



## DID HE REALLY SAY THAT?

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**F**requently, pharmaceutical researchers and marketers track message performance by asking customers to regurgitate what the rep said. After reading this article you may wonder about the validity and usefulness of this method.

In the mid 1990s, two drug companies (Schering and Pfizer) were competing in the American prescription antihistamine market, a very valuable and quickly-growing market. Schering, the dominant market leader, initiated litigation against Pfizer.<sup>1</sup> The outcome of the litigation rested entirely on the admissibility of and weight given to Schering's surveys of physicians' recollections.

Based on Schering's surveys, physicians were recalling that Pfizer's reps were making "non-sedation" claims, which was not supportable by their FDA-approved prescribing information. After five years before the courts, Pfizer successfully defended themselves against these claims of deceptive advertising. They did this by demonstrating that:

- "non-sedation" in physicians' minds is not dichotomous but a matter of degree and
- what is detailed is not what gets recalled by doctors.

Pfizer showed that, consistent with the scientific evidence, physicians correctly perceived Pfizer's antihistamine caused more sedation than Schering's, but much less than first generation medications of the same class. Furthermore, the majority of doctors believed that the degree to which Pfizer's medication caused somnolence was sufficiently low to meet their personal criteria of "non-sedation."

In carefully scripted and video-taped sales presentations, Pfizer demonstrated that detailed physicians would recall claims of "non-sedation" even though there was no mention or discussion of sedation whatsoever in the detail. In effect, the physician was filtering and

embellishing the reps' message with what they perceived.

### Conclusion

As the marketer, you should wonder how you can reliably use "day-after-recall" to evaluate the performance of your brand's message. Reconsider what relationship the recalled message has to your intended message which is displayed on your promotional materials or used by the reps.

Leveraging is about using inexpensive and efficient support promotion to reinforce and remind physicians of your intended message delivered by the more powerful and effective promotional vehicles like the sales force. Your support promotion cannot reinforce what each individual doctor remembers, only your intended message.

Previously, we showed that, in Canada, support promotion can enhance intended message performance by one-third over detailing alone. However, the majority of campaigns we evaluated could still be more efficient. This means that most campaigns could generate faster sales growth with improved performance of their intended message. **GPM**

### Reference

1. Vodra WM, Miller RK: "Did He Really Say That? Survey Evidence in Deceptive Advertising Litigation" *Trademark Reporter* 2002; 92:794-863.

*For more information about our integrated approach to optimizing your promotional mix, contact Graham Davies at (416) 467-7005 or [g@davies-strategic.com](mailto:g@davies-strategic.com).*