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YouPharma

New Rules for Pharma Marketing and Social Media

By John Mack

To use a war analogy—as is often done in industry—sales and marketing executives tend to send in more troops when they fail to reach their goals with the current force level. We can see that playing out today in the war to market drugs. When your market share is not up to par, send out more DTC ads and more reps—the drug industry's grunts and jarheads.

DTC Spending Up, ROI Down

So it's no surprise why we've seen spending on DTC increase by an average of 11.5% every year between 2000 and 2005 (about 9% last year), while spending on physician promotion has increased about an average of 5.4%.

Yet it is generally agreed that the return on these investments (ROI) is declining. A new approach to the way forward in pharma marketing is needed. Is it time for the pharmaceutical industry to take the advice of some of its critics and use the new tools available to it and extricate itself from its moribund situation of declining ROI?

To answer this and other questions, *Pharma Marketing News* tapped into the expertise of the [Pharma Marketing Roundtable](#) and several bloggers in the [Pharma Blogosphere](#)[™] to provide a range of opinions.

The new tools I am talking about and that are big topics at many pharmaceutical marketing conferences can be lumped under the heading "social networking" or "Web 2.0," which is exemplified most notably in the non-pharma arena by YouTube and MySpace.

Fard Johnmar's Web 2.0 Tools Sampling

Following are some examples of relevant social media tools summarized by Fard Johnmar, founder of Envision Solutions, LLC, a healthcare marketing communications consultancy specializing in

analysis, strategy, content development and training. Fard is also the author the HealthcareVOX blog, which was rated very highly by readers in the First Ever Pharma Blogosphere Reader Survey (see "[How Readable, Credible & Useful are Pharma Blogs?](#)").

Wikis: Wikis are becoming an increasingly important tool for collaboration and knowledge sharing. They are also helping to aggregate information about disease and potential public health crises.

One prominent example is the Flu Wiki. Co-founded by Dr. Greg Dworkin, this wiki filled an important information void during the initial public conversation about bird flu.

A new site that is gaining a following is Ask Dr Wiki, "a medical wiki with the goal of creating a collective online memory for physicians, fellows,

residents, and medical students." This wiki was recently profiled in the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Social Networks: I've spoken a lot about the benefits of social networks and one prominent one, Sermo. Over the past few months, Sermo's physician user base has significantly increased. Doctors are using the site to share information about treatment practices and to track disease outbreaks, including the emergence of antibiotic resistant bacteria.

Other Web 2.0 Tools: There are other social media tools that use the "wisdom of crowds" to track illness. One new site, Who Is Sick?, "provides current and local sickness information to the public—without the hassle of dealing with hospitals or doctors." While the site is in its infancy, it has interesting information and should be very helpful for parents. I could also see folks from the CDC using it to help track disease—if more people start to contribute to the site.



"The pharmaceutical industry has been slow to embrace new media," says Mark Senak, author Eye On FDA, another influential blog denizen of the Pharma Blogosphere. "There are a number of good reasons for this. Any highly regulated industry, such as the pharmaceutical industry, has to be careful and concerned when considering new media strategies. That doesn't mean that they should consider them at all, however..."

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Some Pharma Feet Are Getting Wet

Some pharmaceutical companies may already be experimenting with social media and blogs in particular. Johnson and Johnson (J&J), for example, continues to lead the pack in outreach to healthcare bloggers and may also be ready to launch employee blogs!

J&J's Marc Monseau, Director of Corporate Media, recently organized a dinner meeting where several Pharma bloggers could meet and talk with J&J people. According to Jim Edwards, author of the blog BrandweekNRX, attendees included: "Fard Johnson of Healthcare Vox, Nicholas Genes from MedGadget, Peter Pitts from Drug Wonks, Steven Palter from Doc in the Machine and Ed Silverman from Pharmedot" Jim also attended. (For more on this meeting, see "[Should Bloggers Dine at Pharma's Table?](#)")

J&J is also hosting a private speaker/blogger reception at the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas prior to the Healthcare Blogging Summit 2007 that will be held the next day at that location (see "[Full Disclosure](#)").

