Background & Industry Implications

The most interesting and promising recent introduction to the world of search is Schema.org, an organization that reaches across all search companies to allow better semantic search. As the Schema.org website explains:

Schema.org is a joint effort, in the spirit of sitemaps.org, to improve the web by creating a structured data markup schema supported by major search engines. On-page markup helps search engines understand the information on web pages and provide richer search results. A shared markup vocabulary makes easier for webmasters to decide on a markup schema and get the maximum benefit for their efforts. Search engines want to make it easier for people to find relevant information on the web. Markup can also enable new tools and applications that make use of the structure.

In order to help understand the meaning behind queries on their websites and to better understand the context around key terms in websites, search engines rely on bits of code placed in websites called structured data. Structured Data Markup is added to the code of a website that allows a search engine to understand the type of content on your page. The primary reason to use Schema.org and structured data in general is to allow search engines to better understand your web content on a semantic level.

For instance if your website contains the keyword “Orange,” you will want to include structured data and schema.org vocabulary so that Google will understand whether you mean orange the color, orange the fruit, or the city of Orange, California. Without using schema.org tags, your website could appear on keywords that are not semantically related to your website.

In pharma, this type of structured data would help a website to distinguish themselves as a healthcare company and not show up in the search engine results for unrelated searches. For example, if you have a cardiovascular health product and have the term “cardio” in your website, you would want to make sure that you put the schema.org tag of “Medical Entity” in your code in order to make sure it doesn’t show on searches for “best cardio workout.”

Overall, having a good Schema.org-based data structure will allow search engines to better understand exactly what your content is about, and better match you with users who are searching for your type of content. With semantic content matching, Google – which we profile in particular as it offers comparably the most opportunity for pharma as it’s the only one that offers rich snippets – will help match you to users who are searching for what you offer, especially through mobile devices.
Since many mobile searches are voice activated, the search queries on mobile tend to be more conversational. This conversational search relies much more on semantic understanding by the search engine. It is therefore necessary to have a website whose content is understood by the search engine, so they can adequately match it with proper queries.

The second reason to use Schema.org is for rich snippets. The bit of text that is shown beneath your website’s link on a search engine results page (SERP) is called a snippet. Rich snippets are additional detailed information in your snippet that allow users with specific queries to see additional information about each listing. In addition to supplementary information to help your user, rich snippets also make your SERP listings more visually striking, and help them to stand out from the rest of the listings on the page.

Currently, rich snippets are only supported for the following content types: Breadcrumbs (hierarchy navigation), Events, Music, Organizations, People, Products, Recipes, Review Ratings, Reviews, Software Applications and Videos. While many of these rich snippet content types are inaccessible to pharma companies due to the intricacies of the industry versus consumer packaged goods for example, some pharma companies are already taking advantage of rich snippets like videos:

If you have videos on your website, the use of rich snippets would help guide users directly to the video content, as well as making your search listing stand out among the rest of the search listings. This makes users more likely to click on your link and drive more traffic to your page. Google also recommends you use a video XML sitemap to allow search engines to further understand how your webpage is constructed and how your videos fit in with your on-page content of your website. If you use a specified YouTube channel, video rich snippet descriptions are automatically added to search listings for your videos. Despite this, Google advises that you add Schema.org to these videos so that Google can better understand what your video is about, and can better match your videos to specific user queries, potentially driving more page views, and video views.

Another possible rich snippet opportunity is with recipes. If a healthcare company with a disease state awareness or consumer website wants to build links, drive traffic and engage users through interesting content, healthy lifestyle recipes featured on the website can be a good way to do that. Using Schema.org markup and rich snippets, you can make these recipes stand out even more.

For example, if a user is diabetic and is looking for diabetes-friendly cookie recipes, they might input a query like “diabetes cookie recipe.” If you utilize rich snippets, you could have a search listing that looks like the picture on the next page.

Advil uses structured data to provide video metadata to Google, allowing Google to show the video on the SERP as a Rich Snippet.
The listing features a rating, reviews, the length of time it takes to make, and the caloric intake—all information useful to the user, in a visually engaging search listing.

If you have an author on your website who writes a lot of rich content, search engine marketers can add a tag that allows for rich snippets and is also a ranking factor for organic search. When an article or newsletter with an author that is tied to Google is tagged, the organic search listing features a picture of that author, her name, and when the article was published. Additionally, using this tag factors into its organic search ranking, potentially boosting the listing to a higher position. The listing with the author rich snippet looks like this:

Through the addition of this rich snippet, the user will be more visually drawn to the listing, and will treat the link as a more trusted source than those without the tag.

Despite many of the rich snippet supported Schema.org tags not being directly related to pharma, any pharma company would be able to take advantage of the rich snippets available in order to boost rankings and make their organic listings stand out.

**How this Affects Pharma and CMI/Compas Recommendations**

The implementation of structured data, and Schema.org in particular, is a great way to help boost click-through-rates on organic listings through Rich Snippets. Additionally, implementing structured data helps to avoid listing on unrelated search queries, and help Google and other search engines better understand the content on your website. The use of Schema.org in the implementation of rich snippets points to structured data becoming more and more important with an increasingly semantic web. It is advisable for a pharma website to work closely with an SEO agency to help set up Schema.org tags, provide insights into Schema.org tags’ effects on organic search performance and to help monitor Google for any changes, additions or improvements in Schema.org or rich snippets. Additionally, it is recommended that any pharma websites with a dedicated YouTube channel utilize an agency to help manage and optimize that YouTube channel and implement Schema.org to ensure proper video indexing and rich snippet descriptions in order to drive page views and video views.

**Analysts:**

Conor Hafertepe  
Assistant Planner, Search Engine Marketing  
Communications Media, Inc.

Justin Freid  
Vice President, Search Engine Marketing & Emerging Media  
Communications Media, Inc.

Recently, Schema.org added new medical-related markups to their vocabulary including such content types as Medical Entity, Medical Device, Medical Condition, Medical Indication, Medical Study and others. While these content types do not have rich snippets yet, they may in the future.