

The Right Message, Better Results:

Understanding and Improving the Impact of Messaging on Prescribing Behaviour



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Traditionally, pharmaceutical marketers have perceived “share of voice” as one of the strongest drivers of brand performance and measured it by both the number of details to physicians and physician recall of key product messages. In today’s competitive marketplace, there is increasing focus on the financial impact—and budget constraints—associated with pharmaceutical marketing. One positive outcome of this increased scrutiny is the evidence of greater diligence and investment in physician segmentation and positioning/message development.

However, little time or effort is spent on understanding the influence of all of these activities and their impact on prescribing behaviours, which is crucial to success. IMS research has shown that messaging that is linked to a change in physician behaviour can increase the effectiveness of detailing efforts by an extra 10% to 20%, a significant opportunity given the current competitive climate and growth challenges. While pharmaceutical marketers generally agree on the importance of messaging, many outsource the function, or do not give it the attention it deserves. As a result, one of the most critical dimensions of brand performance has become an under-appreciated commodity.

Primary research is not sufficient

Pharmaceutical marketers often develop brand messages on initial, or primary research. While this is very useful for measuring the impact of messages on prescribers’ intentions, it does not tell the whole story—marketers must adopt a more analytical approach so that they can better predict how messages will resonate

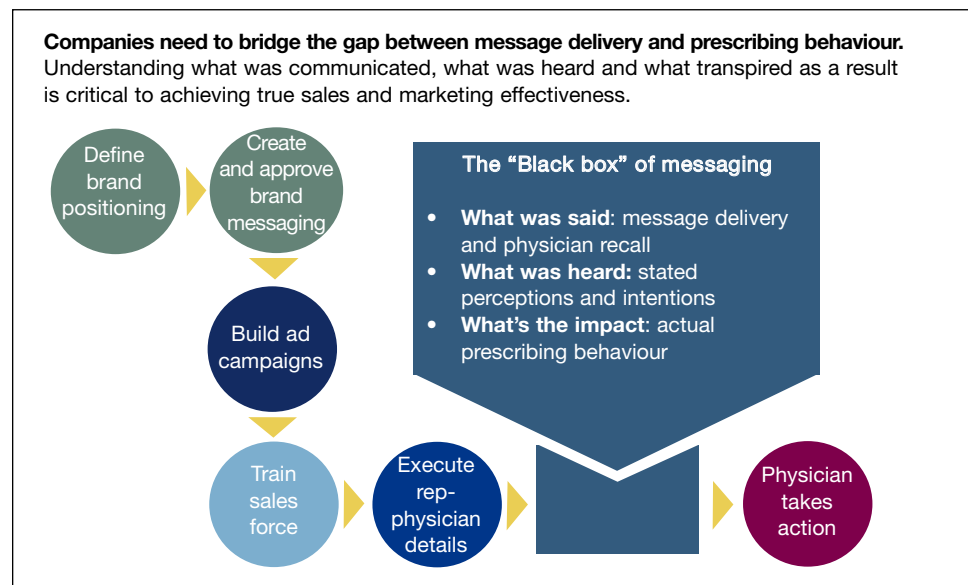


Figure 1. The impact of messages on Physician’s prescribing habits.

with physicians, as well as better understand the impact that each message (and/or a combination of messages) has on physicians' prescribing habits (Figure 1).

Practically speaking, this approach will enable marketers to:

- Generate targeted messages to ensure physicians hear what the sales force intends to say
- Anticipate proactively and respond quickly to shifts in messaging during product launches
- Defend against competitors' message strategies
- Improve creative development and enhance sales team performance

Linking messages to prescribing behaviour: A case study

An example in the overactive bladder (OAB) market¹ demonstrates the power of a more analytical approach. At the time of an IMS study, the three main OAB therapies of focus were Detrol LA[®], Ditropan XL[®] and Oxytrol[™]. Primary research was used to track message recall by physicians following each detail delivered by the sales representative. Physicians were also asked about the credibility and relevance of the message(s) delivered. Responses to these questions served as key inputs to a process known as "message mapping," which was used to isolate messages that were strongly associated with each of the brands.

When all messages were mapped, clear patterns emerged. Detrol LA[®] was positioned as the drug of choice in the minds of physicians and associated with better efficacy, Ditropan XL[®] was associated with dosing and Oxytrol's[®] positioning was linked to cost, convenience and fewer side effects.

In order to understand the impact of both the detail and the message on physicians' prescribing intentions, statistical models were applied to develop message influence indices. When standardized for the level of detailing activity and compared across brands, it was clear that Detrol LA[®] was in fact the drug of choice among physicians. And, the number of details that competing brands needed to execute to have the same

impact on prescribing intentions was substantial. Specifically, Ditropan XL[®] would need to deliver 15% more details to have the same impact on prescribing intentions as Oxytrol[®] and 46% more details to have the same impact as Detrol LA[®]; Oxytrol[®] would need 33% more details to have the same impact as Detrol LA[®].

Insights yield new growth opportunities

In today's marketplace, the investment in detailing and message development is substantial. Given that the goal of messaging is to influence prescriber perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, it is critical that the messages delivered are the 'right ones' given the brand strategy. They should support the brand positioning, demonstrate brand value and differentiate the brand. To achieve these goals, marketers should ensure that messages are:

- Delivered correctly
- Compared to competitors to determine impact and relative influence
- Recalled, relevant and credible—three key elements needed to achieve true resonance with physicians
- Adjusted given brand performance and new market entrants

Engaging in these activities serves as a reality check for companies regarding which of their own messages are or are not working and provides valuable feedback on the need to fine-tune a message or replace it with an alternative one. More than ever, marketers need to exploit growth opportunities. Understanding the true influence of brand messages provides a foundation for identifying the possibilities—and capitalizing on them. **CPM**

Reference

1. IMS Consulting study of the 2004 OAB market.

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