

# Catch a Rising Star

The Science and Art of Identifying and Engaging Emerging or "Rising Star" Experts



**MONOCL**

a DEFINITIVE HEALTHCARE company

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External experts are sought-after advisors for life science companies, where they inform critical decisions along the entire product lifecycle of a drug. These experts use the knowledge and experience they acquired over the course of their careers to help companies address challenges like identifying unmet medical needs, clinical trial design, stratification of patient populations, label extensions, product positioning, regulatory challenges and many others. They can also serve as the scientific face of the organization, e.g. by discussing trial results during conferences and/or co-authoring scientific publications.

Traditionally, these external experts have been referred to as “opinion leaders”, or “key opinion leaders” (KOLs) and while some experts are central to shaping the opinions of their peers in a specific therapeutic area (TA) and are indeed key opinion leaders, the broader and more encompassing term (external) expert more accurately describes their role in general.

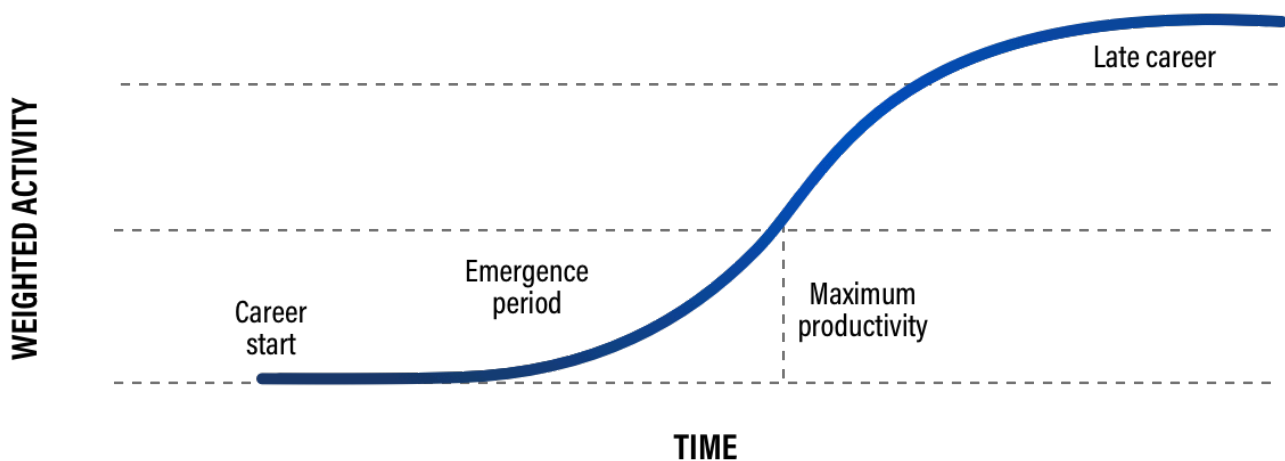
These established experts owe their reputation to distinguished and often long careers in their specialty. Becoming an external expert does not happen quickly and many pharmaceutical companies are looking to engage tomorrow’s established experts today. This next generation of external experts are today’s “rising stars” or emerging experts.

In this white paper we take a look at who these emerging experts are, how they can be defined, what criteria companies apply when selecting rising stars and how these up-and-coming experts overlap with the new group of digital influencers.



# Defining emerging experts in the context of therapeutic areas

On a high-level, emerging experts can be defined as medical and scientific professionals in the emergence state of their career, who have shown the potential to become influential voices in their therapeutic area.



**Fig. 1** Life cycle of activity of an expert. Rising star experts are in the emergence period before they reach maximum productivity and impact.

During the early years of their medical or scientific careers healthcare providers or researcher are relatively unknown and have few activities such as publications or speaking engagements associated with their name. In their late career distinguished experts are well-known, recognized and highly sought-after. It is during the “emergence period” that companies need to identify tomorrow’s experts and start engaging them with the goal of building mutually beneficial, long-term relationships.

While the above definition for emerging experts is a good starting point, who is considered a rising star is highly contextual. In different TAs different experiences, characteristics and activities are important and therefore the selection criteria need to be carefully crafted for each TA in order for the definition to be useful and serve as guide for the identification and later engagement of emerging experts.





