

Contributed by William M. Clapper



WILLIAM CLAPPER

MARKETING IN A SOCIALY RESPONSIBLE WORLD OPTIMIZING COMMUNICATIONS IS KEY

The words “corporate social responsibility” are flooding the headlines. While not a new concept, in today’s world there is a fundamental expectation that we should do business in an ethical manner that supports the well-being and betterment of society. Under constant scrutiny by industry regulators, consumers, and other public consortiums, companies are required to consider the impact their activities have on customers, communities, shareholders, and even the environment.

Pharmaceutical manufacturers must be particularly diligent when addressing matters of social responsibility, especially when it comes to their brand-marketing initiatives. Industry guidelines established by PhRMA task marketers with ensuring that healthcare providers (HCPs) have the latest, most accurate information available regarding prescription medicines. At the same time, they are also expected to maintain a competitive market position for their brand. But industry critics are quick to implicate pharma marketing for the rising cost of healthcare, exacerbated by the waste associated with blast marketing or mass-marketing tactics.

The challenge is to develop a marketing strategy that minimizes marketing waste and gets information in the hands of HCPs without compromising a brand’s ability to remain competitive.

By following some basic principles and employing the availability of sophisticated communication technologies, pharmaceutical marketers can effectively communicate with HCPs in a socially responsible way while remaining competitive and, in many cases, improving the overall effectiveness of their marketing efforts — a win-win.

MINDFUL MARKETING

Salesforces are shrinking, prescribers have less time to review important brand information, and marketing dollars are hard to come by. Pharma marketers are challenged with finding better ways to engage HCPs with their brand.

Today’s marketing strategies must be “mindful.” They need to be sensitive to the needs of the HCP, conscious of individual informational needs and communication preferences, and smart about the allocation of available funds.

Fortunately, improving marketing effectiveness and being more socially responsible go hand-in-hand. By harnessing the efficiencies that address social responsibility, marketing can be more focused and more powerful. In other words, provide communication optimization. Optimizing communication in a socially responsible way is all about following a few fundamental principles:

- Strategically analyze the audience — know which HCPs prescribe your brand the most and which HCPs have the highest potential for prescribing more of your brand. Then allocate your marketing resources in a way that ensures these physicians are getting the information they need on a regular basis. Eliminate wasteful blast marketing.

- Communicate individually with HCPs through the channel(s) they prefer.
- Make messaging relevant, clear, and timely.
- Measure your marketing efforts regularly and adapt communication to the behavior of each HCP.
- Right size allocations of samples and other support materials to fit the need of the HCP and his or her patients.
- Minimize the impact your marketing channels may have on natural resources like paper and fuel by sending only what you need to meet objectives.

These principles support the current evolution in pharmaceutical marketing — the transition from independent mass-marketing tactics to a more integrated relationship-building strategy. It’s a strategy that may begin to silence the critics and boost the momentum behind responsible drug marketing.

A SMART START

It would be short-sighted to think that communication optimization can be started with an initial telemarketing call or the mailing of a letter to an HCP. To be truly responsible in the allocation of communications, marketers must first identify those HCPs who are most likely to consider their brand information valuable.

If the primary goal of the marketing initiative is to communicate product benefits to the HCP and, in turn, grow prescribing, marketers would want to identify those HCPs who will be receptive to information on their brand and who may write more scripts as a result. Doing so requires a thorough, methodical approach that analyzes all factors, such as past prescribing history, growth rate, patient volume, specialty, demographics, managed care impact, etc.

The best targeting solutions also incorporate the ability to continuously evaluate the target audience and make necessary adjustments in near-real time. This ensures marketers are always investing more in delivering information to those HCPs who find value in their message.

CONSCIOUS COMMUNICATION

Once marketers have identified the best target audience, the real challenge begins — how to efficiently and effectively deliver brand information to HCPs given increasing market restrictions and the need to remain conscious of society’s expectations.

Understand Each Customer

Know the audience — in today’s market, customer insight is more critical than ever before. It’s no longer enough to simply know what works, on average, with an entire customer base or even what works for isolated segments of the audience. Marketers need to understand each individual customer and his or her communication preferences. It is the only way to create and sustain a mutually ben-



EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

A NEW ERA OF LEADERSHIP

REGISTER NOW

for the 6th Annual HBA Leadership Conference
at www.hbanet.org

In this dynamic healthcare environment, it is important to fine-tune your leadership skills and career perspectives. Hear from our plenary speakers, Jack Groppe, Peak Performance expert and coauthor of *The Corporate Athlete: How to Achieve Maximal Performance in Business and Life*, and Laura Berman Fortgang, author of *Take Yourself to the Top*. Listen to an executive panel, led by HBA Woman of the Year Charlotte Sibley, speak about their "Hard Lessons and Sweet Successes".

Join us in Chicago, November 5-7, 2008

Marriott Chicago Downtown

Opening reception begins Wednesday at 6:45pm

Early Bird registration savings end September 15, 2008

For sponsorship opportunities and exhibits, please
email Renee Lasco at Renee.Lasco@covance.com
or call 610.597.3934.



