

Contributed by Ken Begasse Jr.

## THE CHANGING SALES MODEL PROVIDES GREATER VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS



KEN BEGASSE JR.

Over the past few years, the practice of healthcare has changed significantly, forcing marketers to reevaluate their strategies, tools, and tactics. One change has been to reverse the previous trend toward larger salesforces — a trend that has devalued pharma's No. 1 investment: their sales reps. Today, for example, pharma companies are sending out smaller numbers of better trained reps, each rep providing important value to his or her customers.

A second change has been the rise of more specialized medications for diseases such as multiple sclerosis and Crohn's disease, conditions that don't need huge salesforces to impact prescribing habits. And a third change has been the rising importance of managed care, which requires sales reps to understand the payment and reimbursement issues affecting a patient's ability to pay for particular drugs.

### A CHANGING SALES MODEL

All these factors point to a changing sales model — one that is moving away from clinical data alone and toward a service model that encompasses a deeper understanding of the complex issues of today's healthcare environment.

These service or customer-focused sales models focus on building stronger relationships with physicians and providing more services and a better experience for sales reps' customers.

In line with this model, reps need to understand, respond to, and support healthcare decisions at every level. This requires educating reps so they can provide a perspective on products in their category, along with clinical studies and data on cutting-edge treatments for specific conditions.

In addition to medical and scientific data, reps also need to provide a broader range of information relating to the physician's practice. For example, they need to be able to alert their physician-customers to information available on the Internet that can help or hurt their patients. Sales reps need to be able to arm physicians with patient education and communications materials as well as address their practice management issues. In short, today's detail person needs a comprehensive understanding of the entire range of issues that can affect prescribing, acceptance, and adherence and be able to respond quickly and knowledgeably to a wide range of issues that can — and do — arise at some point during the day.

### PROVIDING BETTER TOOLS

It's a well-known fact that, after a drug's initial launch period,

data alone generally fail to move product. Only by developing less traditional, more innovative ways to teach salespeople how to put their products in the context of the entire healthcare continuum — from generating patient acceptance and adherence to understanding a product's place within the managed care arena — will marketers achieve ongoing success.

For example, because managed care coverage and access differ state by state, each geographic region must be approached individually. To understand and deliver this information, sales representatives need tools that target customers by region, telling them the roles each provider plays. Is a particular product on a patient's managed care formulary? If yes, at what level of reimbursement? Does the cost of a particular product put a burden on patients? Do patients have to go outside the network to purchase their products? If yes, it may be too expensive for them unless there's a plan in place for financial assistance.

Similarly, if patients need nurses to learn how to use a product or its delivery system, reps need to alert physicians about clinical health educator programs or other support plans available for patients who need assistance.

Without a clear understanding of the practical and financial impact of their products on doctors' patients and practices, salespeople are going into battle unarmed.

Recognizing these challenges, smart marketers are developing a new generation of tools — often in the form of games — that facilitate learning and behavior. The best of these games not only offer challenge and fun, but also leverage a sales representative's knowledge and competitive spirit. Interactive and highly personalized, these tools can be used at home, on the road, or in the office.

As the market changes, the best sales professionals are addressing the needs of the numerous gatekeepers in the healthcare system and becoming partners in their customers' quest for better care.

These are all positive outgrowths of new media, new channels, and new and diverse needs arising from a wider range of customers. By embracing change and using it to improve the sales staff's skills and relationships, the industry can promote the health and well-being of its ultimate customer — the consumer — improving the health, value, and image of the industry as a whole.

*Ken Begasse Jr. is Chief Operating Officer of Concentric Pharma Advertising, an independent healthcare advertising agency. For more information, visit [concentric-rx.com](http://concentric-rx.com).*

PharmaVOICE welcomes comments about this article.

E-mail us at [feedback@pharmavoice.com](mailto:feedback@pharmavoice.com).