## Overview of the different characteristics of emerging experts in oncology versus diabetes:

### Characteristics of emerging experts in oncology

- Highly specific domain knowledge for a specific cancer or patient population
- Tight but potentially fairly small network of peers in the same specialty
- Speaker at specialized conferences
- Significant experience with clinical trials

### Characteristics of emerging experts in diabetes

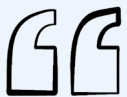
- Significant experience treating broad and diverse patient populations, incl. those with various co-morbidities
- Large network of peers
- Active speaker at national, regional and potentially local conferences

Developing definitions and emerging expert personas for each TA requires deep knowledge and a significant amount of work and, once crafted, these definitions need to be consistently used across an organization in all geographies.

In addition to developing TA-level relevant definitions of emerging experts, these definitions also need to be kept up-to-date and refined to reflect changes and new trends in the industry. A recent relevant example is the emergence of social media as a way for healthcare providers and researchers to communicate professionally.

As more academicians and healthcare practitioners adopt these channels, life science companies need to revisit their rising star definitions and consider whether - and if so how - they need to add digital and social thought-leadership to their list of requirements.

Having detailed and consistently applied definition on a TA level can constitute a significant competitive advantage for a company and enable it to identify top emerging experts fairly quickly in a data-driven and consistent process.



**An organization should have an agreed upon definition of what an emerging expert is on a therapeutic area level. It creates a competitive advantage when you are working as a company and applying that definition in a consistent way."**

Robert Groebel, VP Global Medical Strategy, Monoclon

A recent survey conducted by Monocl in collaboration with the Medical Science Liaison Society, however, showed that only 50% of the participants of medical affairs executives, managers and MSLs answered the question whether their company has a definition for “rising stars” with “Yes” with the other half answering “No” or “I am not sure” highlighting a clear need to develop and communicate definitions throughout the organization.

### Does your company have a definition for “rising stars”?



**Fig. 2** A survey showed that, according to medical affairs professionals, only half of companies have a definition for rising stars.

## The importance of emerging experts for medical affairs

Rising stars are tomorrow’s established - and likely very busy - experts. Early engagement with emerging experts is important because it presents an opportunity to partner with promising individuals before they are committed and to forge long-term professional relationships that are built on trust and loyalty and are of value to both parties.

Identifying emerging experts is a critically important task for every life science company and one that requires thought, planning, coordination across geographies and a data-driven approach to make sure the most promising experts are identified.





## Here is a short list of characteristics that make emerging experts desirable advisors for life:

### Accessibility

Emerging experts are more accessible than established experts who have fostered relationships over a long career. Engaging an expert who has a long and successful history of working with a competitor is very difficult. Even if an expert is not already engaged, accessibility might be an issue if the expert is actively involved as a member of a medical society, a regulatory body, is active on the speaker circuit or consumed by their clinical work. Emerging experts are often more accessible and less likely to be engaged with another company.

### Innovative mindset

Emerging researchers can bring innovative mindset as well as a fresh perspective to the discussion. They might perform novel, cutting-edge research using the latest technologies and techniques and as a consequence generate novel insights. Examples of concrete benefits that can come from pushing the scientific or medical envelope are novel uses of a product that could inform label extensions, or adding new subpopulations of patients to the approved uses of a drug.

### A fresh scientific voice

Novel research and different approaches taken by emerging experts can result in a fresh scientific voice which helps life science companies to stand out from the background.

### Broader reach through new channels

Healthcare providers (HCPs) of the millennial generation rely heavily on digital interaction. Therefore, emerging experts with a significant digital footprint are in an excellent position to reach their colleagues through the digital channels they prefer. With that they are able to connect with and engage HCPs that are difficult to engage with traditional methods.

## How to catch a rising star

To identify external experts – established as well as emerging – life science companies use different approaches which fall into one of two major categories: a) recommendations from either internal sources or external experts or advisors and b) data-driven approach relying on a comprehensive database of experts.

In both cases an initial list of emerging experts is created which needs to be prioritized based on criteria that are aligned with the company's needs in a specific TA. What differs is the size and composition of the initial group under consideration. Recommended lists are already pre-selected and therefore much shorter and presumably contain qualified candidates all worthy of consideration.

This advantage, however, comes at a cost: lists of recommended candidates introduce a bias into the selection process and ignore a potentially large group of well-qualified candidates outside the network.

To find the emerging experts the selection process should ideally start with the whole universe of candidates and provide a quick way to sort, filter, prioritize and select the most qualified individuals based on criteria that are informed by well-crafted and TA-specific definitions of emerging experts.



