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It's a small, small world with big, big possibilities. Packaged-goods companies have successfully established worldwide recognition for their products by inundating consumers with strong brand names and messages.

The pharma industry recognizes the benefits of consumer-like global branding and marketing strategies and is taking steps of its own to reach patients globally. Eight major countries reportedly make up about 80% of worldwide pharmaceutical sales. Major pharmaceutical companies are developing big brands that target conditions found in most of the world's population: arthritis, pain, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol, depression, etc. It only makes sense for companies to tap into ever larger markets to sell their brands.

Will the pharmaceutical industry ever achieve the success of the consumer or packaged-good industries in terms of creating memorable, instantaneously recognizable brands? The jury is still out, but many healthcare professionals believe that their version of the Nike swoosh can be achieved.

The attitude of "not invented here" is waning, the export mentality toward globalization is gone. International marketing departments realize that they must work differently. Local marketers are beginning to become more alive to the benefits of buying into a global campaign. But this involves changing behaviors and attitudes. There can't be a global campaign unless there is buy-in from everybody involved. There is agreement that while there has to be room for flexibility in local markets, the brand identity, the brand positioning, the core message, and the core tone of voice have to be consistent — messages that resonate with diverse audiences.

The challenges are numerous. Many brands don't have the same indications around the world, they often don't have the same brand names around the world, and occasionally they are not even marketed by the same company around the



Global consumer brands are everywhere. The challenge for pharmaceutical marketers is to make their products globally recognizable and relevant to diverse patient populations.

world. There also are regulatory issues, pricing issues, and reimbursement issues.

Agencies know that they can create a global brand, develop a personality for that brand — all the various elements that make a brand instantly recognizable to customers around the world. The challenge for pharma companies is to centralize operations to minimize branding and marketing variances in local country implementation. As one agency president says, if the manufacturer of the brand allows each individual country to develop that brand for its own market purposes, there is a Tower of Babel effect.

The industry is a lot farther down the evolutionary path than it was five years ago, but still there is not a common notion of what true global branding is.

Structures and processes and centralization on the client side are slowly being implemented. The evolutionary process of changing attitudes is moving forward, but embedding true global ideals must be adopted centrally within companies. The fallacy, according to one industry executive, is that the agencies are going to lead clients into globalization. When in fact, the agencies can only go as far as the client structure and mandate toward globalization allow.

Taren Grom
Editor

A Common Voice