



# MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Every medicine has a story the marketer must uncork. As doctors' needs evolve, message delivery must adapt to align more with their preferences. **Mark Grove** and **Joanne Flynn** share a fresh approach for meeting the new challenges of physician engagement

**S**ales detailing and direct marketing have traditionally been the key components of physician engagement strategies employed by pharmaceutical companies and have formed the primary link between company and physician. Due to significant changes in the pharmaceutical marketplace, such as the introduction of mobile technology, the increase in “no access” physicians, heightened payer pressures and resource allocation constraints, the traditional sales and marketing models no longer produce the return-on-investment they once did. To meet the needs of the current market, and the new requirements of healthcare practitioners, sales and marketing leaders are in the midst of redefining physician engagement.

“The old pharma sales and marketing model is dying. How fast a death, I’m not sure,” explains Al Reicheg, Qforma’s corporate development officer. “The pharmaceutical industry once employed 110,000 sales representatives. This number has decreased to about 50,000 to 60,000. It’s interesting that our industry is one of the very few that personally shows up at our customer’s door, without an appointment, with a visual aid outlining what we want to talk about. The business world has changed. Customers, including physicians, expect to have relevant, specific and even requested information delivered to them when and how they want it in the evenings, in the middle of the night, and on their computers, iPads or smartphones.”

In today’s healthcare environment, brand success depends on engaging physicians on their own terms. We not only need to reach our customers, but must reach them in a meaningful way. Meaningful engagement is about delivering perceived value. The challenge is to

leverage our marketing channels to deliver messages and information that are helpful to physicians, their patients and their practices.

A fresh approach to physician engagement means redefining sales and marketing strategies to develop physician relationships that change prescribing behaviors. And, the key to building relationships is to create meaningful exchanges, those that provide valuable information and lead to brand loyalty. In short, business strategies must build physician trust. To gain trust, your brand’s multichannel programming should include the following.

**Engage physicians on their own terms**

Leveraging channels that give physicians control over when, where and how they access information is critical to winning physician trust. With the popularity of social media, mobile technology and internet resources, the multichannel environment offers pharmaceutical companies opportunities for building meaningful engagements.

As Michael Rowbotham, a director in the Multichannel Group at Pfizer, explains: “Multichannel marketing used to be limited to a relatively narrow number of channels, but this area has grown quickly over the last few years. New channels offer pharmaceutical marketers innovative opportunities to engage physicians like never before, and we are constantly learning how to use them more effectively. We also need to learn to accurately measure them differently than traditional channels.”

The multichannel landscape lets marketers better leverage physician preferences to build value, and in turn, trust. Because the physician controls how, when and where they get information, versus traditional detailing and direct mail methods, he/she is more likely to perceive value. When the physician, not the sales person or marketer, chooses what brand messaging and content is of value, engagements become more meaningful and trust may be built more easily.

**Provide value by focusing communications on physician education and skills enhancement**

Engaging physicians on their own terms by providing value can be challenging. Marketers need to transition from “this is what the physician needs to know” to “what does the physician want to know.” Brand messaging and content is of more value to practitioners when the focus is education and skills enhancement. To achieve this goal, marketers need to successfully integrate several tactics:

- Adapt content and messaging to the specific communication channel (e.g., video on-demand, mobile technology, etc.)
- Provide a variety of clinically relevant, on-demand information that physicians can easily access and consider a trusted resource
- Create an information delivery infrastructure that can quickly adapt to physicians’ changing clinical interests and needs
- Deliver interactive content allowing the physician to feel more fully engaged and part of a medical community
- Adapt internal training programs to help sales and marketers adjust activities to the new model of physician engagement

- Collect and analyze program data to evaluate physician preferences and to effectively adjust multichannel tactics and strategies to these preferences

This last point is critical. How do we know if our multichannel strategies are successful? Andy Woolf, CEO of McCallan Health, offers additional insight. “One of the many challenges of creating an impactful multichannel marketing approach is collecting, archiving and mining the data on the various types of customer interactions,” he says. “The process of collecting this data is significant. But access to this rich data on a customer’s preferences will not only make multichannel campaigns more efficient; it will also help marketers to hone the communication information that is desired by each customer. Properly capturing the customer engagement data will also allow advanced analytics to enable optimization of future programs.”

**Identify physician networks that can amplify your brand’s value**

One of the best ways to build physician trust is leveraging professional peer networks and physician relationships. In today’s market, it’s critical that your brand is part of the daily conversations between physician peers. Marketers must capitalize on these conversations by integrating multichannel programs at the peer and community levels. To achieve these objectives, marketers must overcome two challenges: 1) Deciphering complex and disparate data sets to identify high-value physicians; and 2) Identifying those community influencers who have the greatest positive impact on growing your brand.

“Many of our pharmaceutical clients are drowning in a sea of data without the appropriate resources or technology to translate the data into actionable business intelligence,” adds Qforma’s Reicheg. “For example, high-prescribing physicians are often the target segment identified for personal and non-personal promotional strategies. However, our experience shows these physicians may not amplify your brand’s message or change physician behavior due to their minimal peer relationships or influence over other physicians’ prescribing decisions. Our goal is to help pharmaceutical sales and marketers identify the highest-value physicians who will spread their message and maximize program returns.”

Changes in the marketplace are driving marketing and sales leaders to redefine their approach to physician engagement. The new engagement model focuses less on “pushing” specific brand messaging to physicians and focuses more on enabling physicians to “pull” the information they perceive as valuable. Leveraging multichannel programs to create value and build physician trust is critical. Those companies that adapt their business strategies to this model, by engaging physicians on their own terms, will create meaningful physician interactions that build trust and brand success. ■

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