# Identifying rising stars - the status quo

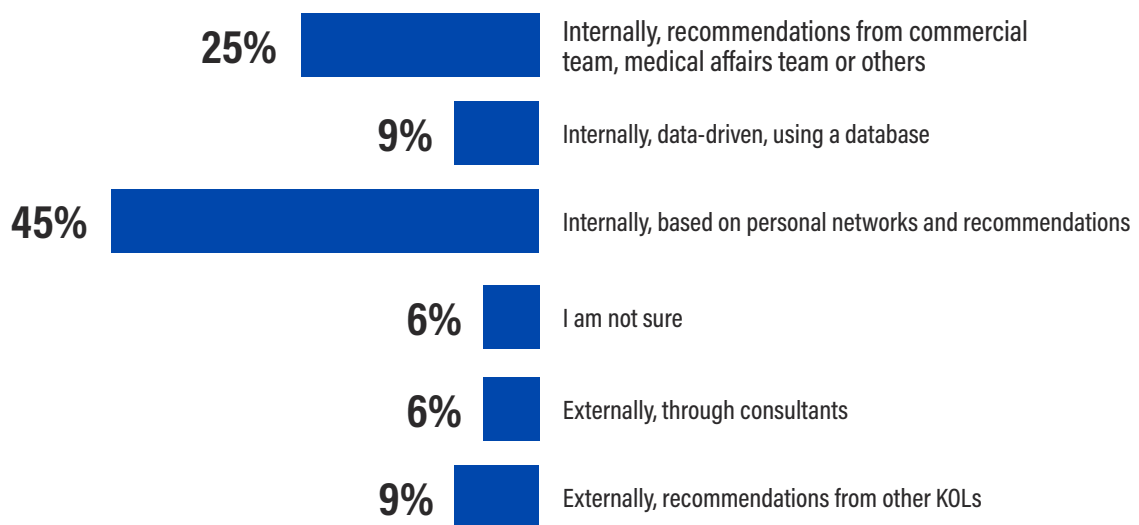
To find out how companies currently identify emerging experts we asked medical affairs executives and directors a series of questions about the process their companies employ.

First, we asked more than 50 Medical Affairs Directors/Managers in pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies whether they select emerging experts based on recommendations or by using a data-driven process, e.g. an expert database. The answers show that the majority currently uses personal networks and recommendations. 79 percent of the respondents indicated that personal networks and recommendations are the most important source for identifying emerging experts. Only 15% used an internal, data-driven process or relied on external consultants.

Several reasons explain this reliance on networks for rising star identification. Importantly, established experts often mentor younger colleagues and can make recommendations based on personal experience. For companies, recommendations are an easy way of identifying emerging experts that are of the “same fabric” as the recommending expert.

However, recommendations and personal networks are unsuited to identifying outstanding individuals that aren’t closely linked with an established expert and/or whose scientific voice differs significantly from that of their senior colleagues and therefore might not to be recommended.

## How does your organization ID Rising Stars?



**Fig. 3** Organizations use different methods to identify emerging experts. Internal recommendations either by colleagues or based on personal networks are the most frequently used way to find these experts.

