

Conference Highlight Reprint # 43-04

Leverage Health Beliefs to Develop Effective Online Compliance Programs

By John Mack

"Pharmaceutical marketers are itching to do something more sophisticated online, to go deeper," claims Monique Levy, an Analyst at Jupiter Research, a leading international research advisory organization. She was speaking at CBI's 4th Annual eMarketing for the Pharmaceutical Industry conference in Philadelphia, PA on March 16, 2005.

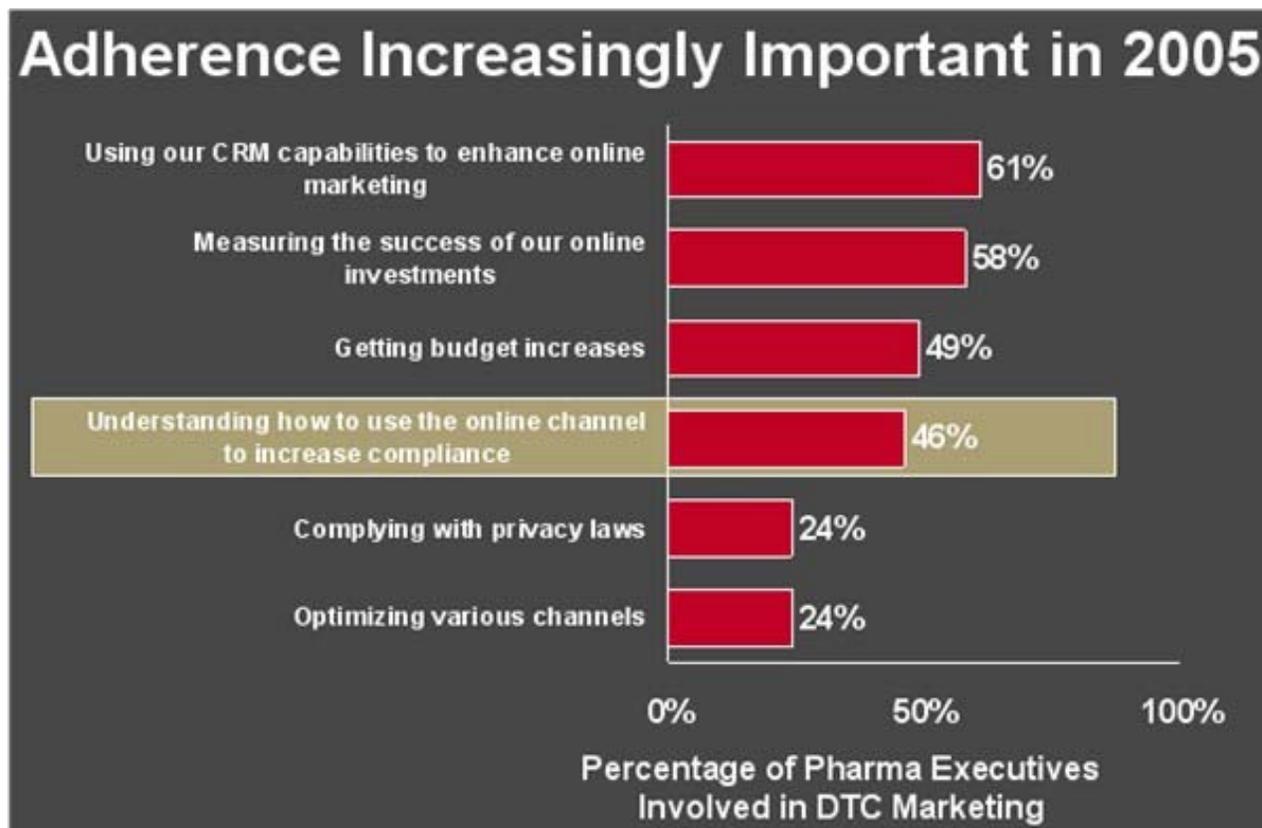
Online Marketing Issues and Plans

According to an August, 2004 JupiterResearch Executive Survey of 33 US pharma executives involved in DTC marketing, 46% of respondents said that understanding how to use the online channel to increase compliance was the most important issue

they faced with regard to online marketing targeting consumers (see chart below).

The survey also showed that these executives plan to increase spending on adherence-related online tactics with 67% intending to increase spending on e-mail marketing in 2005 and a majority (58%) planning to increase spending on online patient support programs, web site redesign to improve usability, and online content sponsorships. Similar results were reported in the "2004 DTC Industry Checkup" survey (see [PMN Reprint #42-03](#): "DTC in 2005: Can You Teach Old Dogs New Tricks?").

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Question: What are the most important issues you are facing this year with regard to online marketing targeting consumers? (Select all). Source: JupiterResearch Executive Survey (8/04), n = 33 (pharma executives involved in DTC marketing, US only) © 2005 JupiterResearch.

How Do Consumers Use the Internet for Health Purposes?

