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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Mastering New Product Launch Readiness in the Pharmaceutical Industry: Technical and Operational Perspectives

Rohit Singhal

Supply chain consultant, Rudra Technologies

ABSTRACT

A successful new product launch in the pharmaceutical industry requires detailed planning and coordination across various departments, from regulatory filings and manufacturing readiness to supply chain management and quality control. This research article outlines a structured, step-by-step approach to preparing for a pharmaceutical product launch, focusing on activities conducted from 18 months to 6 months before launch. It covers key responsibilities of cross-functional teams, including program strategy, regulatory affairs, quality control (QC), packaging engineering, chemical outsourcing, global trade operations, and others. Furthermore, the article delves into SAP systems readiness, which is crucial for managing data integrity, procurement, manufacturing, logistics, and post-launch operations. This comprehensive guide provides a roadmap for professionals to navigate the complexities of a pharmaceutical product launch, ensuring a coordinated, compliant, and efficient path to market.

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Introduction

In the highly regulated pharmaceutical industry, a new product launch is the culmination of years of research, clinical trials, regulatory approvals, and operational planning. Unlike other industries, where the time-to-market for new products can be relatively short, pharmaceutical companies face extended timelines due to regulatory scrutiny, manufacturing challenges, and market access complexities. The preparation phase for launching a pharmaceutical product typically begins as early as 18–24 months before the target launch date, involving cross-functional teams that work to align regulatory, manufacturing, and commercial operations.

This research article provides a detailed framework for industry professionals to follow when preparing for a new product launch. It emphasizes the importance of cross-functional collaboration, regulatory compliance, and systems readiness. The article begins by detailing the critical steps taken from 18 months prior to launch, covering aspects such as launch strategy, regulatory filing, demand forecasting, packaging, and manufacturing readiness. Each section discusses the roles of relevant departments and outlines the specific tasks they must perform to ensure a successful product launch.

Formulation of Launch Strategy

At 18–24 months before product launch, the program strategy team begins by conducting a detailed market analysis to understand the competitive landscape and identify unmet medical needs. The pharmaceutical market is highly segmented, and understanding key therapeutic areas and target patient populations is critical to ensuring the product is positioned correctly. The strategy team works with the organization's medical affairs and commercial teams to define the product's target indications and segment the patient population based on factors like disease prevalence, treatment outcomes, and market access hurdles. This stage also involves analyzing competitor products, strengths and weaknesses, and identifying how the new product will provide superior efficacy or safety. Additionally, the team assesses market dynamics, such as healthcare reimbursement trends, regulatory changes, and the potential for new entrants into the market, all of which may impact the product's positioning [1,2].

Early alignment across various organizational departments is crucial for a successful launch. The program strategy team organizes cross-functional workshops to align key stakeholders from regulatory, supply chain, commercial, finance, and legal departments to focus on creating a unified launch roadmap that identifies key milestones, including regulatory filings, clinical trial completions, manufacturing ramp-up, and marketing initiatives. By ensuring that all departments are aligned early, risks related to miscommunication or delayed actions are minimized, and contingency planning is built into the roadmap to address potential obstacles.

Every pharmaceutical product launch is fraught with risks, ranging from regulatory delays to supply chain disruptions. The program strategy team conducts a comprehensive risk assessment to identify potential risks and their likelihood of occurring. This assessment focuses on the critical paths within regulatory, manufacturing, and market access activities that could delay the launch. Contingency plans are developed for each identified

Contact: Rohit Singhal, Supply chain consultant, Rudra Technologies

risk, such as securing backup suppliers for critical raw materials or preparing alternative regulatory pathways if the primary plan is delayed.

Identification of Filing Strategy

The regulatory affairs and pharmaceutical development teams are responsible for identifying the appropriate regulatory filing strategy for the new product around 18 months before the product launch. This involves selecting the most appropriate regulatory pathway, such as filing a New Drug Application (NDA) or Biologics License Application (BLA). The team works closely with clinical development to ensure that clinical trial data aligns with the chosen pathway and that the data package is sufficient to meet regulatory requirements.