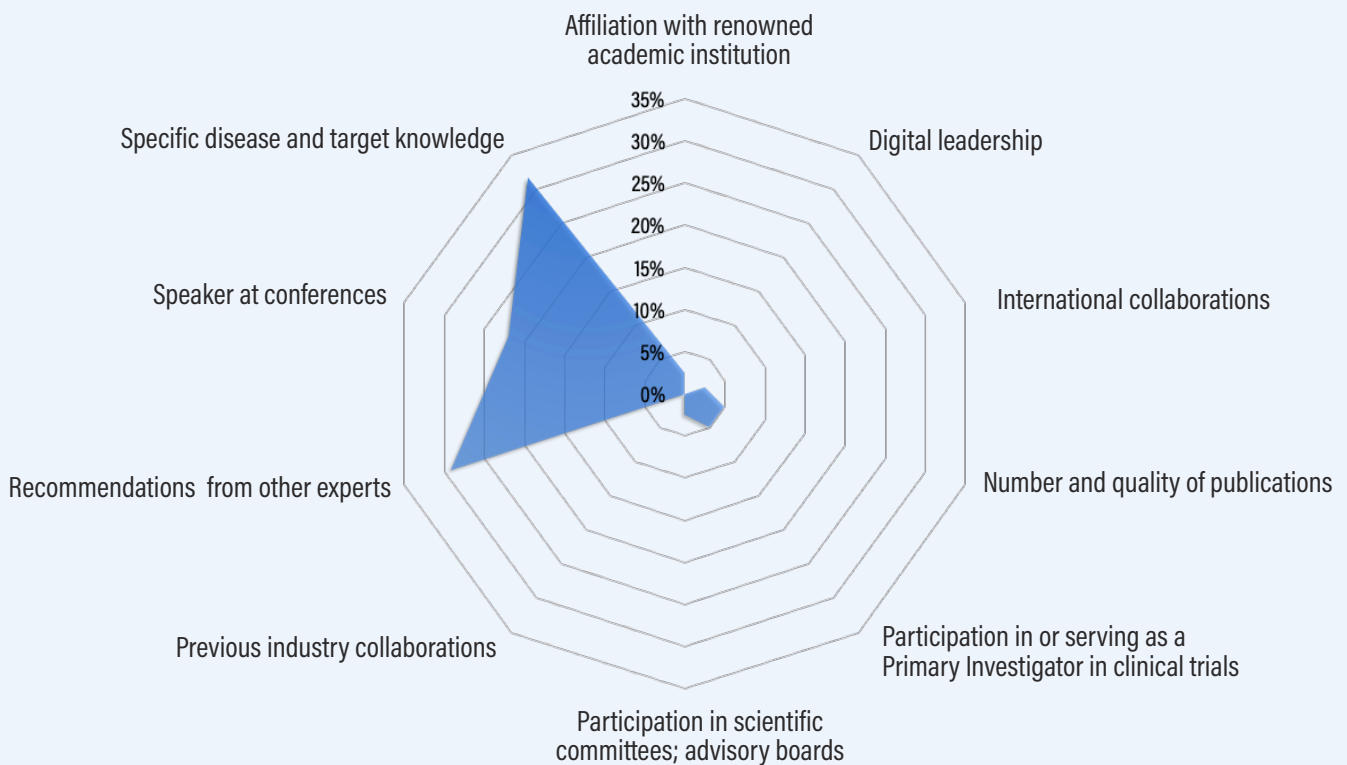


Second, we explored the criteria that drive the decision to engage a rising star in more detail by asking the participants to identify the single most important criterion they use in the prioritization process.

The results show that specific TA related knowledge and, unsurprisingly, recommendations outrank other criteria, including such classic measures such as the number and quality of publications or experience as principal investigator in clinical trials. In addition, speaking engagements made it onto the top 3 list.

These results do not imply that the other criteria are not important and have no influence on the selection process, but that they are second tier considerations behind specific TA knowledge, recommendations from trusted sources and visibility as speaker at conferences.

### Which of the following is the main criterion that you use to identify emerging experts or “rising stars”?



**Fig. 4** Respondents were given the choice of 10 criteria and were asked to select the one most important to them when identifying emerging experts. Peer recommendations, specific disease knowledge and experience speaking at conferences were by far the most important criteria.





