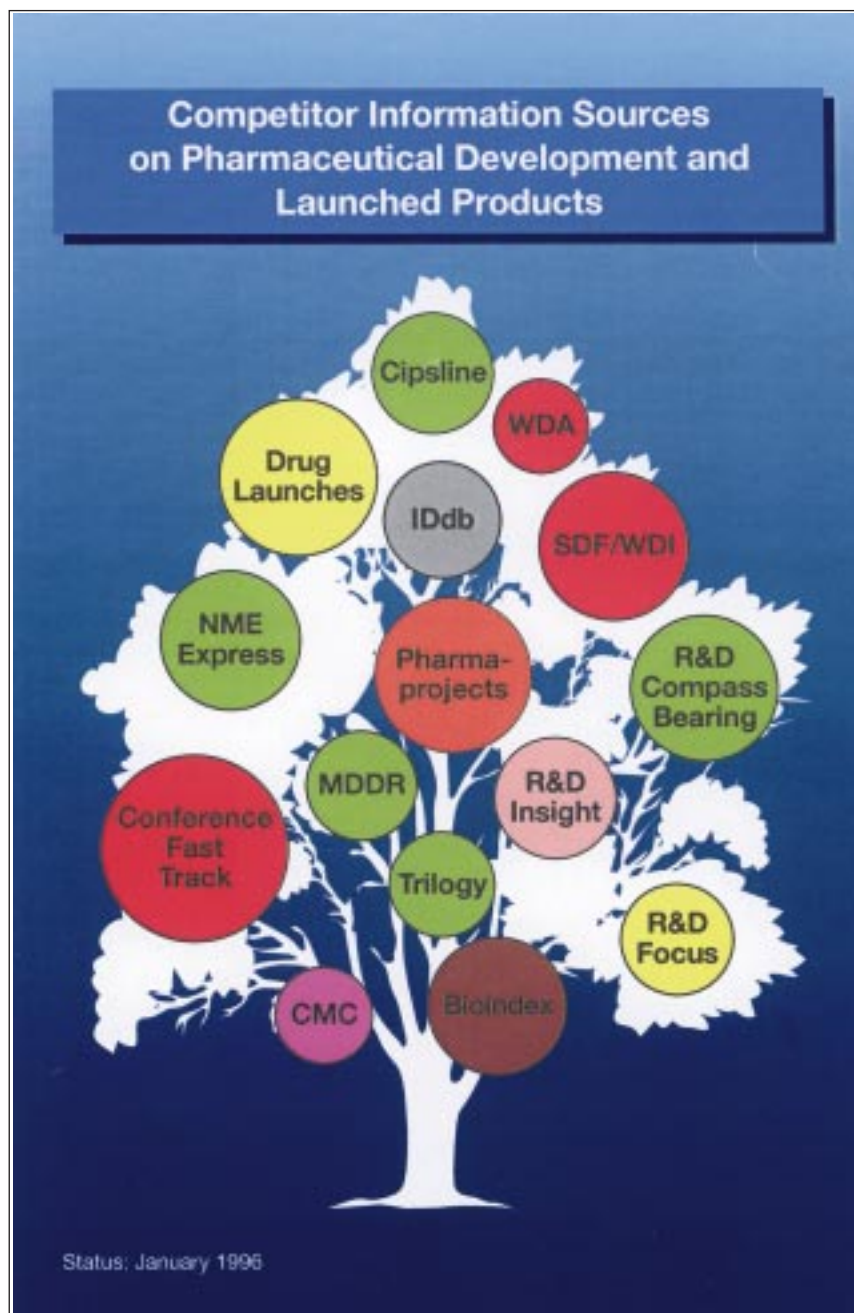


Fig. 3. Competitor information sources on pharmaceutical development and launched products.

overview of the pros and cons of the various existing and potential options. Presentations were made by FIZ-Karlsruhe and the British Library. The PDR will continue to keep abreast of this area.

Drug information systems on development products

There was a review of the current usage of commercial drug information files among PDR companies; parts of

this survey can be found in the literature.^{2,4,6-8} The situation for the end user is made complex by the range of files of differing structures available for in-house use, a selection of which is depicted in Figure 3.⁸

This year's PDR survey on this topic indicated, in the main, that only six files of those depicted in Figure 3 have more than five installations within PDR companies. It is notable that,

over the last year, interest has markedly increased in MDDR (MDL Information Systems, Inc.'s Drug Data Report file), Pharmaprojects (PJB) and R&D Insight (ADIS). Pharmaprojects is now the most widely available file on development products within PDR companies, closely followed by R&D Focus (IMS).

The need for better currency, more chemical structures and improved CAS Registry Number coverage was stressed along with the urgent plea to database producers of the different files to arrive at a uniform (additional?) classification/coding system for at least the following fields: company name, therapeutic use, mechanism of action and development status, as the diversity of approaches is a cause of considerable consternation for end users of these resources.^{4,6-8} The PDR will continue to canvass database producers to try to reach consensus on the above.

Concluding remarks

The 1996 PDR AGM⁹ was really of excellent vintage, as proven by the very serious and well-presented coordinators' reviews in the different areas, the intensive discussions during the company reports session and various breaks, as well as the very positive outcome of an evaluation of the relevance and quality of the presented topics.

Thanks to the maintenance of these high standards, every company was represented at the AGM. PDR member companies now account for *ca.* 65% of the worldwide turnover of the top multinationals in 1995, where they take up some 12 of the top 15 slots. A similar picture is presented when the relative share of R&D expenditure is studied.

To sum up, some initiatives stemming from the 1996 Meeting will be:

- establishment of a PDR Intranet Focus Group to identify needed HTML-based services;
- a PDR Intranet Meeting in the spring of 1997;
- organization of a special TRIP Users Meeting early in 1997; and
- establishment of a PDR Copyright Forum.

Our main aim is to continue to maintain the high standards of our meetings as well as to act as a forum for the information industry to contact its customers as a group.

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