The regulatory team holds early pre-submission meetings with regulatory bodies such as the FDA or EMA to clarify submission requirements, discuss clinical data, and receive feedback on the planned submission strategy. These early engagements help avoid delays or misinterpretations of regulatory requirements, allowing the team to adjust the clinical and manufacturing data submissions accordingly

The pharmaceutical development team must ensure that the manufacturing process is validated and compliant with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). This includes performing validation tests for production and documenting all processes to ensure smooth regulatory submissions. They must also align product formulations, stability data, and batch records to the filing timeline to ensure all data supports the product's safety and efficacy [2,3]. Additionally, the regulatory team prepares the submission package, which includes all required data on clinical trials, product labeling, and manufacturing processes. Global regulatory strategies are also considered for launches in multiple markets, aligning the timelines for submissions across various countries.

By defining a clear filing strategy at this stage, the regulatory and pharmaceutical development teams ensure that the product is on track for timely approval, reducing the risk of delays due to incomplete or non-compliant filings.

Filing Development

At 18–24 months prior to product launch, the focus of the regulatory, packaging engineering, labeling operations, and QA teams is on developing the necessary components for the product's regulatory submission and ensuring all aspects of the product, from packaging to labeling, meet both regulatory and safety standards.

The regulatory team plays a leading role by defining the content and structure of the regulatory submissions to authorities like the FDA, EMA, or regional bodies. This involves compiling all clinical, safety, and efficacy data, as well as working with the pharmaceutical development team to ensure that all necessary documentation, such as manufacturing and stability data, is available. This data will be included in the Investigational New Drug (IND) or New Drug Application (NDA) submissions. Meanwhile, the packaging engineering team works on designing packaging that adheres to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and meets regulatory requirements for tamper-evident seals, child resistance, and material safety. They must also ensure that the packaging design is compatible with high-volume production and distribution needs. Packaging prototypes undergo testing to meet the durability and safety requirements outlined by regulatory agencies [3]. The labeling operations team is responsible for ensuring that the product's labeling complies with regional regulations. This includes developing content for primary and secondary packaging, ensuring that critical information such as dosage, contraindications, and administration instructions are clearly stated. Labeling must also comply with regional standards on language requirements and safety icons [4]. The QA team ensures that all documentation related to the product's manufacturing, packaging, and labeling meets regulatory standards. They conduct internal audits and review the submission package to ensure that everything complies with the necessary regulatory frameworks before submission.

By collaborating early, these teams ensure that the filing development process progresses smoothly, minimizing risks of delays due to non-compliant packaging, labeling, or documentation.

Master Data Setup

Setting up master data is crucial for ensuring that key data across departments is consistent and accurate. The global trade operations, demand planning, finance, and local market teams work collaboratively to establish and validate the master data around a year before the product launch.

The global trade operations team is responsible for ensuring that all master data related to import and export regulations, customs classifications, and country-specific trade compliance is set up accurately. This includes creating and verifying Harmonized System (HS) codes and ensuring that all product information complies with international trade regulations. The team must also establish data for suppliers, third-party logistics providers (3PLs), and contract manufacturers, ensuring they are registered and compliant with local authorities. Similarly, the demand planning team uses historical data, market research, and forecasting models to predict product demand across different markets. Their primary task is to align product availability with market needs by setting up the demand forecast data in the system. This includes integrating forecast data for raw materials, production volumes, and finished goods to ensure that the supply chain is responsive to both pre-launch and post-launch market dynamics [4]. The finance team plays a critical role in setting up financial master data related to costing, pricing, and revenue projections. This includes creating cost models for production, distribution, and pricing strategies in different markets. Accurate setup of financial master data ensures that all cost structures and pricing models are reflected correctly in the ERP system, which is essential for financial planning, reporting, and budgeting [3]. Parallelly, the local markets team ensures that regional-specific master data, such as language translations, regulatory requirements, and distribution models, are integrated into the system. This includes setting up customer profiles for local distributors and ensuring that all market-specific regulatory data is accurately reflected in the global system [4].

By setting up master data at this early stage, these departments ensure that product information is accurate and compliant with both global and local requirements, laying the groundwork for smooth operations during the product launch and beyond.

Demand & Forecasting

Accurate demand forecasting is critical to align production and supply with market needs. This involves close collaboration between the market demand forecaster, global trade operations, demand planning, and supply planning teams. Their collective goal is to ensure that product availability meets anticipated market demand while optimizing supply chain efficiency and their preparation begins 12-18 months from product launch.

