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Going Beyond Literature Reviews: How Maple Health Group Improved Efficiency & Client Value Through an Evidence-First Strategy

Seeking a solution to overcome increasing volumes of evidence and better support literature reviews, Maple Health Group, LLC transformed their processes with DistillerSR to go beyond efficiency gains and into data-driven insights that improved project planning, resourcing, and client relationships.

Shift Serialized Literature Review Processes into Parallel Workflows

DistillerSR eliminates the need to wait for phases of the literature review (LR) to complete, giving managers greater flexibility at a more granular level to save time and boost employee satisfaction.

Foster Transparency & Auditability

Deep visibility into LR activities and modifiable project settings help answer client questions, improve processes, and exceed regulatory and client expectations.

Improve Client Quotes & Budgeting

Data from DistillerSR improves the accuracy of project proposals and resource allocation on LR related projects.

5 Ways We Use DistillerSR Filters to Streamline LR Processes

Chris Waters-Banker, Ph.D., Senior Director of Consulting Operations at Maple Health Group, LLC, authors this blog on how DistillerSR's filter feature is used to assess projects in real-time, anticipate client needs, and quickly adapt to the unique and shifting demands of SLR projects.

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To overcome increasing volumes of scientific literature and the complexity of client needs, contract research organizations (CRO) and consultancy firms are looking towards new technologies to improve their capacity and strategic market differentiators. Maple Health Group, LLC, a leading global consulting firm servicing a variety of pharmaceutical, biotech, and medical device companies, recently chose DistillerSR to increase the efficiency of their literature reviews (LR) and found the power of enterprise evidence management led to better-informed decisions and a strategic edge for clients in a competitive market.

Top Challenges Solved By DistillerSR

For consultancies like Maple Health Group, LLC the dynamic and complex nature of scientific literature publication, coupled with diverse client requirements, presented an opportunity to evolve their LR processes. Chris Waters-Banker, Ph.D., Senior Director of Consulting Operations at Maple Health Group, and Konrad Pisarczyk, Maple's Scientific Lead in Evidence Synthesis, explain some industry challenges of the LR process below.

Overcoming the increasing volume and scope of evidence. The manual (i.e., Microsoft Excel-based) review and analysis of scientific literature is increasingly time consuming, resource intensive, and error-prone. As Waters-Banker explains, "The biggest challenge for Maple Health Group, and with the industry at large, is dealing with the exponential increase in the volume of scientific evidence with each passing year."

Addressing diverse client requirements. Clients seeking reviews across multiple topic areas and asking broader research questions introduce unique challenges not often present in a more narrower literature review. Maple Health Group, LLC prides itself on developing robust literature review proposals that evaluate relevant topic areas, such as clinical (both trial and real-world effectiveness), humanistic, economic, cost, and healthcare resource use evidence, to better inform and provide the greatest value to their clients.

"Academic literature reviews are traditionally focused on answering a very specific question and may target a specific type of evidence (e.g., clinical trials). Although valuable, it is not uncommon for those LRs to identify very few to no studies fitting the inclusion criteria," explains Waters-Banker. "When considering a project like a global value dossier (GVD) or a health technology assessment (HTA), it is important to structure the LR in a way that demonstrates we've done the proper work to find the most relevant studies to identify evidence gaps, understand treatment patterns, highlight unmet patient needs, and/or support a variety of market access activities."

Ensuring timeliness and relevant evidence. Ensuring evidence is current and relevant is critical for success in the markets that Maple Health Group, LLC operates in. Pisarczyk explains, "Any time the client thinks about refining criteria, such as the timeframe of the LR, or wants to better understand the volume of evidence associated with a particular subgroup, like a specific mutation driver, we can quickly provide the client with data and evidence so they can make informed decisions."

