Product/Service Review

Building Power Sales Messages
The Core of Effective Selling
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PMN77-02

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This article is part of the September 2008 issue of *Pharma Marketing News*.

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http://www.news.pharma-mkting.com/PMNissueSep08archive.htm

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The article "Creating the Most Effective Sales Calls" (see PMN Reprint #76-02) presented highlights from a webinar presented by David Owen, Director, TNS Healthcare, that revealed key insights into sales call message effectiveness and its impact on prescribing. That analysis looked at the comparative importance of the message and the messenger in influencing prescribing intent.

This article hones in specifically on the message—constructing the strongest and most effective messages to support optimum brand performance. It summarizes another presentation from the same webinar, given by Ian McKinnon, Senior Vice President, TNS Healthcare, who focused on building "power messages"—developing the right messages to drive results.

Hopefully this article will help you achieve the following goals:

- **Build the Best Messages**; i.e., create messages with the power to generate prescribing.

- **Identify Competitive Messages that Hurt**; i.e., identify which competitive messages are detrimental to your brand—and blunt their impact through counter detailing.

- **Learn how you can adapt messaging in response to market changes**, ensuring your brand's continued growth.

- **Identify Your Competitor's Weaknesses**; i.e., find the Achilles' heel in your competitor's message—and act to gain a market advantage.

- **Understand the Voice of the Competitor Before Entering a Market**

"Message recall data is a rich source of information regarding communications in the market," said McKinnon. "It provides a great diagnostic metric about your message platform and your competitors' messages. When put into action, message recall data can determine the negative impact of competitors' messages on your brand and reveal how you can message to overcome those harmful effects."

At its core, messaging is really about providing information to create or change a perception in order to change behavior. There are many things you can test about a message, including motivational impact of visuals versus text, alignment of message with desired product positioning, and how well a message deflects negative claims from competitors.

Messages can be evaluated at many points along the product lifecycle starting at pre-launch and extending into maturity.

"Typically the big push for message development and evaluation is in the pre-launch phase, post positioning to make sure you are launching your product with the right messages," said McKinnon. "Inline products, however, also require message evaluation, for example when there are new indications or when a brand is faced with competition from other products. At the mature phase, there are further opportunities to refine your messaging, such as with the entry of generics or to support plans to switch a brand to over-the-counter sales, requiring physicians to change their mindset from prescribing to recommending."

Multi-Stage Approach to Message Testing
McKinnon outlined the three major stages of communications development, as follows:

- *Message Development and Testing* – involves qualitative and quantitative testing to identify the right themes and categories and develop messages with your agency

- *Creative Concept Testing* – to make sure your creative content is "emoting" appropriately to position your brand in the best possible light

- *Sales Ad Development/Testing* – to make sure the visual aid you bring to physicians is as powerful as it can be

Building the Best Messages for the Inline Brand
The goal of message development and testing is to construct a message platform that is appropriate at a global and local level and will have the greatest positive impact on the brand. "It's critical," said McKinnon, "to identify what physicians remember about your brand and the competitor brands and to understand the impact of being 'on message' versus being 'off message.'"

The availability of existing message recall data provides an important source of information for creating and refining messages. In fact, the existing messages can serve as a benchmark for testing new messages. Message recall data can be used to:

- Test and modify existing messages,

- Test new messages and message categories, and

- Understand the impact of new competitive messages.

Continues…

The Impact on Your
Brand of Your Messages

Your Brand's Messages	Patient Type
Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used in Combination with other Therapies	8.6
Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used in Combination w/ other Therapies	8.1
Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used as a Monotherapy	4.8
Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used as a Monotherapy	4.2
Tolerability	7.7
Appropriate Patient Population	5.2
Convenient Dosing	3.1

Figure 1: Impact of **Your** Brand's Messages on Your Brand's Usage. Using RA as an example, this hypothetical analysis of "your" brand's messages in isolation from competitors' messages shows the 3 most impactful messages with their scores in the blue boxes on the right. The numbers show the impact on motivating physicians to prescribe the brand. Think of these as likeliness to prescribe or preference share numbers. The number "8.6," for example, means that the message increases the physician's likelihood to prescribe "your" brand by 8.6%.

The Negative Impact that
Their Brand's Messages
Have on Your Brand

Their Brand's Messages	Patient Type
Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used in Combination with other Therapies	-4.1
Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used in Combination w/ other Therapies	-3.5
Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used as a Monotherapy	-2.0
Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used as a Monotherapy	-2.2
Tolerability	-3.5
Appropriate Patient Population	-0.5
Convenient Dosing	0.0

Figure 2: The Impact of **Their** Brand's Messages on Your Brand's Usage. This table shows the negative impact that a competitor's messages have on "your" brand in terms of a physician's likelihood to prescribe your brand. The negative scores in the red boxes in Figure 3 show how the competitor's messages regarding efficacy and tolerability decrease the use of 'your' brand.

