

Specialty med,



Knowing your competition is always helpful,” offers Paul Daruwala, VP of marketing, Vertex Pharmaceuticals. Daruwala spent 18 years at Merck, cutting his teeth on the drugmaker’s hepatitis C pipeline before leaving to head up Vertex’s HCV franchise. That bred a healthy respect. “But ultimately,” he says, “how you market is like stepping onto the field. You know you’re

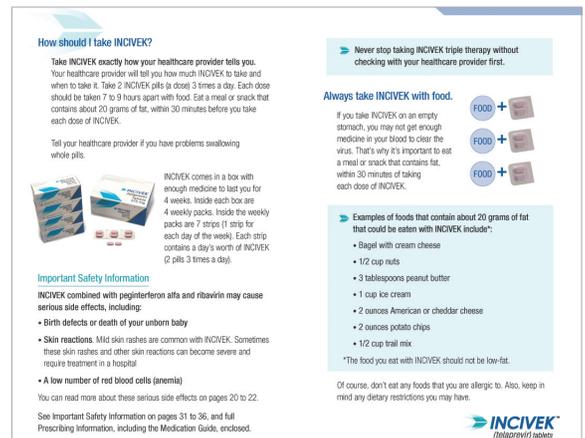
going to play your game.”

Sticking to their game fueled the success of the brand team behind Incivek, even as it faced a daunting rival in Merck, already a presence with older HCV products PegIntron and Rebetol, and whose protease inhibitor, Victrelis, gained approval a week before Incivek.

Some analysts had predicted a fifty-fifty split despite the perception that Incivek was more potent. With Incivek likely to go blockbuster in under nine months, setting a new commercial record, Daruwala’s crew has turned what appeared to be an early disadvantage into a mere footnote in the annals of biopharma lore.

“We [didn’t] get carried away in worrying what [Merck is] going to do so much, as opposed to what we need to do to really educate,” Daruwala says. “That’s where I placed the focus for the team.”

Before launch, Merck signed a co-promotion deal with Roche, seller of its own HCV brands, effectively doubling the marketing muscle behind Victrelis. But Incivek’s Phase III data had shown a 79% sustained viral response for those new to treatment (vs. 66% for Victrelis) and the promise to cut treatment time in half. That tilted the playing field in Incivek’s favor,



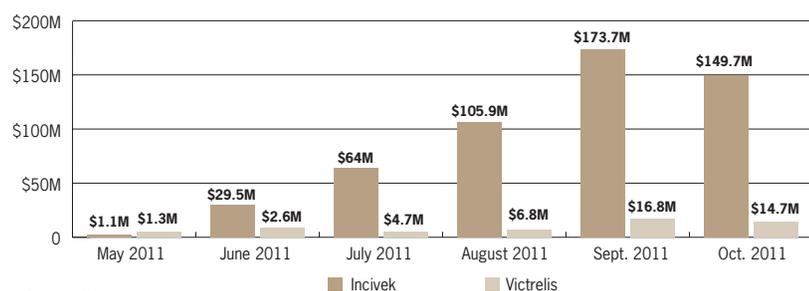
Vertex used patient education site BetterToKnowC.com (top), plus illustrated brochures (middle) and online video (bottom) to explain the virus’ impact and its treatment

storied launch

Left: Pamela Stephenson, VP of marketing in charge of Incivek brand; right: Paul Daruwala, VP of marketing/HCV franchise, Vertex Pharmaceuticals

Proving its potency

Vertex protease inhibitor Incivek was on course to reach a billion dollars in total sales in less than nine months, beating Merck's Victrelis for share of the US HCV market.



dictating a product positioning from which Vertex never really strayed.

The rest of the story is one of tight coordination and smooth execution. "This was [the company's] first launch and was such an important [one]," says Pamela Stephenson, VP of marketing in charge of the Incivek brand. "There was a lot of dedication, commitment and passion to getting [it] right."

A big challenge was educating physicians, patients and nurses about taking Incivek along with interferon and ribavirin, each dosed and administered differently. Total duration is six months or a year, depending on response, and things can get confusing.

The literature showed that, "with really complicated treatment regimens, the more the patient is prepared, understands the consequences of their disease, and is ready to make a lifestyle change, the better they are with adherence," explains Meredith Manning, senior director of marketing, who headed up patient education.

Prior to launch, Vertex set up an unbranded patient education site, BetterToKnowC.com, using it to provide information about the virus, along with a professional education

QUICK FACTS ON INCIVEK

Ratio of total dispensed scripts vs. Victrelis

3:1

Ratio of total monthly US sales vs. Victrelis

10:1

Avg. # of scripts per prescriber vs. Victrelis

3.7 VS. 2.7

2011 revenue estimate

\$1.0 BILLION

2012 revenue estimate

\$1.4 BILLION

Sources: IMS Health; Wolters Kluwer inThought

site at HCVInsights.com, to jumpstart non-product scientific dialog.

With final approved label in hand, Vertex got educational information (sans promotional claims) to sales reps, and used a satellite webcast to beam it to the speakers bureau, arming them with more than just the package insert.

A treatment management guide had pictures to help providers manage the main side effect—rash. The guide "enabled providers to act confidently, assess the rash and take appropriate action," explains Dallan Murray, senior director of marketing with a focus on HCPs.

Now that Vertex has DDMAC sign-off on its marketing claims, Incivek.com and a branded DTC campaign set to start this month feature actual patients. — Marc Iskowitz