

CHANGING

Social networks and an expanded digital landscape have opened up more avenues for pharmaceutical and healthcare marketers to reach their patient and physician customers. **Deborah Dick-Rath** looks at how and where to spend your budget

Pharmaceutical and healthcare marketers are better able today to communicate with their patient and physician customers because of the vast array of emerging media channels and tools at their disposal. However, the growing number of options has made decisions about which channels to choose more challenging.

The reason there are more channels, of course, is the expanded digital landscape, powered by technology innovations and more enabled consumers.

Technology has created a Web 2.0 world that reflects the new consumer-driven business model. It used to be that consumers were totally dependent on what marketers told them. But in this new world marketers listen to, and take direction from, their customers.

Today, the best healthcare marketers are evolving a dialogue with their patients to improve adoption, compliance and adherence. Once again, technology is making these consumers more accessible. For example, the number of web pages that patients accessed for certain health/disease has grown by more than 200% in the past two years.

More patients are seeking healthcare information and have the means to find it. But because of the fragmentation in the media marketplace, it is becoming harder for marketers to find these empowered consumers. And while marketers may feel increasingly dependent on the expertise of their agency partners, they are perhaps less confident in the media mix choices that their agencies recommend.

Developing an effective media plan

In developing effective media plans or in approving expenditures for implementation, marketers must first understand what emerging media has to offer. This includes:

- Brand awareness
- Audience penetration
- Number of impressions
- Number of engagements
- Total conversions
- Number of retentions
- Number of conversations

The next step is to decide which of the above to pursue within the realm of the new media landscape. In doing so, healthcare marketers must adhere to these three goals:

1. Create relationships/partnerships with patients,
2. Provide ongoing and relevant information, and
3. Ensure privacy and safety.

In creating a communications plan, it is important to understand the reach and scope of today's most important emerging consumer-controlled channels. Social networking, blogging and mobile marketing are three of the new media tools that are gaining traction with healthcare marketers and currently show the most potential for growth.

Social Networks

Not just for kids anymore, social networks such as Facebook have become almost ubiquitous. In fact, 65% of all online users are now part of a social network. Social networks are popular



Search results: Number of web pages found, by month

	Alta Vista 6/99	Google 10/03	Google 8/04	Google 1/06	Yahoo 4/08
Diabetes	738,220	4,110,000	13,900,000	91,300,000	214,000,000
Heart Disease	157,271	2,110,000	6,230,000	86,000,000	210,000,000
Breast Cancer	146,702	1,590,000	4,580,000	62,000,000	154,000,000
Viagra	315,640	1,390,000	10,700,000	12,000,000	106,000,000
Prozac	35,348	299,000	2,070,000	6,010,000	30,700,000

Source: Total Access Regis McKenna

2.0 world, pharmaceutical companies and their brand directors have been appropriately reluctant to participate for reasons of liability regarding unfiltered comments about adverse drug reactions, among other issues.

Nevertheless, Johnson & Johnson has taken a step in the right direction and has captured the essence of blogging in a format that is both positive and informative. J&J initiated a corporate blog—called JNJ BTW (www.jnjbtw.com)—that underscores the company’s corporate brand of trust by encouraging an open dialogue with customers based on honesty and truthfulness. The blog is run by the public relations department under the leadership of director of corporate communications Marc Monseau.

According to Monseau, the blog grew out of a longstanding tradition at J&J to communicate directly with consumers about their products. Company archives show that John Kilmer, a pharmacist and J&J founder, routinely corresponded with his customers, seeking feedback and input about his products and services. He took the good with the bad. While today’s blogosphere does not require stamps and letters, it still reflects the spirit of Kilmer in that it opens a two-way dialogue for sharing information.

Although JNJ BTW is full of corporate and industry information, it tries to maintain a human voice rather than lapsing into “corporate speak.” This helps to create a feeling of trust among its readers.

On a recent posting, Monseau reported on a meeting with healthcare industry advocates for blogging.

Their discussion, “To Blog or Not to Blog,” revolved around concerns about losing control of the message, dealing with legal and regulatory issues online or perhaps just not having anything to say.