REQUIRED EXPERIENCE FOR HEALTHY CAREERS

MENTORING LEADERSHIP SKILL BUILDING NETWORKING CAREER

official relationship. As the demands on HCPs increase — higher patient loads, pressure from managed care, and tedious administrative tasks — it's imperative to recognize the importance and value of personalizing the communication approach. No HCP wants to be inundated with unnecessary communication; therefore it's necessary to make sure the channels and messages are relevant and timely.

“Green” Your Channels

Many believe that “e” marketing is the key to being socially responsible, but without the continued use of traditional channels, brand managers may be limiting their ability to be effective. It's great that there's the ability to send an e-mail or post a blog without using paper — without burning fuel — but what if the audience prefers to receive their communications in a more traditional way?

Using multiple channels to deliver the brand message will continue to be the most effective way to communicate, but there are steps that can be taken to ensure that every channel used is socially and environmentally acceptable.

Direct Mail Marketing

In today's world where the focus of “going green” and saving resources is at the top of most corporate and personal agendas, direct mail is often regarded as the enemy of social responsibility. This does not have to be the case since it is still considered one of the most effective marketing tools.

Direct mail is often a preferred communication method by HCPs.

As everyone looks to find the balance between eco-friendly practices and to meet critical marketing objectives, there are some obvious but important conditions that will help to conserve resources in direct mail applications:

- Never blanket HCPs with unsolicited mail. It's essential to know who wants to receive direct mail and who does not. HCPs who prefer this type of communication and choose to receive it will probably read it and take action. Mass mailings have little return for the investment and are a waste of paper, time, and postage.
- Be prudent when designing your direct mail campaign. Creativity is great but it comes at a cost. Make sure your creative investment is balanced with the anticipated benefits.
- Consider using recycled products and be selective in the vendors you choose. Make certain they have the appropriate environmentally friendly practices in place to help keep your direct marketing efforts “green.”
- Use printers with print-on-demand capabilities to save inventory costs and significantly reduce excess.

Face-to-Face Communications

Just because the number of no-see HCPs has increased dramatically does not mean there is not a place in the marketing mix for pharma reps to engage in face-to-face communication. Many HCPs still prefer the personal interaction as a way to obtain information.

Rep visits should not be perceived as eco-unfriendly but — to be as socially responsible as possible — they should be coordinated with other less-expensive channels to help limit travel expenses. This also allows a manufacturer to maintain effective HCP coverage with a smaller rep base.

E-Marketing

Electronic channels are an absolute must for the marketing mix. According to Manhattan Research, about 90% of HCPs are online up to about nine hours a week. As the number of no-see HCPs increases, e-mail and Internet resources have become an influential communication channel for pharmaceutical companies. These “e”

options provide a great opportunity to interact with HCPs at their convenience, without the distractions that occur during busy office hours.

And there are undeniable resource efficiencies to be gained by using online channels — no paper, minimal delivery costs, no waste.

INTEGRATE MEDIA

There are many ways that marketers can successfully communicate with HCPs. The problem is that not all healthcare providers want to be reached in the same way and they will not all be receptive to the same messages. Marketers also need to consider that the provider's stated preference may be different from what his or her actual behavior would indicate. And what if the provider would be receptive to more than one channel or message?

How can marketers address all of the “what ifs” to truly optimize communication to their HCPs?

The answer is an integrated multichannel, multimessage communication approach that has the ability to continuously track the impact of the communication and make adjustments to increase message receptivity and prescribing. This doesn't mean having several independent programs running simultaneously. Marketers can only truly optimize communication if they can review the impact of all communications comprehensively across one program.

That may seem like a tall order but, fortunately, technology has made it possible.

LET TECHNOLOGY DO THE WORK

Technology exists today that enables pharmaceutical brands to compile and analyze prescriber data at the individual level, manage and track communication activity, and continuously measure prescribing performance to create a targeted “dialogue” with each HCP. This is a process that mimics even the best sales reps.

The most advanced solutions evaluate the impact of communication on a physician's prescribing behavior and make adjustments, when necessary, to future communications to improve message receptivity and, ultimately, prescribing response. In addition, the right technology will allow for coordinated communication efforts with the never-ending challenge of responsible sample management and resource allocation.

Technology makes it possible to optimize communication so efficiently, so effectively, that marketing waste is continually minimized. Mail is more likely to be read, phone calls are more likely to be answered, and e-mails are more likely to be opened. Every communication, every investment is a calculated, socially responsible decision.

When it comes to pharmaceutical brand marketing, maintaining or strengthening commitment to social responsibility can inherently be the end product of a well-planned, strategically executed marketing program. As marketers, it's in our own best interest to optimize communication, maximizing effectiveness and efficiently using the resources and technologies available to us.

William M. Clapper is President and CEO of MTI, a provider of marketing products designed to optimize communication to healthcare providers and create demand for pharmaceutical brands. For more information, visit mtiadvantage.com. ♦

PharmaVOICE welcomes comments about this article.

E-mail us at feedback@pharmavoices.com.