Before spending more money on Internet-based compliance programs, pharmaceutical marketers are keenly aware that (1) it will be a challenge to get increased funding, and (2) they need to be able to measure the success of their online investments. These issues have been discussed in several previous articles and OpEd pieces (see, for example, [PMN Reprint #17-01](#), "The Absolute, Relative, and Incremental ROI of DTC e-Marketing" and "Product Web Sites: Are They Worth It?").

Consumer use of the Internet for health purposes spans a spectrum from accessing information only to using interactive tools to manage their health. Although it is widely known that almost three-quarters of online consumers use the Internet to find health information, many marketers don't realize that less than 10 percent of online consumers use online health resources to continuously manage their health conditions. According to a Jupiter survey, consumers don't manage their health online because they have low confidence in their ability to use online health resources to improve their health. Pharmaceutical marketers must leverage health beliefs and models to design comparatively more effective adherence-related online marketing programs.

A number of psychological models of health decision-making processes have been proposed to guide pharmaceutical marketers in designing effective consumer and patient marketing campaigns.

Responders and Non-responders

One such model talks of "responders" and "non-responders" in terms of health-related behaviors and treatment characteristics that drive DTC response (see [PMN Reprint #27-03](#), "Understanding Drivers of Patient Behavior to Maximize DTC Effectiveness"). According to this model, responders are more likely to have condition and treatment-related concerns (severity of condition, management of symptoms, and satisfaction with medication), are more open to making changes in their lives, feel empowered within the patient-doctor relationship, and are more likely to already be Rx users. Non-responders, on the other hand, feel less vulnerable about their condition, describe themselves as being healthier, are more resistant to possible changes, and are less likely to ask for what they want in the doctor's office.

Proponents of this model suggest that pharmaceutical DTC advertisers should first determine if their intent is to motivate the responder or the non-responder and then tailor and personalize ads to specific target audiences to increase interest and motivation to respond.

Cycles of Change Model

In her presentation, Levy, who once provided health psychology expertise to eDiets.com, a diet web site, summarized Prochaska and DiClemente's "Cycles of Change" behavioral model (aka, "Transtheoretical Model") and its implications for pharmaceutical marketers.

STAGE 1: Precontemplation. This might be called the "Ignorance is bliss" stage in which there is a lack of awareness and the person is not currently considering change. The marketer's goal for people in this stage is to build awareness. DTC ads on TV are very good at this and much superior to the Internet.

STAGE 2: Contemplation. Let's call this the "Sitting on the fence" stage, which is characterized by an awareness of the problem and the person is thinking about a change. "Pharmaceutical marketers have a huge opportunity to use the Internet to build motivation at this stage," says Levy. This is when people access the Internet to do their research and are most receptive to advertising.

STAGE 3: Preparation. Sometimes referred to as the "testing the waters" stage, this is when action is imminent and when marketers can convert prospects into customers.

STAGE 4: Action, Maintenance. This is the stage that offers the biggest challenge to pharmaceutical marketers. Here's where people either commit to sustain the new behavior or suffer a relapse and revert to old behaviors. In health treatment terms, the challenge is maintaining compliance with treatment and improving retention.

Very few online consumers use compliance-building self-monitoring tools on the Internet. For example, only 10% of online consumers have used e-mail reminders in the past 12 months. "Given this low utilization of online compliance tools, pharmaceutical marketers face a huge challenge to leverage the Internet for compliance," says Levy.

Self-Efficacy

Pharmaceutical marketers that are really serious about compliance and who wish to increase consumers' adoption of online tools, need to understand the concept "self-efficacy" and how it influences online behavior. In this context, self-efficacy is a measure of a person's confidence and ability to use online tools to manage their health. According to Levy, only 15% of online consumers said they are confident they can manage their health condition online and that their actions will have a positive impact.

"Pharmaceutical marketers must leverage these health beliefs and models to design comparatively

more effective adherence-related online marketing programs,” says Levy. She offers the following suggestions:

Involve healthcare professionals. Baxter has developed a sophisticated set of complementary online initiatives to manage patients with hemophilia, including an online patient-physician communications tool called Advoy (see [PMN Reprint #41-06](#), “A Web-based Therapy Management Program”) and a comprehensive patient support program called Passport for Life. Ultimately, Baxter plans to coordinate data in both tools to increase patient adherence. At the very least, marketers unwilling to make this type of investment should emphasize patient online resources to physicians through various outlets, including office brochures and online detailing sessions.

Avoid long registrations up front. Jupiter-Research has continually advocated building consumers’ profiles incrementally.

Reward long-term behavior. Several pharmas are having success using online coupons to drive compliance. However, this approach does not promote long-term behavior change. Marketers should consider offering increasingly substantial rewards for sustained consumer efforts.

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Contact Monique Levy, Health Analyst,
Jupiterresearch, (212) 389-2014,
mlevy@jupitermedia.com

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Publisher & Executive Editor

John Mack
VirSci Corporation
www.virsci.com
PO Box 760
Newtown, PA 18940
215-504-4164, 215-504-5739 FAX
<mailto:editor@pharmamarketingnews.com>

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