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Letters

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In June, PharmaVOICE hosted its first Pharmaceutical Marketers KnowledgeShare Forum, a two-day event that brought together top-level executives from throughout the industry to engage in a meaningful dialogue on a number of subjects impacting the marketing sector.

On the second day of this event, the participants, representing pharmaceutical companies and service providers, were broken into three teams and asked to address the challenge of rebranding the industry for reputation enhancement.

The three teams each came up with unique and very creative strategies, but their solutions shared the common themes of putting a human face to the industry, communicating the industry's good works to the public, and changing the perception of the industry from a villain to an ally.

All groups agreed that although TV was a good medium for communicating messages, the industry needs to develop more personalized approaches to address patients' and consumers' concerns, and these messages need to be delivered via many different channels.

Suggestions included creating industry visibility on a local level through live community healthcare events; kiosk-type venues staffed by pharmaceutical company representatives to provide seniors with information about prescription access under Medicare and assist with filling out the necessary forms; and making sure the industry's employees — its greatest asset — have the facts, figures, and other pertinent information to communicate a positive, well-balanced message to family, friends, and others in their communities.

The topic of trust is one that has created a great deal of discussion within the industry. During ExL Pharma's Pharmaceutical PR and Communications Summit this past July, communications executives gathered to discuss shaping the industry's value and perception through public relations and communications. During the keynote panel session, executives from leading pharmaceutical companies discussed how and why the industry has come to be viewed so negatively by the public, as well as ways to repair its image and perception.



Taren Grom

With public confidence in the pharmaceutical industry at a steady decline, experts interviewed for this Forum agree that all sectors of the life sciences need to come together behind a unified message to refocus the spotlight on the good works the industry does.

Pricing and access issues were highlighted as the key reasons why the industry is suffering image problems, as well as the fragmented, competitive nature of pharmaceutical companies in general. The panel provided several possible solutions, including the need for a stronger industry brand identity. These experts noted that for this to be a viable solution there would have to be collaboration among the different pharmaceutical companies to create and communicate a clear, consistent, and positive message.

Respondents to PharmaVOICE's recent online reader survey clearly agree that this is a viable strategy; overwhelmingly, 67% of respondents indicated that the different sides of the industry can move beyond competitiveness to resolve the trust issue.

An overarching theme discussed by this month's Forum participants, who were interviewed by Elisabeth Pena Villarroel, PharmaVOICE's associate editor, is that despite the fact that the industry has done more to advance human health over the last century than any other and that its companies produce products that improve and save lives, it struggles under this perception. These executives also believe that by bringing all stakeholders in the life-sciences industry together behind a unified goal of communicating its positive news, the industry can demonstrate, through words and actions, to the public and its critics the good that companies do and the value they bring to the healthcare system.

Taren Grom
Editor

Turning back the tide