
Reprint

The Revitalized Brand: Creating a New Brand Image from an Old Product

By Neville Dickson

She's tough, she's savvy, and what's more she gets results where others have failed.

Speaking at EyeforPharma's "Successful Product Branding in Pharma" conference in London, UK on 23 March, 2004, Lynne Brookes, Vice President, US Marketing, Cephalon Inc., made great marketing seem so simple.

Brookes has built her considerable reputation on turning around marketing blunders. Cephalon has acquired other people's brands that hadn't done well in the marketplace, yet had unique features that could be presented in a more favorable light. Without the luxury of a huge marketing budget, and not a lot of time either, Brookes has first to undo the harm already done to the ailing brand. "It's not rocket science," she claims. "You need to be clear about what the drug does, and the benefit(s) the drug provides".

We all know that. Yet strangely enough, many pharma marketing campaigns go to great expense and miss these points completely.

A Slow Start

Gabitril was launched in 1997, but sales were slow and marketing support was curtailed within 6 months of launch. Cephalon was brought on in 1999 to act as a co-promotion partner, to focus on neurology.

As second generation anticonvulsants entered the market in late 1999-2001, Gabitril was in a big hole. Although the marketing was neurology focused, even general neurologists had not been detailed extensively and the sales force lacked enthusiasm.

Faced with such significant marketing and sales force issues, Cephalon soon decided to acquire full rights for marketing and selling the product.

Brookes took stock of the situation. Why does the prescriber base for other anti-epileptic drugs look so different?, she asked. What are the competitors doing?

The Power of (Re)Positioning

From the original launch, the sales pitch based on mechanism of action had proven unsuccessful. It was time to get back to basics. Brookes and the marketing team were not afraid to think out of the epilepsy box, knowing full well that they needed to simplify the sales message and create a message that was more meaningful to specific target audiences. Creating sales force buy-in was the final, and not the easiest, challenge.

Get your story straight

Mechanism of action is important, but it's just a feature that lacked relevance as it was positioned, Brookes realized. And the market analysis showed that Gabitril was missing the entire psychiatry segment that was important to other anticonvulsants (24% of sales).

How do you sell to this market? The market is chock-full of acronyms SSRIs, SNRIs, BZDs, AEDs and more. Cephalon devised new positioning and set Gabitril apart as the first commercially available... SGRI! (selective GABA reuptake inhibitor).

As for the sales force: "The Most Important Lesson About Selling Gabitril Is That You Can," Brookes told them. The figures speak for themselves: since Cephalon acquired Gabitril, there has been a seven-fold increase in sales.

It is now over a \$70 million product, and with a strong clinical development effort behind the product, has the potential to be one of Cephalon's largest products.

Cephalon Strikes Again

Actiq (oral transmucosal fentanyl citrate) is the only prescription medicine approved in the world for treatment of breakthrough pain in opioid-tolerant cancer patients. Fentanyl itself is not new, but this delivery mechanism is. Yet Actiq had not had much success when Cephalon took over in December 2000.

Actiq had been promoted mainly to oncologists for two years by a 45-person contract sales force. Lack of meaningful, focused positioning or a consistent message meant low awareness of Actiq, and problems with prescriber retention.

Brookes and her marketing team reassessed the target audience. "Oncologists treat cancer," she says, with her characteristic pragmatism. "They misunderstood fentanyl, and had concerns about its abuse potential in general. For significant pain, they refer." The marketing team felt they should be talking to the PAIN prescribers. A turnaround in marketing thinking that led to product success. Anaesthetists and pain specialists treat pain. They understand fentanyl well. They are the ones who receive the referrals.

The product was repackaged to better suit the end users. The marketing campaign was refocused to promote not the delivery system, but the benefits of this unique system, and sales have taken off.

Pharma Marketing News

Actiq's Success Brings Notoriety

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article suggests a link between Actiq's growing use and an increase in its abuse and illegal trade ("Narcotic Actiq's Use And Abuse Raise Concern" WSJ, 17 May 2004). The article also sites the following sales data: "Among the 321,463 U.S. prescriptions written for Actiq last year -- up from 77,478 in 2001 -- 26% were written by family-practice doctors or internists, five times the number in 2001, according to data from NDCHealth, a health-care information company."

-- Editor

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Pharma Marketing News

Pharma Marketing News—the First Forum for Pharmaceutical Marketing Experts—is published monthly by **VirSci Corporation** except for August. It is distributed electronically by email and the Web to members of the Pharma Marketing Network (www.pharmamarketing.com).

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Publisher & Executive Editor**John Mack**

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