

Swimming the Channels

Recent technological and industry events have conspired to make the job of the pharmaceutical brand manager more difficult.

IN AN EXCLUSIVE TO PHARMAVOICE, JAY BIGELOW, CHIEF ARCHITECT OF MICROMASS COMMUNICATIONS INC., DISCUSSES KEYS TO CREATING INTEGRATED MULTICHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMS.

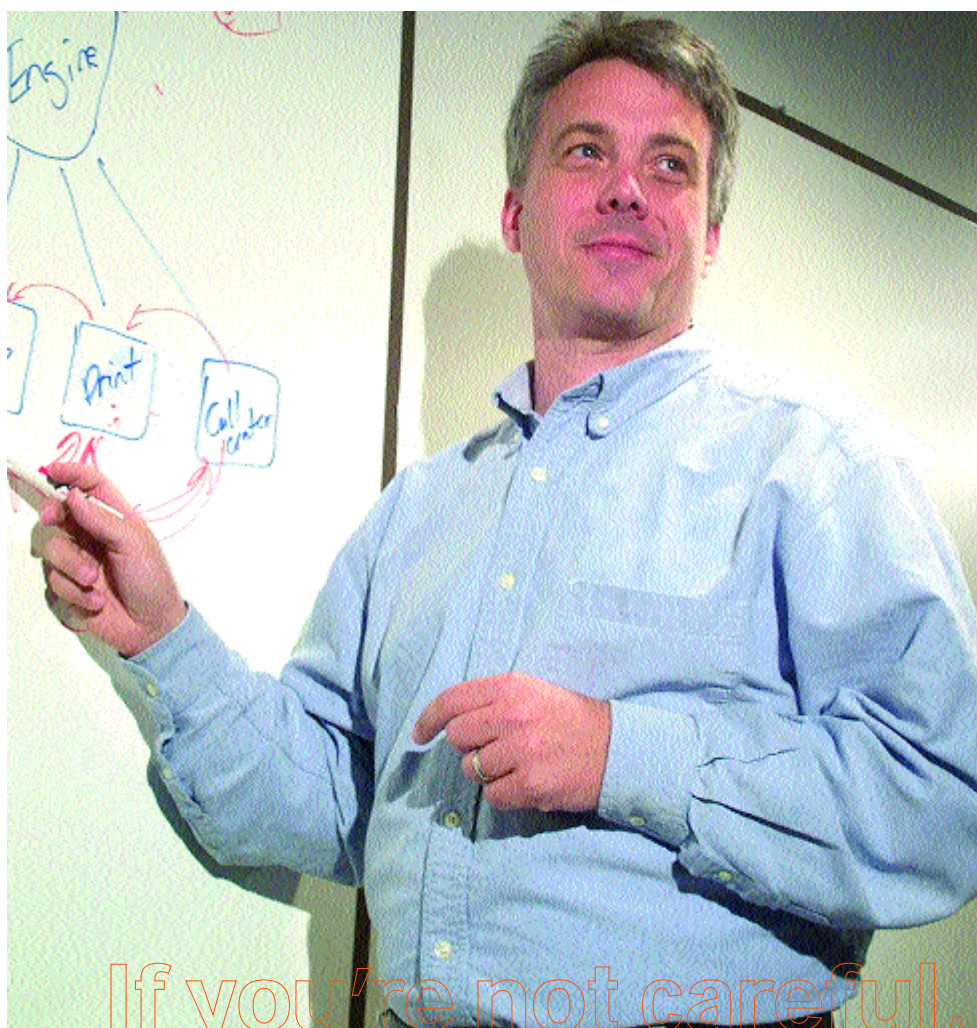
Think back 15 years and consider how much simpler the role of marketing a brand was. There were a few solid, inescapable channels to choose from

to reach an audience. Printed materials, such as direct mail and collateral, were a mainstay of many marketing efforts; television or radio provided a more immediate, wide-reaching

outlet; and traditional advertising in periodicals always loomed large in any marketing mix.

For the pharmaceutical brand manager, recent technological and industry events have conspired to make the job of marketing brands much more difficult. The rise of the Internet coincided with the explosion in direct-to-consumer advertising. Instead of sending a generic postcard or printing an ad, a pharmaceutical company now can create an e-mail campaign or develop a targeted Website for a brand — with the option of targeting the consumer directly.

“Now, there is added pressure on the marketing function to manage a new, complex multichannel marketing environment that encompasses both online — Web and e-mail — and offline — print and call center,” Mr. Bigelow says. “If they are not careful, marketers could find themselves drowning in the varied channels of communication. They need to look at the current marketing landscape — and ways to optimize programs in a multichannel environment.”