Enhancing competitive differentiation. A highly competitive industry requires innovative tools to differentiate in the market, whether it's competitive LR timelines, improved output quality, or new ways of adding value throughout the process. For Maple Health Group, LLC, this means going above and beyond to meet our client's needs, as Waters-Banker explains, "In the context of drug review, HTA agencies conduct their own LRs and our goal is to conduct an equally, if not more extensive, LR so that the submissions we prepare for our clients include a robust review of the current evidence-base. The HTA and reimbursement processes play a critical role in deciding whether a drug should be recommended for approval and these LRs play a crucial role in evidence-based decision-making that can drive potentially life-changing treatments forward."

Maple Health Group, LLC adopted DistillerSR to overcome LR challenges. Utilizing artificial intelligence (AI) enabled workflows and evidence management capabilities, DistillerSR automates many aspects of LRs, from literature collection, screening, assessment, and reporting; thereby reducing overall review times, defining smart workflows to minimize human error, while improving transparency and auditability.

Adopting DistillerSR: Benefits That Go Beyond Faster Reviews

Through an evidence-first strategy, DistillerSR paved the way to faster and more effective LRs. Following a short evaluation period and incremental deployment across projects, DistillerSR is now the literature review platform of choice within Maple Health Group, LLC.

"Prior to adopting DistillerSR, we were using highly customized Excel spreadsheets, with complex macros, and a custom screening form," said Pisarczyk. "But Excel wasn't providing us with the productivity and the detailed screening data we needed, so we trialed DistillerSR within our organization to overwhelmingly positive results. Now, DistillerSR is written into our proposals as the technology we use for the literature review process."

Maple Health Group, LLC follows a rigorous internal evaluation process with team members to evaluate new technology to determine best practices before adoption. No deployment goes forward until feedback is received from everyone on the team and there is sufficient data to support its use. "There is aways a concern regarding adoption when bringing on new technology; however, we've never had a consultant express they want to return to Excel-based literature reviews after using DistillerSR. In fact we hear the exact opposite!"

The following sections explain the top benefits Maple Health Group, LLC achieved through the adoption of DistillerSR.

Flexibility for Any Review Scenario

Maple Health Group, LLC found the configurability of DistillerSR to improve both the speed and quality of LRs through the ability to rapidly tailor workflows. "Due to its flexibility, we can use DistillerSR for any LR project," explained Waters-Banker. "The functionality of the DistillerSR platform offers features and opportunities for greater customization that are simply not available in Excel," added Pisarczyk. "For example, if we are collecting clinical trial and observational evidence as a part of an LR, and the client has expressed that the trial data will be used for a meta-analysis or an economic model, we can modify our approach to prioritize the identification and extraction of clinical trial data while continuing to screen for observational evidence – typically a much higher volume. DistillerSR allows us to get the evidence to the client earlier for their internal activities without sacrificing the integrity of the LR."

Saving Time on Reviews

"When you have a large volume of evidence, DistillerSR's AI and natural language processing (NLP) features automatically bring the most relevant titles and papers in front of the reviewer for screening first," said Waters-Banker. Pisarczyk further explains, "By capturing more of the relevant papers early on, you can start overlapping the LR phases in parallel, so you're not waiting for one phase to complete before starting the next one. It's more than improving the efficiency of each phase in sequence, it's enabling process flexibility at a finer level."

DistillerSR helps respond to client requests faster, as changes can be applied across the evidence population in seconds. "I can set up a form in DistillerSR that includes a yes/no question about the study dealing with a specific population. Inclusion is set to neutral at first, but the criteria can be updated quickly to either include or exclude. With a simple click of a button, the refined criteria can be reconciled, or applied, to every record that has been screened within seconds, even if its 10,000 papers. That scale is not very feasible without it being incredibly labor intensive and prone to error without a platform like DistillerSR."

"With DistillerSR we can make modifications in bulk across all records, adjust our screening forms, label citations, quickly identify and upload freely available PDFs, and easily reconcile conflicts between multiple pairs of reviewers for SLRs or as a part of the quality check settings for target literature reviews (TLRs)."

