

The glycemiac

L-R: John Spera, brand director, Victoza PCP marketing; Will Bainbridge, VP, Victoza brand; and Jeff Fayer, brand director, Victoza patient marketing



By the time you read this, Victoza should have earned its blockbuster stripes for chalking up a billion dollars in global sales for 2011. On the face of it, this is the story of a superior second-to-market treatment that quickly wrestled market leadership from the incumbent. But that's not the whole story.

Victoza, a non-insulin injectable GLP-1 receptor agonist for patients with Type 2 diabetes, was approved by the FDA in January 2010. For almost five years, Lilly/Amylin's Byetta (exenatide) had been the lone GLP-1 injectable, but Novo Nordisk's new drug boasted a 97% similarity to endogenous human GLP-1 (versus Byetta's 53%) and a big once-a-day dosing advantage.

Remarkably, by last summer, Victoza had claimed more than 50% of the US GLP-1 market and considerably more globally, according to IMS Health (see chart). And while sales of Byetta had hardly plummeted, Victoza had succeeded in growing the market considerably and reaping the benefits.

It was clear that, rather than simply taking the line of least resistance and hammering away at Byetta, Novo was looking beyond the GLP-1 class and was also taking on the fastest-growing market in diabetes, the mighty DPP-4s—namely, the oral treatments Januvia (Merck), Onglyza (Bristol-Myers Squibb/AstraZeneca) and Tradjenta (Boehringer Ingelheim/Lilly).

"Because [Victoza] is such an incredible product, it behooved us to not simply limit our activities to just targeting GLP-1 therapies such as Byetta, but also coming after the DPP-4s," says Will Bainbridge, VP, Victoza brand.

"But, quite frankly, we weren't sure how well real-world doctors

go-getters



and patients would respond to an injectable therapy. We knew physicians would be interested in prescribing a once-daily medication that was shown to generate the A1C levels that we have, but we've been absolutely thrilled and overwhelmed by the response that doctors have had and the kind of experience that they've had."

Bainbridge says the team had also gone to great lengths to reassure patients about injectables using programs such as VictozaCare. "We share patients' experiences through testimonials and work with HCPs to help educate patients and take away some of the fear of using an injectable on a daily basis."

In fact, more than 65% of new Victoza patients had come from oral-only treatments, representing a significant swing toward injectables and a victory for Bainbridge and the team—which includes John Spera and Jeff Fayer, the respective brand directors for PCP marketing and patient marketing, both of whom have been there since the

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launch. Heather Millage, corporate project VP for Victoza diabetes and future GLP-1, built the US launch strategy, before moving to Europe to head up the global campaign.

"We made a conscientious effort to leverage all channels and communicate the benefits of the molecule," says Bainbridge. The overall message was, "Take diabetes by the roots," and

the professional side was a mix of sales reps and traditional sales collateral along with a very heavy digital play designed to educate physicians (PCPs and endocrinologists). "Because this molecule is so unique," he adds, "we also did a lot of DTC print and digital, as well as looking at compliance programs to really reinforce that overall message." —James Chase

Above: DTC advertising included print work emphasizing the uniqueness of Victoza, an injectable therapy (top)