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Deconstructing The Silo Approach

According to a July 2001 survey of information technology and marketing executives conducted by Forrester Research, the three most important marketing channels are traditional print-based mail (with 68% of the vote), e-mail (50%), and phone (46%).

“Given these beliefs, companies often use a hodge-podge of communications vehicles — a Website with introductory data and possibly some direct support, printed material for in-depth information, a call center for more intensive support, and so forth,” Mr. Bigelow says. “Currently, most brands approach these different communication methods as separate efforts, each with a dedicated focus, budget, and goal. A direct agency is responsible for the design and execution of direct mail while the consumer agency of record may handle print advertising. An interactive or marketing spe-

cialty shop writes and designs e-mail campaigns. Another agency designs and hosts the Website.”

Although companies may realize some gains in terms of time-to-market and “creative excellence” by relying on disparate agencies, according to Mr. Bigelow, over time the gulf between agencies can create a disjointed, ineffective marketing effort — losing a valuable opportunity to layer messages and add consistency to the core brand equity. When evaluating a traditional approach to multichannel communication, Mr. Bigelow identifies three main inefficiencies.

The first is the development of ineffective messages. “What works in one medium may not translate to another channel,” he says. “For instance, a successful print campaign isn’t always right for e-mail. Printed material provides a more tactile experience, while an e-mail provides a measure of immediacy.”

The second drawback is conflicting messages; agencies working in a relative vacuum

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can create a fractured corporate message or image. “The last thing a brand marketer wants to hear from a customer is that the messaging or look-and-feel presented in an e-mail is different from the promotion running in a printed direct-mail campaign,” Mr. Bigelow says.

The third inefficiency is the duplication of efforts. Maintaining agreements with separate organizations creates the opportunity for over-

lap. This can result in considerable resources expended on duplicated functions each month and increased costs over time.

Integrating Multiple Channels

Because customers often expect a consistent mix of both online and offline communications, brand managers must find a way to meet this demand. Mr. Bigelow says the solution is to find a method to build and deliver messages from a single pool of content across multiple channels. With this program structure, the message stays consistent, regardless of the delivery method. This is the rationale behind the integrated multichannel communications system.

“With integrated multichannel communications, the corporate marketing department remains in firm control of the marketing messages,” he says. “Instead of divesting aspects of the marketing function to agencies, the brand’s marketing team — with input from creative agencies — develops a core set of content that will be used in synchronous e-mail, Web, and print communications. In addition, call centers can access this content and drive one-to-one live conversations while ensuring that each member of this team maintains consistent corporate messaging.”

Whereas the current multichannel message concentrates on accomplishing the tactics of a multichannel system, the integrated multichannel communications approach places a premium on message creation and uniformity. With this method in place, customers have the ability to receive information across any online or offline channel.

“Today’s more sophisticated personalization engines can even apply rules to the messages to modify them to utilize the strengths of each channel, while still retaining the basic integrity and consistency of the core message,” Mr. Bigelow says. “As an example, ‘click here’ in the e-mail delivery and ‘turn to page 3’ in the print-based communications.”

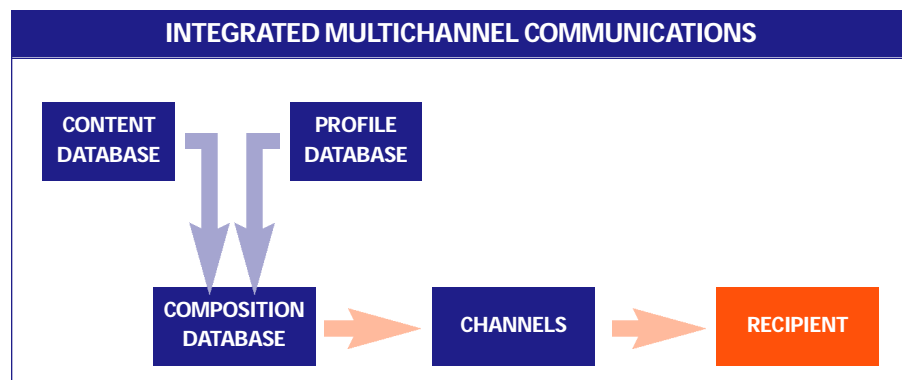
Creating an Integrated Program

ACCORDING TO JAY BIGELOW, MICROMASS COMMUNICATIONS INC., CARY, N.C.