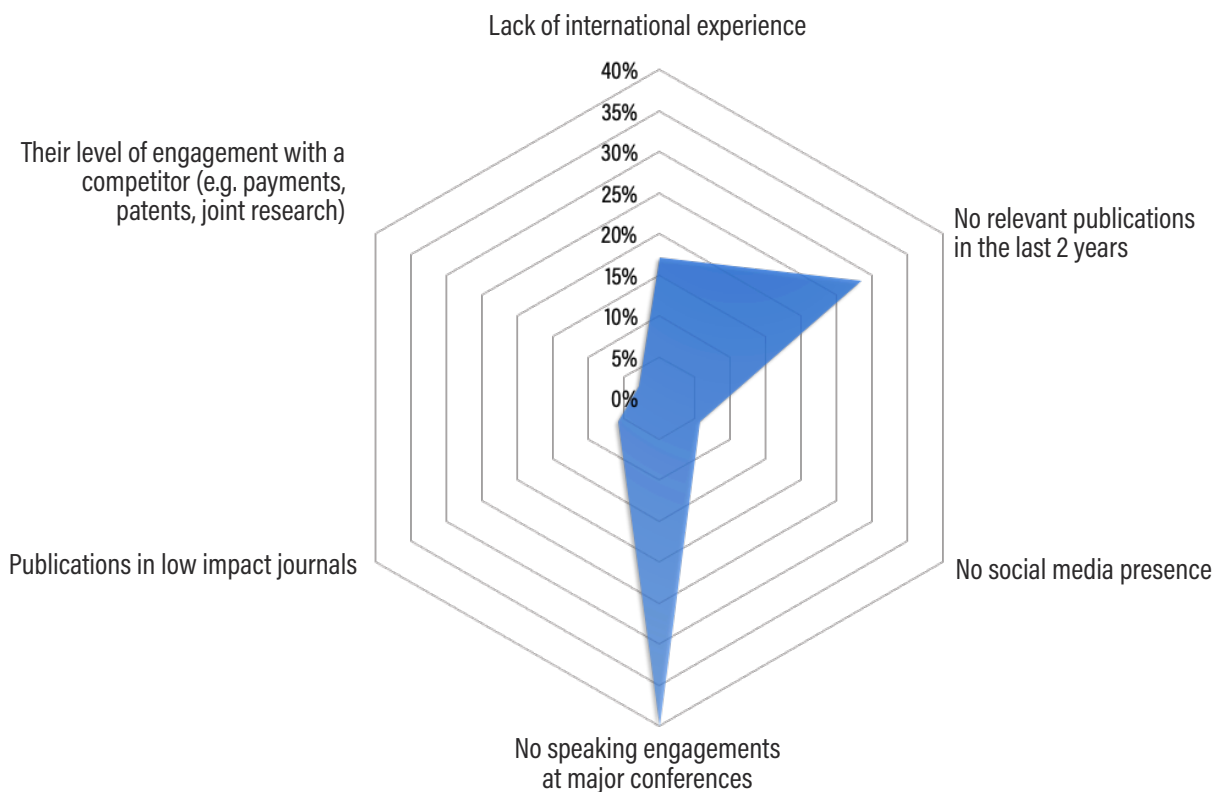
We also asked the participants about their primary disqualifying criterion in the selection of an emerging expert.

The top exclusion criterion is the lack of speaking engagements at major conferences which mirrors the importance the respondents assigned to speaking engagements in the previous question. While number and quality of publications by themselves is not a top criterion, the lack of relevant publications in the recent past is the second most frequently named exclusion criterion.

One explanation is that lack of recent relevant publications can be viewed as a close proxy for lack of specific disease or target knowledge or a lack of interest in that disease/target and as such this answer is aligned with the results of the previous question.

Lack of international collaborations rounds out the top 3 exclusion criteria. Interestingly, experience with international collaborations ranked close to the bottom on the “must have” list which suggests that international collaborations are considered table stakes: a lack disqualifies someone from consideration, but alone they are not sufficient to make a researcher stand out among their peers.

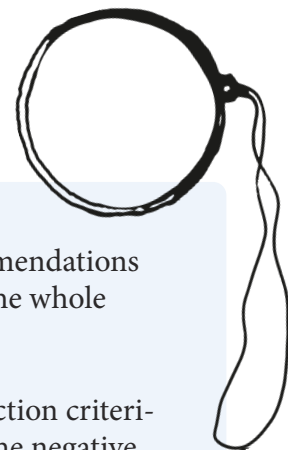
## What is the number one reason to disqualify an individual as an emerging expert or “rising star”?



**Fig. 5** Asked to pick the single most disqualifying criterion from a list of 5 options, respondents choose lack of speaking engagements, lack of recent relevant publications and lack of international experiences as the biggest negative signals.

## Key points

### Key points for identifying rising stars:



- Medical affairs professionals rely heavily on personal networks and recommendations when selecting emerging experts. Data-driven approaches that start with the whole universe of possible candidates are currently in the minority.
- Disease and/or target knowledge is the single most important positive selection criterion and is matched by lack of “relevant publications in the last 2 years” on the negative side. This finding is expected as it speaks to identifying experts that are deeply involved and actively participating in the therapeutic area of interest to the company.
- Speaking engagements at conferences are a strongly required activity and lack thereof is highly likely to eliminate candidates from consideration. Speaking engagements can be viewed as proxy for outside recognition of authority and influence as well as the ability to convey science in a compelling way to expert audiences.
- International collaborations play a unique role: while lack is a strong negative signal, collaborating internationally is, by itself, not a qualifying criterion. Working with colleagues across borders is therefore table stakes for emerging experts.

