

Getting More from the Promotional Mix



“SUPPORT PROMOTION, A LUXURY I CAN AFFORD TO DO WITHOUT?”

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It's December and 2006 is all but over. Already you are starting to implement plans for 2007. Many of our pharmaceutical companies have had a tough year cutting expenses and people. The productivity of our collective pipelines is down and not likely to give us many new products for several years. And still, despite these setbacks, has anyone agreed to cut your sales and profit targets?

“Support promotion dollars,” as one ad agency executive generalized for me, “is something pharmaceutical companies spend if they have left over funds.” Most pharma executives doubt that support promotion, like advertising, direct mail, leave-behinds, or patient forms actually works. Works to do what, though?

Generate campaign awareness or product recall, increase message retention, or accelerate sales?

If your brand's success depends on a sales force to reach the decision maker, then you need to support your reps. Doctors take in and retain information like most human beings. They will remember less than two-thirds of the concepts just four days after your representative's detail. How will you help them to remember your intended message? Leveraging is something that almost every marketer swears he does (Figure 1). However, our own research indicates that only two of the 20 brands we evaluated this spring were effective in using support promotion to magnify the impact of their sales force and achieve superior levels of message retention. Thirteen brands had specific

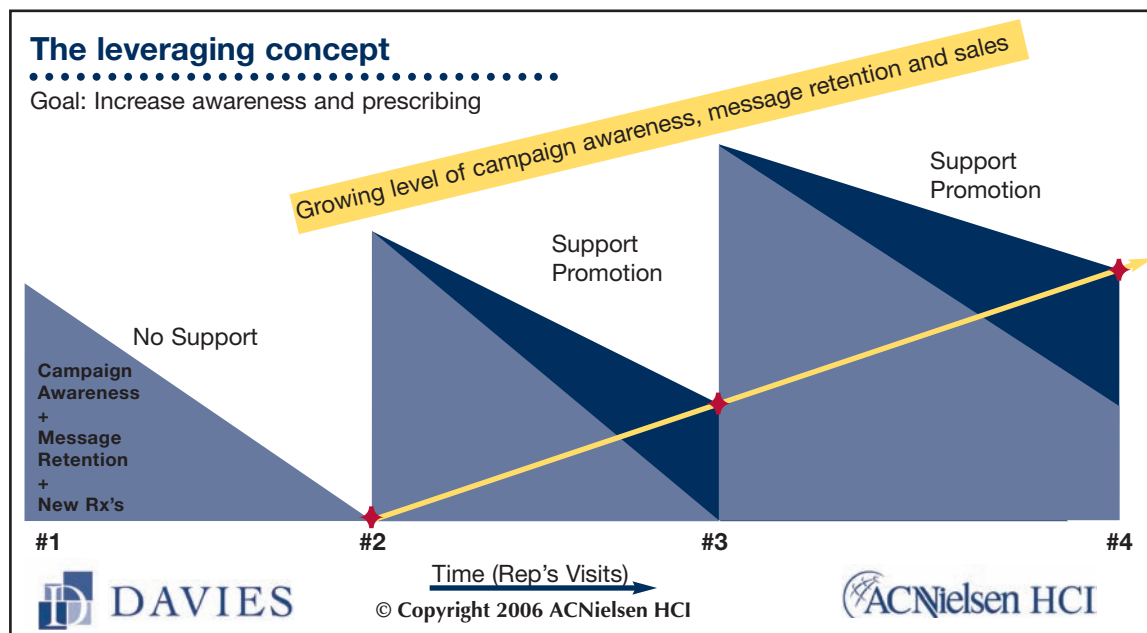


Figure 1. The Leveraging Concept



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things to do to improve. Five campaigns needed to be overhauled. This is further proof that if you do not measure, you cannot manage.

Support promotion is usually inexpensive (*i.e.*, \$10 or less, per exposure) and efficient (because you control the message). That means you can economically reach your audience more frequently than your sales force. Therefore support promotion can efficiently remind prescribers of your representatives' call and reinforce your intended message.

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While your competition is reducing or cutting marketing budgets, you have the opportunity to be competitively advantaged. Maintain your support promotion budget and at levels higher than that of your competition. ACNielsen HCI research, discussed in the last issue of *CPM*, suggests that brands can enjoy greater campaign performance and higher levels of message retention. Sales growth will likely be higher too.

If you follow the crowd, you will subscribe to the belief that support promotion is ineffective and a luxury to do without. You will reduce, or cut your overall marketing expenses and have fewer tactics supporting the sales force. No one will fault you for this decision.

Do you choose to be different? If you feel you need to do something different to move your brand ahead, then look at ways to increase the efficiency of your promotional mix. Consider ways to better leverage your promotional mix to:

- generate higher levels of campaign awareness and product recall,
- increase message retention and
- accelerate sales.

Be sure that you can show your management how well your promotional mix is in fact working to get your message across to prescribers.

The evidence for most of what I have said here, some of which is based on ACNielsen HCI research, has been provided in past columns. ACNielsen HCI, leaders in pharmaceutical promotion research since 1986, are experts in planning, optimizing and monitoring promotion.

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For more information about how to get more out of your promotional mix, please contact Graham Davies at (416) 467-7005 or at g@davies-strategic.com.

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