— CHRIS WATERS-BANKER, PH.D., SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CONSULTING OPERATIONS AT MAPLE HEALTH GROUP

Through configurable smart forms and reporting, screening results can be presented early to help clients make informed decisions on projects. Waters-Banker explains, "We can improve the quality of our literature reviews and data collection using DistillerSR-generated reports to identify key differentiating factors related to population, interventions, and outcomes. Studies can often be rather heterogeneous which makes the synthesis or comparative analysis difficult. Forms, labels, and filtering features help us organize the evidence in a meaningful way." Pisarczyk adds, "The data we generate from DistillerSR during the literature review process helps facilitate these conversations with our clients."

Greater Transparency and Auditability

Literature review guidelines, clients, and regulatory authorities require a rigorous, repeatable, and transparent methodological approach to literature reviews, setting high expectations for CROs and consultancy firms alike. Waters-Banker explains how DistillerSR meets these needs.

"A big benefit for clients is the transparency into the literature review process in real time. We use data generated by DistillerSR to provide our clients with regular updates, and to clarify screening criteria when necessary. DistillerSR also provides a peace of mind that decisions are consistently applied throughout, reducing the risk of a wrongful exclusion. For example, DistillerSR's NLP algorithm ranks the probability of inclusion based on the reviewers' decisions during the screening process, allowing us to audit the process and flag any excluded papers that had a high probably of inclusion for another round of screening. This auditability is a major value add for our clients and helps us evaluate our processes to improve the robustness of reviews."

Project Management Support

Accelerated timelines and a growing volume of evidence present challenges for project management and resource planning. Waters-Banker explains how project management has changed since deploying DistillerSR.

"DistillerSR gives our project leads an incredible tool for workforce planning as they can divide the number of records to be screened by each reviewer based on their capacity. Or they can assign a people to review specific topics based on their area of expertise. With DistillerSR we can make modifications in bulk across all records, adjust our screening forms, label citations, quickly identify and upload freely available PDFs, and easily reconcile conflicts between multiple pairs of reviewers for LRs or as a part of the quality check settings for target literature reviews (TLRs)."

Employee Development and Satisfaction

Waters-Banker explains the internal training benefits. "We can set up demo projects within DistillerSR and train consults. Individual user data captured in DistillerSR helps identify training opportunities and builds confidence in our reviewers before they utilize DistillerSR on a literature review project.

The same goes for employee retention. "At a minimum, DistillerSR is another example of how Maple Health Group, LLC is committed to investing in technology that supports our consultants, in terms of simplifying their workflows and helping them manage their workloads effectively."

Cross-functional Benefits

The benefits of automating evidence management scale rapidly across organizations, in terms of saving time and quality of results. When deploying transformative technologies into one group, it's important to consider how they may help other teams and business units – especially for activities with common components like literature reviews.

"Literature review processes are built into almost every type of project we do, so the benefits of automation can apply across the board," Waters-Banker explains. "If we are contracted to build a value proposition or build an economic model, literature reviews are often part of those processes. The value of DistillerSR applies well across different topic areas and different projects."

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An Unexpected DistillerSR Benefit

Like many clients, Maple Health Group, LLC discovers new applications for the evidence management capabilities provided by DistillerSR. One example comes from addressing a client's question about the volume of evidence representing a particular geographic region. Waters-Banker explains how this information was captured:

"Geographic region is not typically provided upfront in a title or abstract. Using DistillerSR, we were able to code the bibliography to display the research institution. Although it is possible that data can be used from other countries, this allowed us to estimate the volume of evidence from any given region to help inform future areas of research."

Evidence First Fosters Strategic Thinking

Maple Health Group, LLC highlights the transformative impact of an automated, AI-based platform on the efficiency and effectiveness of projects that include literature reviews. By addressing the challenges of increasing evidence volume, diverse client requirements, and an increasingly competitive market, DistillerSR empowered the company to streamline their processes, improve decision making, and provide clients with a value-added partnership.

Chris Waters-Banker has the final word: "We never put our clients into a single mold and force them to operate in particular way. We use DistillerSR to gather the evidence and inspire the questions we need to understand our clients better. It's changed the way I think about literature reviews, developing a more strategic approach to meet client's needs while streamlining the process." ⌘