# 5-Step process to identifying emerging experts

Based on the findings of our survey and discussions with medical affairs professionals we developed a list of criteria to consider when selecting emerging experts as well as a five-step process.

## Prioritization criteria

The importance of aligning prioritization criteria with the TA cannot be overstated. However, we identified five high-level criteria of relevance to a broad variety of TAs.

### 1. Recent publications

Number and quality (measured via journal impact factor) of recent publications that are highly relevant to the therapeutic area of interest. TA-relevant publications as a percentage of total publications is a good indicator of a researcher's focus and interests.

### 2. Career start

Looking at the publication history, e.g. over the last 5 to 10 years, can help identify up and coming experts whose careers are in the emergence phase.

### 3. Speaking engagements

Speaking engagements, especially as invited speakers at major conferences are a reliable sign that a researcher's experience and opinions are valued by their colleagues.

### 4. Grant funding

Grants are awarded in a competitive process for innovative work. A significant number of grants is a reliable indicator for an innovator. Grants also provide another way of gauging whether an expert's research interests and the company's objectives are aligned.

### 5. Society awards

Best poster or young researcher awards help identify researchers that stand out among their peers based on the quality of their work.

These and additional contextual criteria can help narrow down an initial list of candidates and identify the select individuals a company wants to engage.

## 5-Step Process

This process provides an overall guideline to identifying emerging experts:

### Step 1.

Develop a well-thought-out definition and a rising star persona that is aligned with your TA.

### Step 2.

Use the list of five basic criteria and amend and edit it to develop a list of early signs of success in your therapeutic area and ways of measuring impact.

### Step 3.

Generate a list of candidates in a consistent way across geographies for each TA.

### Step 4.

Collect comprehensive profile information about the members of that list.

### Step 5.

Engage with the candidates on that list to validate interest and expertise. MSLs are in an excellent position to interact with candidates and establish that they have what it takes to become a thought-leader and that their career goals are compatible with the role of an emerging expert (e.g. commitment to a career in research or patient care rather than in industry).

The work doesn't stop there. Once an emerging expert is identified and engaged it is critical to follow their career development to make sure they remain interested in and relevant to the TA and aligned with the company's objectives.

## Tips!

- Identify candidates based on defined criteria rather than looking to identify a specific number such as setting out to identify 50 emerging experts in a therapeutic area.
- Avoid overly commercial criteria for emerging experts working with medical affairs, e.g. instead of prescription volume, focus on patient number.
- Create search criteria that reflects the overall volume of scientific activity specific to a therapeutic area or disease state.
- Apply specific considerations, i.e. Journal Impact Factor may not be as relevant when considering data presented in highly focused publications



# Engaging an emerging expert

A successful long-term relationship with an emerging expert is built on trust and added value for both sides. The needs of early career professionals are different from those of established experts. They may need more mentoring, education and guidance, e.g. about the drug development process or how to work with companies.

To keep emerging experts involved, medical affairs professionals and especially MSLs have to figure out how give a researcher a reason to continue the engagement, such as:

- Partnering with the emerging expert, e.g. on publications or clinical work which helps career advancement.
- Expanding an emerging expert's network and visibility, e.g. giving them to opportunity to present at conferences.
- Helping emerging expert grow in their TA through funding, educational opportunities, or field medical engagement.
- Collaboratively developing intellectual property and filing for joint patents which strengthens an emerging researcher's profile.

Making sure every interaction between the company and the emerging experts adds value increases the chance of a long and mutually beneficial collaboration.