To construct a marketing system that can simultaneously communicate a parallel message across all channels, Mr. Bigelow identifies three primary components that must be integrated:

- Content database — contains the content elements (text, graphics, charts, tools, layouts, etc.) that will constitute the messages created by the system.
- Profile database — provides the recipient profile information used to shape or personalize the communication.
- Composition engine — assigns content based on rules and sends it to the appropriate channel or channels.

With these components in place, a brand manager can effectively manage an entire multichannel campaign from a single solution. By centralizing the content, this approach allows for enhanced personalization of content by using individual profiles in the customer relationship management (CRM) system, helping companies fully utilize the wealth of customer data already available.



Creating Value Through Integrated Communications

“Just as the silo approach was built on the relative ease of establishing a number of distinct, independent channels, the integrated multichannel communications approach recognizes and embraces the integral ‘value of the message’ — the need for a consistent, reliable voice for the brand,” he says.

The effect of the integrated method is apparent after implementation when there is a single source of content driving marketing efforts. Once established, the integrated multichannel architecture offers a number of benefits tied to the unique ability to create and replicate multichannel campaigns.

According to Mr. Bigelow, the most obvious benefit to approaching marketing communications through an integrated program is the ability to deliver messages consistently across a variety of channels. Suppose a customer wishes to receive nothing but online communications. He or she could receive e-mails with links to the corporate Website. The same applies for those who prefer print-based methods. A customer requesting only mailed material will receive the same information in hard-copy format.

“However, customer preference is only one part of this equation,” he says. “Customers now expect the information on the Website to match the information they see in an advertisement or a printed piece of collateral. This

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leads to the second benefit of the integrated method: the ability to leverage a single pool of consistent content.”

Maintaining Control Of The Message

The ability to draw information from a single source puts the brand manager in a new position. Now, instead of content being created across a network of disparate agencies, the integrated method places more control with the brand-marketing team.

“With this system in place, the brand team and the various external agencies collaborate to create the various text pieces, design elements and layouts for the integrated platform,” Mr. Bigelow says. “This information becomes the foundation for all direct communications with customers. With the integrated multichannel communications method,

branding initiatives are much easier to implement across channels. By creating a standard set of graphics, layouts, and text elements in the content database, it becomes much easier to establish, modify, and reuse a company’s identity.”

The Potential for Highly Tailored Content

Because the integrated method relies on a composition engine to prepare messages, communications, and content, there is a unique opportunity to create more personalized messages for the recipient. By applying a rules-based solution in conjunction with the composition engine, this facet of the system can tailor individual pieces of content down to the sentence or word level.

“Tailored communications means delivering the right message to the right person at the right time,” he says. “Unlike traditional methods of personalization or targeted marketing that deliver the same static message to each customer in a segment or group, tailored materials are uniquely written for one specific person in real time, based on characteristics that are unique to that person.”

Navigating Rough Waters

For brand managers looking to build stronger direct-to-consumer programs with their customer base, the thought of running a multichannel program may seem a logistical nightmare. With multiple advertising agencies running multiple campaigns, each with different goals — the task can seem daunting at best.

“Take heart,” Mr. Bigelow says. “Solutions now exist that allow for the simultaneous creation of a consistent, reliable message to both online and offline recipients. With an integrated multichannel communications program in place, brand managers can finally start winning the race — and stop treading water.” ♦

PharmaVoice welcomes comments about this article. E-mail us at feedback@pharmalinx.com.

To Print or Not to Print: The Reality of Multiple Channels

ACCORDING TO JAY BIGELOW, MICROMASS COMMUNICATIONS INC., CARY, N.C.

One of the earliest promises of the Internet age was the “paperless” aspect of daily life. The “paperless office,” the “paperless home,” and indeed a “paperless world.” The Internet has been part of many people’s lives for close to a decade. Has paper lost its foothold on day-to-day life? Hardly. While data suggest a cutback in paper usage, its appeal is strong — and will remain that way.

According to a recent survey by the Rochester Institute of Technology, analysis on the mix of communication channels showed that in 1995, 70% of information was in print, while 30% was electronic. By 2010, the percentages are projected to be almost even. In 2020, 35% of all information still will be available in print.

The lesson that all marketers should learn is clear:

- Although online or electronic communication is faster and usually cheaper during the production and delivery phases, the high-tech approach has been slow to supplant traditional channels.
- Since printed materials will still comprise more than one-third of all information by 2020, any strategy that ignores the importance of printed material risks losing a significant portion of recipients.