

A product lives on a shelf. A brand lives in the mind of the consumer. The challenge, according to industry experts, is making an emotional connection between the two. A brand goes beyond the rational; a brand is the promise the product offers the customer or stakeholder, whether that customer is a physician, a healthcare provider, a consumer, or a company's employees.

According to Ken DeLor, president of the DeLor Group, one of the biggest challenges of successful branding in the pharmaceutical industry is breaking away from the concept that branding is trade advertising. He says branding is building an icon, building a symbol or identity, building everything that touches a brand for the long-term value for a pharmaceutical product and the manufacturer. Ultimately, he says, branding is about communicating visually and strategically, not only for one product, but connecting one product to the other products in a therapeutic class of drugs that the company has in its portfolio.

According to all of the industry experts interviewed for this month's Forum, the communication of that brand's promise must be consistent, and this is where most communications breakdown.

"The biggest problem in branding is the lack of consistency, and this manifests itself in a number of different ways," says Vince Parry, president of Y. "The No. 1 obstacle standing in the way of successful branding isn't necessarily what the competition is doing, or how much money is being spent, but the lack of internal consensus."

These experts say it is vital to carry the brand message consistently through all media to all customers because a brand gets manifested in many different ways, not just in print. A brand can be manifested by how someone in a company's call center answers a telephone inquiry, by how the salesforce interacts with physicians, even by how managed-care strategies are developed.

"A pharmaceutical company fosters an impression of a brand in the way it does business on behalf of that product with



In healthcare, we tend to think that the brand is owned by the marketing team, when really the brand is owned by the customer.

other organizations," Mr. Parry says. "Branding is consistently fostering a unified idea across the board in everybody's mind, but this is not necessarily done just by releasing the same materials with the same images."

Successful branding is building trust with the customer. This trust is built because the product delivers the same consistent performance, and consistency means living up to that promise.

"Where we often fall short in our industry is in the blueprint as we move forward in creative development," says Dave Chapman, president, Thomas Ferguson Associates. "What is the brands' promise to the consumer? We struggle to get those words correct."

For Stephen Wray, president and CEO of Bates Healthworld, the promise of a brand has to combine the scientific values of a product with the values that are held by the physician customer or consumer.

In essence, a brand's promise, its emotional connection to all customers and stakeholders, is its value proposition — the brand's functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits.

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