



# Marketing PHYSICIANS TRUST

**I**n *The Tipping Point*, author Malcolm Gladwell said: “The most powerful selling of products and ideas takes place not marketer to consumer but consumer to consumer.” He couldn’t have been more on point.

In fact, according to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer, only 20% of the people surveyed trust corporate and product advertising; instead, for the vast majority of respondents, “a person like me” was considered “the most credible source of information about a company.” In other words, trust in, and commitment to, a brand is less about slick product or price promotion and more about trusted relationships.

This is particularly true in the pharma space, where physicians have an even greater affinity for peer-based information sharing than the average consumer. Consider this: fully two-thirds of HCPs access user-generated content online — via professional blogs, Medscape, and *The New England Journal of Medicine* articles that enable reader comments, or private professional communities such as Sermo and Medscape Physician Connect.

Across all drug categories and clinical specialties, providers are increasingly looking to their colleagues for information and insights on everything from decision support to practice management. And they want to consume this information in on-demand formats that are accessible 24/7 — downloadable, sharable, convenient.

## A New Paradigm in Non-Personal Promotion

Non-personal promotion (NPP) planning efforts should be built on the concept of physician advocacy — not as a stand-alone tactic but as a strategic means to an end. We’ve found that this approach to generating product preference not only generates interest but provides ongoing, quantifiable brand benefits such as increased awareness, peer-to-peer endorsement and more sales.

Of course, this involves a lot of up-front fieldwork and other complicating factors, such as knowing that there is a big difference

between “opinion formers” and “opinion spreaders.” The process starts with identifying the leading physicians in the field and encouraging them to participate in the brand marketing as advisors and content co-creators — helping to develop fresh, authentic content that satisfies the unique needs of that particular clinical community.

Essentially, position KOLs as brand advocates who can be trusted to help other physicians become educated consumers. By empowering the audience in this way, the pharmaceutical manufacturer becomes one-half of a trusted relationship.

## Earning Exposure — Not “Buying” It

Creating value-added content that physicians will share requires proactively putting these experts at the center of the brand experience. For example, we worked closely with an advisory board to guide in the creation and evolution of *epilog.us*, an online community serving the unmet disease awareness needs of epileptologists and neurologists, for one client that is entering the CNS space. Together, we developed brand assets in the form of videos, podcasts, infographics, surveys, and e-books to engage the audience and allow them to tap into the collective knowledge of their peers.

The value these assets provide users can be measured in terms of content consumption and relationship building — essentially, engagement. As for the value they generate for the client, it’s plainly visible in the growing number of new and repeat visits to the site by these specialty physicians who have come to regard *epilog.us* — and, by extension, the product manufacturer — as a trusted source of useful information.

Another successful example of how peer-to-peer information sharing can deepen relationships with physicians and improve sales is the Peer Report ([www.inomax.com/oi-peer-report](http://www.inomax.com/oi-peer-report)) created for another client targeting neonatologists and respiratory therapists for its vasodilator product. This Web application is designed to survey individual providers to determine when they initiate product therapy,

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and provide a valuable “peer context” for best practices in the form of aggregated results that can be viewed against a variety of criteria, including neonatal level of care, specialty, and number of patients. This application, among other similar initiatives, has contributed to the company’s double-digit growth in the past year.

These are just a few of the ways to leverage physicians’ affinity for learning from their peers to drive powerful results. Because once again, they’re earning exposure, not “buying” it, through an organic, rather than interruptive, approach to marketing that physicians can trust. **PV**

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