

# Learning from Experience



Pat Forsythe,  
Vice President,  
Marketing and  
Business  
Development,  
Nycomed Canada  
Inc.

*Humber's Health Industry Professional Development programs provide participants with perspective around the current challenges and best practices for the development and commercialization of brands in the marketplace today. Core to the design of courses is the involvement of guest faculty sharing their experiences and knowledge. It is through these insights that the participants gain "real world learning." This column will share the experiences of the faculty speakers through their topic discussions and the questions posed by participants.*

**Q Product Managers often struggle to find the time to focus on strategy rather than being buried by tactics. Can you provide any "tried and true" guidelines that can be followed when trying to develop competitive positioning for pharmaceutical brands?**

**A** Developing the positioning for your brand is one of the most important strategic steps that a company will take in the commercialization process. The time and effort spent here will payoff throughout the life of your brand.

A good positioning statement is a roadmap for all your promotional efforts. It should help to guide strategies and tactics that you will develop and implement during the brand's lifecycle.

There are a few "rules of thumb" to help direct your thoughts. A strong position is characterized by four things:

- Unique (differentiated from competitors)
- Believable (not seen as too good to be true)
- Relevant (meets your customers' needs)
- Sustainable (not easily copied)

Additionally, based on the fact that your product cannot be everything to all customers, a successful position will always follow two key principles:

- Sacrifice: A good position will have ONE key benefit
- Focus: You must concentrate your effort on ONE specific target market

Following these simple guidelines is essential to your brand's success in the market. Those marketers who have completed these steps have built the foundation for the next step: a more complex and sophisticated positioning strategy that has real competitive advantage.

*Q So many factors can change over the life cycle of a pharmaceutical product. Can you effectively re-launch or change the positioning of a product to reflect these changes?*

*A* It is true that there are many changes that can occur during the life of a pharmaceutical product. Our business is characterized by scientific advances that can change the value proposition of our product or our competitors' products.

While our customers are used to seeing new scientific evidence, it is critical to remember that their decision-making is still explained by consumer behaviour models. That is to say that once you have established a position for your brand in the mind of your customer, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to change it.

Here are some thoughts when faced with this problem:

- Once you establish a position for your product, you cannot radically change it or you will risk confusing your customer. A confused customer will not use your product
- You may be able to “evolve” or “enhance” your position in the mind of your customer. If you do so, the original position that you established will always form the “core position” for the customer. Therefore, if the enhancement is too far removed from the original position, your customer may have difficulty believing it
- Remember that any changes will take time and resources to implement. Positioning changes are known to take a lot of both. **CPM**

*This opportunity to ‘Learn From Experience’ is based upon a presentation by Pat Forsythe entitled ‘Positioning’ to the participants at the Humber ‘Marketing Pharmaceuticals in Canada’ Program run in partnership with Pangaea Development and Training.*

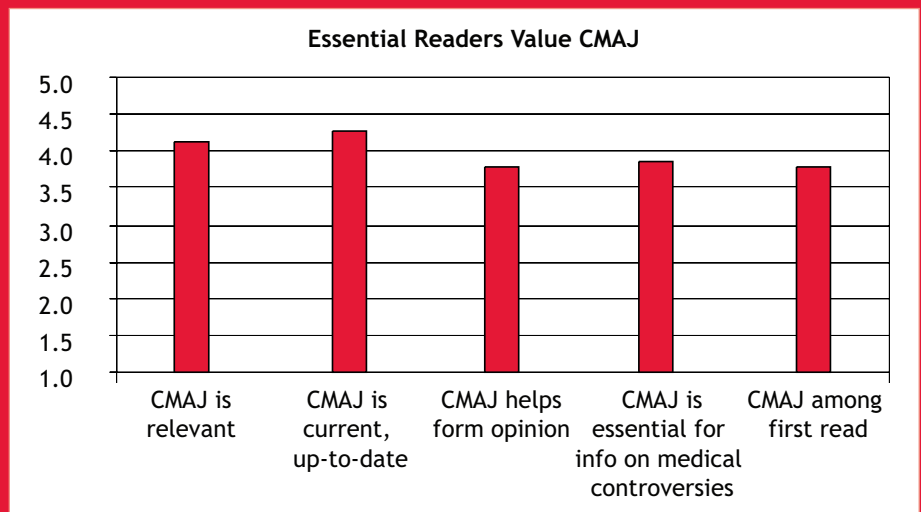
## ESSENTIAL READING DEFINES A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT.

# The complete picture on essential reading.

Do you consider reading environment in your brand media plan? When a publication is considered “essential,” you know it’s important to the reader. *CMAJ* – the essential read – delivers vital benefits and value to Canadian physicians.

Your brand message deserves a quality environment – in the essential pages of *CMAJ*.

For in-depth information on The Canadian Essential Reading Study, contact Trish Sullivan at [tsullivan@keithhealthcare.com](mailto:tsullivan@keithhealthcare.com)



**CMAJ·JAMC**

*The essential read. The essential media buy.*