Employee Blogs

Aside from the Las Vegas reception and the New York private dinner party, how does J&J intend to put its toes in the blogging waters? I've heard—mostly through Peter Rost, industry whistle blower and blogger at Question Authority, who heard it from BrandweekNRX's Jim Edwards—that J&J may be gearing up to having its employees write blogs.

According to Rost, "the person responsible for snubbing me [for an invitation to the New York Dinner] appears to have been Adriana Cronin-Lukas, whom J&J has hired as a consultant on blogging. Lukas told Jim Edwards that she's trying to get J&J to give all their 120,000 employees a blog, on which the workers could write whatever they liked. Jim didn't like that idea, since he felt it was a journalist's dream and a brand manager's nightmare."

Over the past several months, I have offered the industry some FREE advice on blogging. See, for

example, "[A Primer on Pharma Employee Blogging](#)." These rules were influenced by recent events ignited by AtsraZeneca's "Zubillaga Affair" that demonstrate how giving employees free reign to voice their opinions can easily go horribly wrong (see "[The Zubillaga Affair: Effect on the Prospects for Pharma Blogging](#)").

Regarding the notion of Pharma employee blogs, Rost said "I truly very much hope you succeed in getting Big Pharma to start blogging. Imagine all the stuff we'll get to blog about as they try. There will be no limit to the amount of fun we can have. Big pharma can simply not, no matter how much they try, not be fun to write about. The picture they have of themselves and how the rest of the world sees them is so different, that this will be forever amusing. Not until they accept their image and work from that starting point will they effect any change. And until then," warns Rost, "people will continue laughing. Which is no laughing matter."

Code of Conduct

Mario Cavallini, Manager, Competitive Intelligence, Rosetta Marketing, and member of the Pharma Marketing Roundtable, said, "I have also been eager to see brand blogging but now have second thoughts. However, my inspiration is the recent case of Kathy Sierra, an IT blogger who got blasted with flame wars of the worst sort. We who take part in online discussions have, to one degree or another, gotten much too blasé about crude and threatening verbal behavior over the years. This has led no less a light than Tim O'Reilly to propose a Blogger's Code of Conduct that leads off with 'Take responsibility not just for your own words, but for the comments you allow on your blog.' It also includes, 'Consider eliminating anonymous comments.' Both are a sharp departure from current online 'culture,' and yet O'Reilly makes a good case, and I'm open to it."

There are other ideas out there for blogging rules and guidelines. Dmitriy Kruglyak, blogger at TrustedMD, for example, instigated the "Open Healthcare Manifesto," which is "designed to foster 'open media' in healthcare and medicine and to implement some sort of a new 'integrity standard' ... needed to help people sort through the junk..." For more on this, see "[Medical Blog Network Launches HealthTrain Manifesto](#)."

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My interest in this topic was also piqued by Time magazine's person of the year: You. "Yes," says Johnmar, "TIME is paying homage to all of the people who are blogging, podcasting, networking and using Websites like YouTube. According to

TIME, people are watching nearly 100 million videos per day and uploading 65,000 to the service. By any measure, those are phenomenal numbers." But, as Fard points out, healthcare Web 2.0 was not much mentioned in the Time article.

It's Not About Us, It's About Them

Consumers and physicians, clients of pharmaceutical companies, are already "out there" using social media and, according to Johnmar, "are starting to have an impact on how other stakeholders perceive pharmaceutical products and issues. People searching for health-related content are being exposed to this user-generated, social media world. This content is competing with the messages from pharmaceutical companies about their products distributed through traditional channels."

According to a 2006 Forrester/Nielsen BuzzMetrics survey, consumers are looking for opinions of people like themselves and trust consumer posts to blogs and discussion forums more than they trust magazine and TV ads.

Monique Levy of Jupiter Research summarized some of her company's research thusly, "As many as 34 percent of online users said they connected to others or the content they created online about health and wellness issues using various types of peer-to-peer and social media in the last year. Of these health connectors 69 percent are consuming content, 41 percent creating and 32 percent doing both."