Continues…

Their Brand's Messages	Patient Type 2	Your Brand's Messages' Ability to Deflect Their Messages	Patient Type	Patient Type
Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used in Combination with other Therapies	-4.1	Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used in Combination with other Therapies	8.6	6.5
Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used in Combination w/ other Therapies		Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used in Combination w/ other Therapies	8.1	3.5
Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used as a Monotherapy		Efficacy – ACR Scores When Used as a Monotherapy	4.8	1.2
Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used as a Monotherapy		Efficacy – Progression and Function When Used as a Monotherapy	4.2	0.0
Tolerability		Tolerability	7.7	5.0
Appropriate Patient Population		Appropriate Patient Population	5.2	-0.5
Convenient Dosing		Convenient Dosing	3.1	0.0

The Impact of Your Message and the Impact of Your Competitors Message

Impact of Your Brand's Messages in Isolation

Figure 3: Overcoming the Negative Impact of Competitive Brand's Messages. This example focuses on one competitor message that negatively impacted "your" brand's messages and shows how this changes which of "your" brand messages are most impactful. The next to last column on the right shows the original scores for the brand messages and the rightmost column shows the scores for these same messages when tested in an environment that included the competitor's message. Whereas in isolation the two top efficacy brand messages were more impactful than the tolerability message, in a competitive environment, the tolerability message is the second most impactful message for "your" brand. This example demonstrates the value of not testing messages in isolation and illustrates how one can identify messages for 'your' brand that deflect competitor messages.

Identifying Competitive Messages that Hurt

"Wouldn't you like to know if what physicians remember about your competitors hurts your brand?" asked McKinnon.

Message recall data identifies not only what doctors remember about your brand, but also what they remember about competitors. "To optimize your communications, it is important to identify which competitive messages are detrimental to your brand," said McKinnon. You must also:

- Understand which messages are hurting your brand and whether the effect is general or specific to one competitor.
- Determine if the negative effect is general or specific to a patient type.
- Determine if the negative effect is present among all physicians or only found in sub-groups of physicians.

But identifying messages that hurt your brand is only really helpful if something can be done about

them. Understanding how best to counter detail in order to protect your brand is the ultimate goal, according to McKinnon. To accomplish this:

- Identify which, if any, of your existing messages and message categories will blunt your competitor's messages.
- Determine if new messages are required to deflect competitive messages and identify which new messages would work best.

In addition, recall data can be used to uncover which of your competitors' messages are weaknesses for them and identify how best to message against those weaknesses. Further, messages can be tested to understand how best to respond to physician objections.

Understanding competitive messaging is key to the success of new brands, as well as inline products. "To start your brand on the right path, it is very important to understand the influence of existing messages before entering into a market," said

McKinnon. "Message recall data can be used to identify how best to communicate your brand's positioning with respect to the other voices that already exist in the marketplace. Recall data can also be used preemptively to identify and counteract any negative impact on your new brand from existing messages even prior to entering the marketplace."

McKinnon concluded his presentation by illustrating a framework for testing messages in isolation versus in a real-world scenario that included competitor's messages. "When the analysis includes communications from other brands," said McKinnon, "what you learn by testing your messages in isolation may not necessarily hold up, because it is a whole different environment." To illustrate his point, McKinnon presented hypothetical message impact analysis for a rheumatoid arthritis drug (see Figures 1, 2 on pg. 3 and Figure 3 on pg. 4).

Creating the Most Effective Sales Calls

In summary, David Owen and Ian McKinnon made the following points in their combined TNS Healthcare webinar:

- Given the limited time that reps can spend with physicians, understanding what physicians value and optimizing how that value is delivered are critical to your brand's success.

- The dynamic nature of pharmaceutical markets also requires the constant monitoring of this relationship, with respect to performance, delivery, and impact.

- The foundation of a successful sales call depends on a rigorous assessment of the quality of the sales call, an understanding of the messages in the market place, an assessment of the relative importance of the message and the messenger and the impact of the message and the messenger on prescribing.

- The crucial information gained through the monitoring process has many uses, including the utilization of message recall data to optimize your brand's communications.

- Effective message testing frameworks must identify both the competitive messages that are detrimental to your brand and how to deflect those negative messages.

- The combination of monitoring and improving your brand's communications is critical to the effectiveness of the sales call and the success of your brand.

Experts Consulted

The following experts were consulted in the preparation of articles for this issue.

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