Each stakeholder has a critical role to play at this stage. The market demand forecaster plays a key role in creating a data-driven projection of product demand. This involves using historical data, market trends, patient population insights, and competitive intelligence to forecast the product's demand in various regions. The forecaster also collaborates with the commercial and marketing teams to understand sales targets and market entry strategies [3,4]. The global trade operations team ensures that the forecasted demand aligns with trade regulations and the logistics network. This includes setting up forecasts for import/export volumes and ensuring that necessary trade licenses and documentation are in place for global distribution. The team must also anticipate any potential bottlenecks in customs clearance or international shipping regulations that may affect the launch. The demand planning team consolidates all market-specific forecasts to create a global demand plan. This team takes input from local market demand forecasts and refines them to create an integrated plan that aligns with production capabilities and available resources. The plan is regularly updated to reflect market conditions, such as changes in pricing strategies, healthcare access, and economic conditions in key regions. Further upstream, the supply planning team translates demand forecasts into actionable production and supply chain plans. This team ensures that the product can be manufactured in sufficient quantities to meet demand and works closely with contract manufacturers (CMOs) to secure raw materials. Safety stock levels are determined to handle unexpected demand surges or supply chain disruptions. These teams ensure that the product launch is supported by an efficient, responsive supply chain that meets market needs.

Forming the Local Distribution Strategy

At 12-18 months before product launch, the local market's distribution strategy must be finalized to ensure that the product reaches the market efficiently and complies with all regulatory and legal requirements. The local launch team, comprising commercial operations, regulatory, legal, finance, quality assurance (QA), and customer service, works collaboratively to set up the necessary frameworks for successful local market distribution. The commercial operations team is responsible for developing a detailed plan to bring the product to market and ensuring its availability at healthcare facilities, pharmacies, or hospitals. This includes collaborating with local wholesalers and distributors, identifying key points of sale, and coordinating pricing strategies. The commercial team works with local market intelligence to understand the distribution landscape and how to engage effectively with healthcare providers. In addition, the regulatory team ensures that all local distribution plans comply with the relevant laws, including import/export requirements, product labeling, and documentation. This phase often involves gaining final regulatory approvals for local distribution and ensuring that all marketing authorizations are in place. The team also ensures that the product complies with Good Distribution Practices (GDP) to meet quality and safety standards in the pharmaceutical supply chain [2,3].

The legal department plays a crucial role in securing contracts with local distributors, wholesalers, and third-party logistics providers (3PLs). Legal ensures that all agreements comply with local laws, including those governing distribution rights, intellectual property, and liability protections. They also review terms of sale, including return policies and dispute resolutions, to minimize risk in the distribution process. On the finance side, foundational work is performed to assess feasibility and planning of local distribution. This includes determining cost structures for distribution, setting up payment terms with distributors, and ensuring that the strategy is profitable. They also handle local currency exchange rates and develop financial models to forecast distribution costs and revenues. The QA team ensures that the product quality is maintained throughout the distribution process and that all local distributors comply with GMP and GDP standards. They also establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) and work instructions (WIs) for tracking the product's temperature and ensuring it remains within the required ranges during transport and storage. On the other commercial end of the supply chain, the customer service team establishes processes to manage customer inquiries, complaints, and support. They play a crucial role in ensuring that the product's distribution is seamless from a customer-facing perspective, providing customer support for healthcare professionals, pharmacies, and patients regarding product availability and order fulfillment.

Thus, a sound local distribution strategy ensures that the product launch is supported by robust logistics, compliance with local regulations, and clear communication channels, contributing to a successful product rollout.

Quality Control Preparation

At this stage, the Quality Control (QC) team begins preparing critical procedures to ensure that the pharmaceutical product meets all safety, efficacy, and quality standards throughout the production and distribution process. The preparation phase includes setting up testing protocols, validating methods, and ensuring compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Good Laboratory Practices (GLP).

One of the primary tasks for the QC team is developing comprehensive testing protocols for raw materials, in-process materials, and the finished product. These protocols define the specific tests to be conducted to ensure that the product meets predefined quality standards. Tests for potency, purity, sterility, and stability are crucial, especially in pharmaceuticals. The protocols must also ensure compliance with regulatory standards set by authorities such as the FDA and EMA. To guarantee that testing methods provide accurate results, the QC team focuses on method validation and calibration of laboratory equipment. All analytical methods used in the QC lab need to be validated to ensure precision, accuracy, and repeatability. Instruments must be calibrated regularly to maintain compliance and reliability of results, which is critical during audits and regulatory inspections. The QC team is also responsible for conducting stability studies to determine the product's shelf life and storage conditions. These studies test how environmental factors such as temperature,

humidity, and light affect the product's stability. Stability studies typically take several months to complete, making them critical to initiate well before launch.

