

WEB-MANAGED MARKETING – WHY IS PHARMA SLOW TO CLICK ON?

As Brian Gunson and Sarah Hart explain, Web 2.0 allows marketers to have the relationship they've always said they wanted... open and transparent, with two-way conversations



Many pharma marketers are only now using e-detailing as a core element in the marketing mix. But the Web 2.0 bandwagon, in its entirety, is too important and influential to let it pass you by.

FMCG marketers exploiting the unprecedented brand-building opportunities offered by Web 2.0 would regard pharma's e-details as passé. The FMCG sector, always more sensitive to changes in the communication zeitgeist than pharma, invests heavily in Web 2.0 and takes responses from social networks seriously. For example, social networking sites provided Cadburys with the insight they needed to re-launch their Wispa brand.

Essentially, Web 2.0 refers to platforms - including social networking sites, wikis and blogs - that facilitate collaboration and interactions between users. Viral marketing uses these social networks to increase brand awareness. The name reflects the idea that the spread of a marketing message through the networks is analogous to the spread of a viral infection in a population. Such campaigns use video clips, interactive flash games, e-books, brandable software, images, text messages and so on to encourage people to voluntarily pass on information about the brand, producing a swarm of interest.

In terms of RoI, Web 2.0 can reach customers at times rep visits and other traditional marketing strategies cannot. This flexibility may encourage a wider customer base to participate more in marketing tactics for longer. Companies also need to inform a wider group of stakeholders than doctors alone.

Publishers Elsevier recently announced the beta-launch of WiserWiki.com, which allows physicians to develop and update medical information online. You could

envisage a similar open access site to share information on a drug and indication.

Meanwhile, Pfizer is collaborating with Sermo, the medical social networking site. Sermo's 50,000 members anonymously discuss, for example, diagnosis and treatment. Pfizer's doctors (clearly labelled as such) can ask questions and respond to posts. Members can also rank postings, which should give some useful insights when developing marketing messages.

Pharma companies could also consider developing or collaborating on closed social networks groups targeted at specific market segments, especially as FaceBook is growing rapidly and somewhat indiscriminately. Social networks bolster transparency at a time when pharma and biotech companies face increasing criticism for excessive secrecy.

To make the most of the opportunities offered by Web 2.0, marketers need to adopt 'real time' marketing strategies. So when there is online criticism, they should have responses or strategies ready. Medical departments will need to approve text more rapidly, too.

Some companies feel that the ABPI Code needs to address specifically the issues raised by Web 2.0 and social networking. In particular, can pharma companies educate and inform patients on social networking sites? On the other hand, waiting too long for specific guidance risks being left behind.

Old-school marketing skills, concerns over regulation and cost certainly contribute to pharma's inertia. But perhaps some marketers are more worried about just what they might hear about their carefully thought out plans.

“Using Web 2.0 means that marketers need to adopt ‘real time’ strategies”

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