In the end, his roundtable group—which included executives from Genzyme, Vertex and Amgen—decided that the only way to answer their question was to try blogging and see what happens.

Monseau notes that he (and by extension J&J) had discovered a lot about their customers and their own voice from their blog. Specifically, they learned four key things:

50% of consumers used a social network to read a blog or a journal



Epocrates has helped migrate a number of services to mobile devices, such as this iPhone, that allows doctors and nurse practitioners to access programs in between engagements and earn CME credits

1. There are unexpected benefits to blogging. New relationships emerge, new learning evolves.
2. Like all good relationships, blogs take a lot of work and require constant listening and engaging.
3. The audience self-selects. You can’t choose who listens to you.
4. You have to take the good with the bad ... again, like any relationship. The important thing is to listen to criticism and respond to it.

Mobile networks

Just like the internet changed everything, communicating via mobile devices, such as cell phones, is poised to change it all again. Once more, healthcare marketers will need to think about how to leverage this new tool to their brand’s advantage.

How big will mobile networks be? Marketing guru Al Reis stated in Advertising Age in May, that they will become “the sixth mass-communication medium.” To succeed in this new medium, marketers must remember that mobile networks are not just:

- A subset of the Internet
- Another way of surfing without a computer
- Another way to go online
- A way of moving content from one medium to another.

In fact, mobile networks will require a whole new marketing approach. Consider, for example, the most successful brands online—eBay, Amazon, Travelocity and Netflix. They were created for the

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medium and didn't just transfer content to the web, like *The New York Times* or the TV networks. Likewise, healthcare marketers will need to develop brands that are innovative and unique to the channel.

First, the technology must catch up and consumers need to get on board. The required technology is a universal receiving device that can be used anywhere, like a cell phone. Reis predicts it will integrate telecommunications services via three technologies: GPS, scanner and voice recognition. Mobile networks will become integral to healthcare marketers' communication plans. Like the other channels in the consumer-driven world, this one will be activated by consumer "pull" not advertiser "push."

And what will consumers use their new mobile network device for? Sure, they can use it to find a restaurant or call a taxi. But healthcare marketers need to think about all the information about their drugs and services that can be made available. For instance, mobile devices with 2D barcode scanners will enable consumers to access a great deal of information by scanning products in supermarkets or, more importantly, drugstores.

Healthcare marketers that offer physician locators, drug interaction information or health and wellness tips, will create great mobile network brands. Using this medium, pharmaceutical and healthcare marketers can add new levels of patient service and support that will deepen brand loyalty.

Some healthcare marketers are already taking the initiative with this emerging channel, particularly in the healthcare professional space. Epocrates, for one, has helped migrate a number of services, including continuing medical education (CME) programs from the Internet, to mobile devices, allowing doctors to access a CME program when they are traveling or between engagements (see the illustration p.77).

Another service that has already "gone mobile" is the Physician's Desk Reference (PDR). As of June, more than 50,000 healthcare practitioners had downloaded its desktop and mobile versions. Other companies, such as Cegedim, have taken steps to configure data and

79% of consumers used a social network to send a message to someone



Abbott Labs uses Facebook for its "Labs are Vital" campaign (above) which targets potential scientists and technicians; Johnson & Johnson initiated a blog (below) called JNJ BTW to encourage open dialogue

learning materials for pharmaceutical companies to make available on mobile networks. These are all examples of the first tentative uses, the beginning of the next mass medium for healthcare marketers.

In conclusion

Technology is giving healthcare and pharmaceutical marketers more means than ever to engage their patient and physician customers and make them more accessible. While it is imperative to establish meaningful and informative dialogues with customers, it is also important to manage them for optimum outcomes.

There can be no doubt that social networks, blogs and the up-and-coming mobile networks offer exciting new ways for marketers to partner with their customers. To be effective in these channels, and to maximize their budgets, healthcare marketers should remember to:

- Leverage brand websites, search and cross-sell opportunities that preclude competitive choice,
- Integrate all channels, all media, all the time, and
- Constantly keep their eye on the consumer.

Healthcare marketers who remember these points will be the most successful in this new consumer-driven marketplace—and they will be the marketers with the most effective patient partnerships and the most efficient media spend.

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