



Getting Closer to Your Patients: Best Practices from the Consumer Industry



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Over the last decade, the consumer product industry has followed a straightforward doctrine: “Listen to the customer.” With the help of databases and analytical tools, consumer product companies have made the individual consumer the main unit of analysis. Armed with information, they tailor their product’s message to capture the attention of those individuals that will likely become loyal customers and eventually, brand advocates. At the same time, these companies target their marketing message to reach consumers through many different channels, improving the effectiveness of their campaign. Consumer product companies have developed an arsenal of consumer data, spanning from demographic to behavioural, turning data into knowledge and knowledge into formidable customer-targeting skills.

For pharmaceutical companies, segmentation is often a different exercise. Patients are segmented based on the state of their disease as well as on the presence of other co-morbidities. In some instances, this may provide an effective means of clustering patients, but to ensure that the right message is delivered using the right channel, pharmaceutical companies need to segment patients based on behavioural traits and therapeutic progression.

Rising above the clutter

Pharmaceutical companies, or for that matter, health-care professionals, have not been able to discover any reliable method to encourage compliance in patients. The message is often indiscriminate, emphasizing one common message or the most clinically relevant benefit or attribute. Unfortunately, while useful, general information and mass distribution campaigns have no more likelihood of promoting better compliance in patients than untargeted messages do in inducing buying behaviours in consumers. Recently, we conducted interviews with pharmacists across Canada and one common theme resonated: “There exists many traditional patient education programs and not enough that address patients’ individual needs.” This type of disconnect illustrates the need for an in-depth and fact-based understanding of the individual patient.

Building intimate knowledge of your patients

Low compliance rates account for billions of dollars in lost revenues per year. Without an intimate knowledge of patients’ attitudes towards therapy and their therapeutic progression, the educational component of the message, in the majority of instances, is destined to fall on unreceptive ears. The key is to develop a rigorous, proprietary, data-based approach to tailor the message and combine holistic education tools and information. The challenge for the pharmaceutical industry is to

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obtain this valuable profiling information in a cost-effective way. Consumer product managers never cease to canvass, study, survey and profile their customers. Pharmaceutical companies can become trapped in a cycle of focusing and selling to the needs of physicians, while failing to understand what leads to positive compliance among patients. Among the tools that can be used to capture this important patient information are:

- patient registries,
- on-line registries,
- card-based systems and
- direct contact with patients.

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Identifying the best touchpoints

Having a tailored, direct and comprehensive message that looks beyond the importance of compliance is a start in the right direction, but a critical issue remains—how to deliver the message effectively. In healthcare, key messages are delivered at the usual touchpoints: physicians' offices and hopefully, pharmacies. These touchpoints are largely ungoverned by pharmaceutical companies. Developing new touchpoints and delivering tailored messages requires additional effort involving quantitative, creative and operational expertise. Such touchpoints are offered by:

- patient programs,
- on-line activities,
- telephone-based interactions and groups, or
- other innovative ways to reach patients.

Through such developments, patients will value and appreciate the information delivered—positioning the product as the leader in its therapeutic area.

Attracting and retaining patients in any given therapeutic area is much easier with the strong wind of data-driven creativity at your back. **CPM**

To discuss direct to patient interactive strategies please contact Jean Michel Coutu at 1 (800) 811-9880 ext. 126.

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