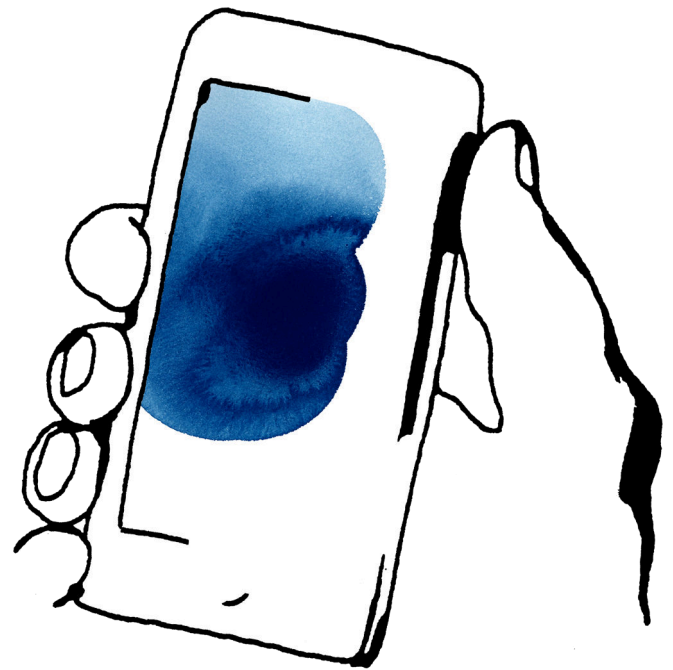


## Are rising stars also digital influencers?

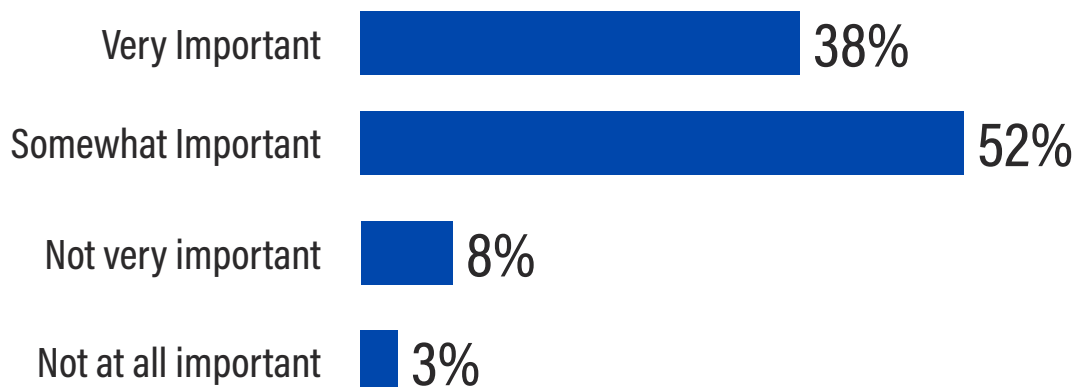
The digital footprint of a researcher or HCP is a relatively new metric that is bound to increase in relevance. How important is it for a rising star to be a digital influencer?

Our survey data show that currently very few medical affairs professionals consider digital influence the most important criterion when selecting emerging experts. That does not mean it is not important: an additional survey question reveals that almost 90% of the respondents consider the digital footprint of a rising star very or somewhat important.

The digital footprint is an important consideration that cannot be ignored. As millennial HCPs replace those of the baby boomer generation they bring their preferences for digital and social media channels to their work and expect to use these channels to communicate with their colleagues, patients and industry contacts such as MSIs. Emerging experts that are fluent in the use of social media will therefore be increasingly important for companies trying to reach out to a healthcare ecosystem dominated by millennials.