Research by Envision Solutions ("Diving Deeper Into Online Health Search") reveals that Internet users' exposure to health-related user-generated media is significant and Wikipedia is the most referenced resource. Key findings include the following:

- User-generated media appeared on the first three pages of Envision Solutions' searches 88% of the time.
- User-generated media was equally as likely to be indexed on the first page of searches conducted on Google and Yahoo.
- Wikipedia was the most frequently cited resource. This wiki appeared on the first page in 63% of searches.

Put Some Skin in the Game

Unity Stoakes, President, OrganizedWisdom, a health-focused, social-networking site for consumers and physicians, suggests some good reasons why pharmaceutical companies should engage in social media. "The more they participate

and the more they introduce their messages, education and content into the conversation," says Stoakes, "the more likely these messages will be heard, repurposed, regurgitated, verified in the same way that much of the content on Wikipedia is checked and sourced."

Rob Nauman, Principal, BioPharma Advisors, suggested that the Internet has slowly chipped away at pharma's position of great purveyors of medical information for physicians. "Now," says Nauman, "the content they produce may not be seen as valuable. Part of this may be due to regulations that guide what information drug companies can put out there. Can the pharmaceutical marketing model survive," asks Nauman, "if user-generated content continues to grow? Perhaps marketers have to redesign their entire thought process about how they market and sell their products."

The fact is pharmaceutical marketers are not in control of their product information any more. Bruce Grant, SVP/Business Strategy at Medical Broadcasting Company, A Digitas inc. Company, expressed it this way at a recent industry conference: "Pharma companies that fail to recognize this shift and adjust the way they interact online with their customers will find themselves increasingly marginalized. But those that acknowledge and adapt will become increasingly influential and trusted."

Dmitriy Kruglyak is optimistic—I think—about pharma's use of social networking. "I get a strong feeling that blogs and social media will go way beyond 'mere adoption' by pharmas and the rest of healthcare industry," says Kruglyak. "Before we know it, a social media strategy will be a key source of competitive advantage, determining success or failure of product lines, business units and executive careers. Adapt or die, no less."

Speaking of RSS Feed technology, Mark Senak suggested "it is time for pharmaceutical companies to look at how they are communicating in the new media milieu. [RSS Feed technology] is just one aspect of that. Anyone who is just posting press releases the old fashioned way, and sending them over the wires, is behind the times. It would be like only advertising on radio, when there is television!"

Beating the Pros

For me, Web 2.0 is all about "beating the pros at their own game" as Time put it: ". . . for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing

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and beating the pros at their own game, Time's Person of the Year for 2006 is you."

How will this translate to pharmaceutical marketing? Could we see, for example, drug commercials use YouTube-like videos like that BMW commercial with the kids opening Christmas presents? Maybe you've seen the "Bus Uncle" YouTube clip from Hong Kong? Here is a guy under "pressure" ranting on a bus—all of it captured in a cell phone video. There must be a drug to treat his rage—let's say its an anti-depressant. Couldn't part of the bus uncle video be mashed into an ad for that drug? In addition to or instead of running it on TV, how about submitting it to YouTube (or a parallel YouPharma site)?

Better yet, run a contest for consumers to submit their own videos illustrating symptoms of depression and select a few to insert into different versions of the commercial, which you submit to YouTube. Air on national TV the one that gets the highest rating or views on YouTube and pay the winner a bundle of bucks! (I don't believe in working for nothing.)

I imagine you could get doctors to submit video clips as well—you know, to discuss the side effects. Maybe there is a doc out there who is really, really good at it.

These ideas are doable because they include the "authentic voices" of consumers yet allow advertisers to maintain control over the important (branded) content. The possibilities are endless.

Jane Chin, author of PharmRepClinic.com, said "Sooner or later, pharma will have to acknowledge social network marketing, not because they want to embrace it, but because their customers are engaged in it." Meet Jane online and view her [profile](#) on the [Pharma Marketing Network Forums](#) where you can join the discussion "[Is Pharma Ready for Social Network Marketing?](#)"

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No sooner did I post my idea about using the bus uncle video in a drug commercial, than did I find an example on YouTube at : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YQ6hj17nUo>

It may not be a drug ad and it doesn't use the actual bus uncle footage—it's a slick ad agency remake—but it gives you an idea of what I mean.

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