Comprehensive documentation is vital to QC processes, particularly in pharmaceuticals, where records of all testing activities must be maintained for regulatory purposes. The QC team prepares SOPs for testing protocols and ensures all results are recorded and stored in compliance with GxP (Good Practice) guidelines. This documentation is critical during regulatory inspections and audits. The QC team must also prepare for any regulatory audits or inspections that may take place before or after product launch. This includes ensuring that all QC procedures comply with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and regulatory standards. Any deviations or issues identified during testing must be thoroughly documented, and corrective actions should be implemented.

Packaging Technical Preparation

The packaging engineering team is responsible for finalizing the design of primary and secondary packaging based on regulatory and operational requirements. This includes ensuring that the packaging complies with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and supports the product's storage, transportation, and usage requirements. Key considerations include tamper-evident packaging, child-resistant features, and temperature-sensitive materials, particularly for biologics or cold-chain products.

Once the design is finalized, the packaging sites (internal or external) must be fully equipped and validated for production. At this stage, the packaging lines are prepared for scale-up to support large-scale production. The packaging engineering team works closely with the packaging sites to ensure that the machinery is capable of handling the specified packaging materials and designs without compromising efficiency or quality. To this end, the team conducts line trials at the packaging sites to verify that the machinery can handle the packaging materials along with calibration and testing of machines for high-volume production. To complement this, the validation team ensures that the packaging process consistently produces results that meet pre-established criteria for quality and performance. Validation involves testing packaging components for durability, compatibility with the product, and performance under various conditions such as temperature fluctuations or pressure changes during transportation. This stage also involves stability testing to ensure that the packaging maintains product integrity over the defined shelf life.

API, Drug Substance, and Drug Product Manufacturing (6–12 Months Prior to Launch)

At 6-12 months before launch, the focus shifts to large-scale manufacturing of the Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) and drug product. Many pharmaceutical companies outsource the production of APIs to Contract Manufacturing Organizations (CMOs). The chemical outsourcing team works with CMOs to ensure that the API is manufactured according to Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), with rigorous testing for purity and consistency. These tasks require close collaboration between chemical outsourcing, pharmaceutical manufacturing, global supply chain, and quality assurance (QA) teams to ensure the product is produced, tested, and prepared for distribution. Supply contracts are finalized during this period, and production schedules are confirmed to align with downstream drug substance and drug product manufacturing needs.

The pharmaceutical manufacturing team oversees the formulation of the drug substance into its final dosage form, whether tablets, capsules, or injectables. This process includes process validation to confirm that the manufacturing methods consistently produce products that meet quality standards. Additionally, scaling up production is critical to ensure that there is sufficient product available for the launch.

The global supply chain team manages the logistics of delivering the API and drug product components to manufacturing sites, ensuring that the supply chain runs smoothly. This involves coordinating transportation, managing raw material inventories, and overseeing the integration of manufacturing timelines to avoid delays in production. Throughout the production process, Quality Assurance (QA) teams are responsible for ensuring that every step of API, drug substance, and drug product manufacturing meets regulatory standards. This includes conducting regular GMP audits, overseeing process validation, and reviewing batch release documentation before the product is approved for sale. QA must ensure that all processes are compliant with regulatory requirements such as FDA, EMA, and other global health authorities.

Conclusion

Launching a new pharmaceutical product requires meticulous planning, cross-functional collaboration, and adherence to strict regulatory standards. This research article has outlined the key activities necessary for ensuring launch readiness, focusing on the roles of program strategy, regulatory, QC, packaging, and manufacturing teams in preparing for product launch. From the development of a comprehensive launch strategy to the execution of large-scale manufacturing processes, each step requires precise coordination and validation to meet industry regulations. The critical role of ERP systems readiness, demand forecasting, and supply chain management ensures that all components—from raw materials to finished products—are managed effectively to avoid disruptions and delays. Industry professionals must ensure that they adhere to best practices in GMP, GDP, and regulatory compliance to bring a product to market successfully.

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