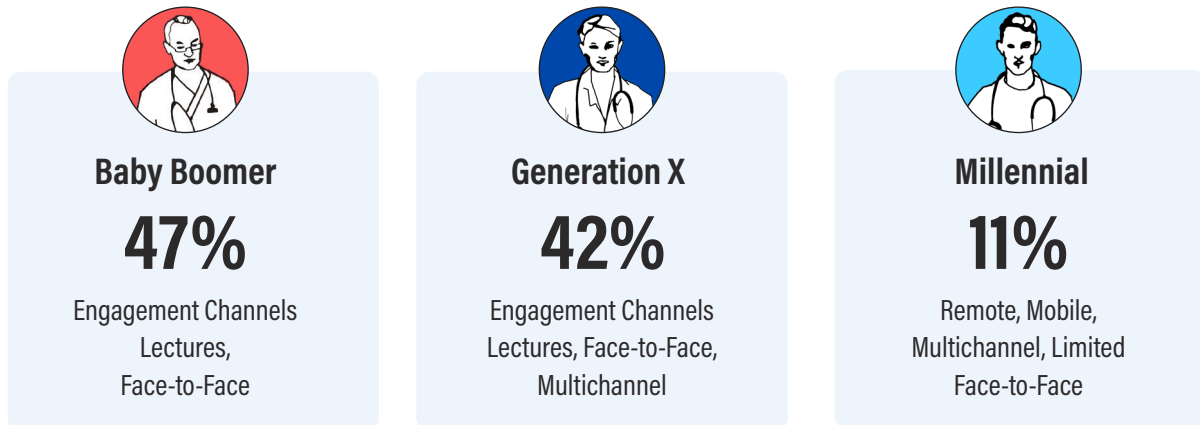


### How important is it for a rising star to be a digital influencer?

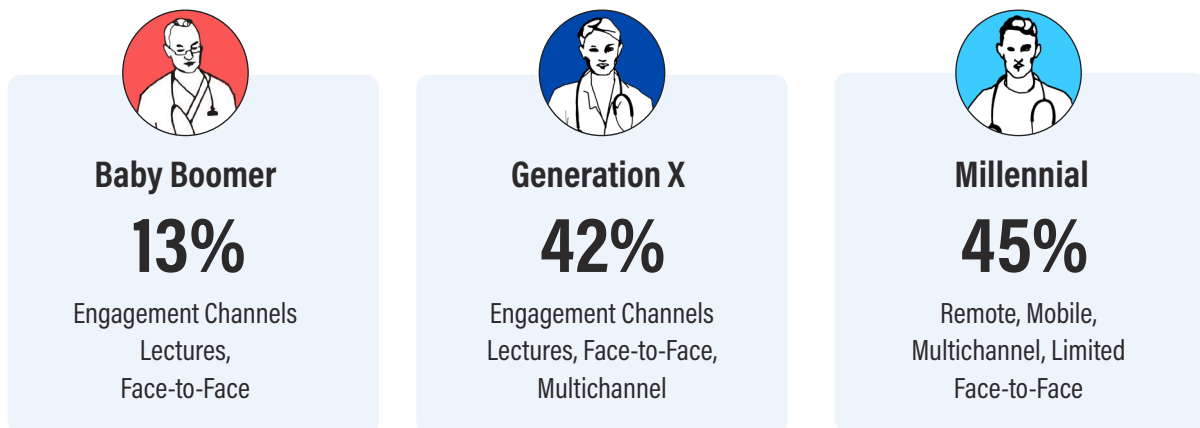


**Fig. 6** 90% of respondents consider the digital footprint of an emerging expert very or somewhat important. Numbers add up to >100% due to rounding.

## US Oncology Landscape 2016



## US Oncology Landscape 2025



**Fig 7.** The changing demographics of HCPs, example oncology. We are in the middle of a decade that sees a fundamental change in the demographics of HCPs. As baby boomers retire, millennials take their place while the number of Generation X HCPs remains stable. Millennials bringing their digital and social communication preferences to their work and increasingly communicate digitally with peers, patients and industry partners.

Digital content is therefore critical to rising star selection. Professionals who are able to engage with their millennial colleagues as well as patients via social channels have a broad reach and influence beyond geographic boundaries. What is more, by analysing an expert's social media following the size of this influence can be established and monitored over time.

Factors to consider when looking at the digital footprint of emerging experts include whether they are engaging HCPs, researchers, patients or patient advocates and whether they are mainly tweeting to a followership of peer researchers around congresses or blogging, tweeting and/or posting on YouTube to help patients. The content somebody chooses to share and their target audiences are strong indicators of their interest and passions and their network of followers indicate the depth and breadth of their reach.

While the digital footprint hasn't made it on the top 3 list of the most important criteria yet, the use of social media for professional purposes is a reality especially among younger, emerging HCPs and researchers and worth close consideration when identifying rising stars.

# Summary

Rising star experts are not new to the life science industry. Recent trends and developments, such as the increasing importance of social media channels and precision medicine with its far-reaching consequences across the entire healthcare ecosystem make it even more crucial for companies to develop processes that help them identify the best candidates based on objective criteria and engage them early with the goal to build long-term relationships of value to both expert and company.

A data-driven approach, solid definitions and reproducible processes for the identification, prioritization, selection and engagement of these promising young researchers and healthcare providers ensure that all relevant emerging experts in a therapeutic area are considered and those selected and engaged have an ideal combination of experience, interest, focus and expertise to make sure a mutually beneficial long-term relationship can be forged.

Monocl is dedicated to connecting life science professionals with experts globally. Contact us to find out how we can support you with finding, prioritizing and engaging emerging experts for your organization.



## About Us

Monocl empowers life science professionals with the complete global expert solution designed to drive impactful outreach and strategic engagement. Our cloud-based expert platform - powered by machine learning - continuously analyzes an unrivaled amount of data across all therapeutic areas and regions, providing invaluable context and actionable insights.

For more information, visit [www.monocl.com](http://www.monocl.com)