

Reprint

Online and Offline Professional and Consumer Marketing

by John Mack, VirSci Corporation.

Attending conferences like the recent Pharmaceutical Marketing Global Summit (see Conference Highlights) gives me tidbits of information about how pharma marketing practices need to evolve. Although the advice from one expert often conflicts with that of another, and sometimes the advice is self-serving, some suggestions seem to ring true and have universal support. The following are good examples.

1. **Personalization** – “definitely where things are evolving to” says a Global eBusiness Director of a major pharmaceutical company. Personalization makes it as easy as possible for visitors to find the information they need. In order to do “push” marketing, one market analyst advises, “you have to be aligned with users’ goals.” While personalization will become more important, brand silos are a problem. Some experts think “pharma has no patience” when it comes to customer relationship management (CRM) for consumers. Brand managers are too short-sighted, focused on short-term goals, and are only around for a couple of years. Another problem cited was the reluctance of consumers to provide personalized information on a brand site. “It’s tough,” says an eMarketing consultant, who characterizes visitors to a product site as “quick-hitting” and not interested in forming a “relationship” with the brand. Of course, lack of trust and concern for privacy are major factors contributing to this attitude. Perhaps pharma companies can do a few things to change this (see, for example, “Protecting Privacy and Gaining Pharmaceutical Customer Trust,” <http://www.virsci.com/presentations/ProtectPrivacy-GainTrust.pdf>).
2. **Consumer Education** – “Build the same system on the consumer side as you do on the professional side,” says a Senior ePromotions Manager of a major global pharmaceutical company. This might go a long way towards addressing the problem of inadequate consumer education revealed by the FDA survey of physicians on the effects of DTC advertising (see article in this issue). This sentiment was also shared by an ad agency eVP, who said there is a “great opportunity in continuing patient education. Consumers need the same depth and quality [of information as physicians].” Another comment I heard: “Too much promotion, not enough education.” An ad executive warns, however, “please do not overestimate how much of the language consumers understand...you can’t be simple enough.” Keeping content fresh, however, is tough for pharmaceutical companies to manage on their own. A good strategy, experts agree, is to work with credible third parties like patient and physician organizations who are challenged to find credible content. Whatever the venue for pharma-sponsored content – whether on branded or disease sites owned by the company or on third party sites – the content needs to be credible and the sources of funding transparent. It couldn’t hurt to deal with accredited third-party web sites or seek such independent accreditation for your own web site (see “A Case for Pharmaceutical Web Site Accreditation,” **PMN**, Vol. 1 No. 1, Jan. 2002; http://www.pharma-mkting.com/news/pmnews1_1.pdf).

3. **Online Compliance Programs** – “seems like a great opportunity.” Online or off, some experts expressed skepticism and wondered if people’s behavior could really be changed, especially that group categorized as “leavers” – people who quit treatment. This is “a nut the pharmaceutical industry hasn’t cracked in 20 years,” said one expert. Nevertheless, some opportunities do exist. Dosing messages, for example, can be effective with patients who go to a product web site after being prescribed the drug and who have side effect problems. One direct marketing expert suggests that pharma should not just look at long-term compliance issues. Increasing the first refill rate, for example, “can make a huge difference in market share.”
4. **eDetailing** – Internet-based detailing (i.e., virtual detailing) works, exclaims many pharma marketers. It generates good metrics for ROI analysis and it is something that the marketing team can easily understand. eDetailing, as opposed to other Internet activities, is familiar to brand managers – it’s like hiring a contract sales force. Scalability is another plus. In-depth interviews with pharma ebusiness executives reveal that companies use a mix of virtual detailing and video detailing. The future of edetailing, and video detailing in particular, currently depends on the viability of vendors. However, these are all technologies that companies can bring in-house.

These are just a few insights that are worth passing on to readers. Please refer to future issues of **PMN** for more insights on pharma marketing trends.

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