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# Steps to a Dynamic Message

An effective product message is the culmination of a process that starts with understanding the market and identifying where your product would fit in. **Donna Kelly, Alice Liftin** and **Stacy Vaughn** examine the research process

**D**eveloping a persuasive message for your product—and a meaningful “story” that presents your message in a logical sequence so that your audience understands why they should care about it—is an important supporting step in establishing the product’s positioning and its subsequent usage. However, even after effective messaging is developed for a product, it is critical to also monitor the product’s message, to make sure it resonates with customers and continues to reinforce the desired brand positioning.

An effective product message is really the culmination of a multi-step process that starts with understanding the market landscape and identifying where your product would fit into that landscape—or how it might even change it. Then with this as the foundation, the next step is to craft the appropriate positioning for the brand. Once that is achieved, the task of optimally communicating that positioning to your audience is key.

This article provides an overview of the research process that can be used as a blueprint for developing and refining the product message across the product’s life cycle (see figure 1). It is critical to note that this is an approach where one step builds upon the next, and it is also iterative.

**Market Segmentation.** Segmentation can support sales and marketing strategies in three ways. First, targeting: promoting to those customers where promotion will yield the greatest ROI; second, tailoring: delivering to each customer a message selected to match that customer’s needs; third, tactical implementation: develop-

ing the optimal media mix at the level of the individual customer.

A comprehensive approach to segmentation includes examining three key dimensions of your target audience: demographic (who they are), behavioral (what they do) and attitudinal (why they do what they do). The most accurate and useful segmentation solutions will explicitly incorporate all three dimensions of data for a hybrid approach. Segmentation is a good place to begin, to lay the groundwork for development of messages.

**2 Attitude, Trial and Usage Studies.** Attitude & Usage (A&U) or Attitude, Trial and Usage (ATU) studies are traditional tools for monitoring the prevailing practices and patterns of the marketplace. In pharmaceutical marketing research, these studies measure the current levels of drug awareness, the usage of those drugs, and the perceptions the physicians have of the drugs in a given therapeutic area.

This information can then be used to identify what elements influence the physician’s prescribing choices most, and what elements are undersatisfied by the marketplace. This is then summarized in graphical representations based on needs gap analyses and/or perceptual maps. Analyses such as these in turn help marketers select the best elements of clinical data to highlight in their messaging and promotional materials for their audience.

ATUs can also serve as the baseline against which to measure changes in the marketplace once your new product is introduced. Often a first, pre-launch wave is done to assess current usage and

perceptions; then subsequent post-launch waves of ATU research are conducted to track how the product is performing and how it is affecting the audience’s perceptions and usage of the existing brands as well as the newly introduced brand.

**3 Message Development Research.** Having identified important customer segments and perceptions of current products, the unique space the new product can be positioned to fill becomes clearer. The ideal product positioning is one that is unique, differentiating, motivational and sustainable across the life cycle.

In starting the positioning process, it is important to first consider the problem your product is designed to solve: For whom is this a problem? How important is the problem to key customers? Are there any other solutions available? How satisfactory are these solutions?

The approach we recommend to positioning is both top-down and bottom-up, called customer-driven positioning. Following this process, the brand team brainstorms messaging around a series of areas relevant to positioning: the problems the product can solve, functional benefits and reasons to believe them, emotional benefits and finally main themes (the initial positioning ideas or “constructs”). These initial ideas are then tested with physicians who “build” the positioning statement by putting together the problem the product can solve, identifying important functional benefits and the supportive evidence, then move on to evaluating emotional benefits. Once these ideas are put together, the physician then identifies his/her own “main theme” and may also evaluate those the team put together in its brainstorming session.

The end result of this process is a basic framework—the positioning itself and some direction as to the types of messaging that will be needed to support the positioning in a persuasive manner.

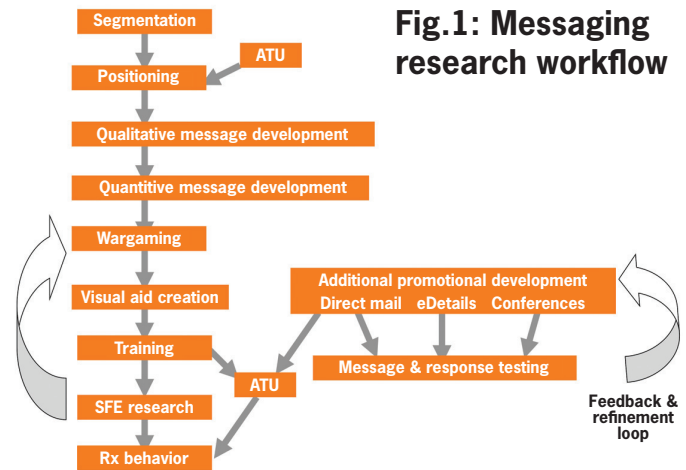
Following the identification of the product’s positioning, the next step is developing the message or story that will reinforce the positioning the brand team wants the product to achieve.

Any message for a product contains a number of components—the information elements—that together describe the benefits of the product in a sequence or flow that makes sense to the audience. In the initial step of messaging research, the universe of possible information elements for the new product is generated by the product teams and sorted in terms of such standard categories as efficacy, dosing and, among others, tolerability.

**4 Wargaming.** An important step prior to finalizing marketing materials such as the core visual aid, is to conduct what has traditionally been referred to as wargaming, a process to examine how well your product message will withstand competitors’ attacks. In today’s highly competitive and noisy marketplace, wargaming is also an important tool to refine the product message as new competitors enter the market or bring to the market new indications or data that may have an impact on your product.

Getting its name from military war games where various scenarios are played out, the qualitative methodological approach referred to as wargaming is an exercise that pits one product’s message against another’s to determine which one “wins” and how best to attack and defend against attacks from the opposition.

At its most basic, wargaming is a duel of selling messages (e.g., detail aids used by sales representatives) in a simulated competitive environment where the benefits of each product are conveyed and the



**Fig.1: Messaging research workflow**

participants in the process judge the arguments made by each side.

The specific qualitative methodology utilized for wargaming can vary. An ideal approach includes an initial round of focus groups to identify the best strategies, followed by individual depth interviews to further hone and refine specific messages and counter-arguments.

**5 Message Testing.** Once the message elements have been vetted in the development phases, they need to be tested to ensure the market accepts and finds persuasive the story you want to tell about your product. This can be done either qualitatively, through rounds of iterative face-to-face, individual depth interviewing, or quantitatively, if there are a large number of messages to be evaluated and pared down. Either method can provide the marketing team with 1) The set of discrete messages that are most compelling and best convey the functional and emotional benefits of the product, and best fit the brand’s positioning; and 2) The story flow or sequence of messages to optimally tell the product’s story.

**6 Sales Force Effectiveness Research.** Once a message is developed and sent into the field for use with physicians, it is imperative to employ further marketing research techniques to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the message as it is delivered. Sales Force Effectiveness (SFE) research tracks physicians’ recollection of the representative details they have received. The core elements in this area of research include:

- Unaided message recall—what the doctor thinks the rep said
- Aided message recall—did the representative deliver the messages that were intended
- Response to the messaging – was the message they heard believable and important to the physician
- Specific behavior recollection—did the rep use the detail aid or the patient materials, did she ask for the business, etc.

The findings of SFE research cue the potential need to retrain or to reconfigure how a particular product message is to be delivered, may uncover the need to conduct further message refinement and/or additional rounds of wargaming to ensure the product message is as strong as possible in the face of competitors’ attacks. ■

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