

10 DTC pitfalls

By avoiding 10 costly pitfalls, pharmaceutical marketers can improve the competitiveness of their direct-to-consumer campaigns.

By Ellen Hoenig-Carlson, president, AdvanceMarketWoRx

Direct-to-consumer and direct-to-patient marketing is moving into its second decade. Earning maximum return on investment from consumer marketing dollars is more challenging than ever – and generally under greater scrutiny than traditional physician marketing budgets. In addition, consumer marketing in pharmaceuticals is both costly and ever more important in the consumer-centric digital age. Following a disciplined process can allow marketers to avoid the 10 common mistakes of DTC marketing and produce strong consumer marketing results.

First, many marketers may believe that they are a swan when they may be a duck. A realistic understanding of DTC as a complex marketing discipline is critical to a winning brand strategy. Marketers should undertake an internal assessment of consumer marketing strengths and weaknesses and where their brand/disease market fits within the company portfolio. This will uncover important implications for return on investment and resource allocation.

Another mistake is thinking that what you don't know can't hurt you. Marketers should conduct a thorough, up-front disease/brand assessment to establish a baseline understanding of how consumers think and act and identify knowledge gaps, opportunities, and potential "leaky buckets." Thinking beyond the broad audience and digging into segments to better understand targeting opportunities

and priorities will allow marketers to focus on what will best power a brand's growth.

A third mistake is cutting before measuring. Putting in everything but the kitchen sink will sink a project every time. Thorough, incisive market research will uncover critical consumer insights and interpretations along the treatment pathway and among potential

segments and targets. Marketers must gain insight to prioritize target opportunities. Learn how best to tell the story and how the conversations will go between physician and patient or caregiver and patient. The message will require top relevance and meaningful claims to break through the noise in peoples' lives and motivate action.

Creating a plan without actually plan-



ning is another common pitfall. Plans are nothing; planning is everything. A rigorous planning process can identify the least number of tactics for the biggest bang. Pause frequently to scrutinize objectives, strategies, and tactics before committing to action. Wield a sharp red pencil to root out sacred cows and other habits that may be obsolete, and a sober eye for resources can provide better return on investment.

Establish meaningful metrics for tracking program performance, both during the development process and in-market. The right metrics for a brand will enable good management as well as continuous learning and improvement. A product will become more competitive, and a team of growing professionals will develop.

Consumer marketing is not one size fits all. Beware of approaching DTC simply as traditional branded TV or print advertising, or relying too heavily on what may have worked in previous campaigns. Creating value-added relationships with the various segments of the consumer landscape requires careful differentiation. Strategies, tactics, and dialogues will succeed only if they are based on the unique wants and needs of each segment.

Speaking to targets in their language – in an honest way – is what will get a message heard. Whether through direct mail or e-mail, marketers are establishing and building one relationship. Cultivate dialogue and synergy in all touch points. Nothing less will do. Explore new ways to get consumers involved and speaking to other consumers on the brand's behalf; it can work better than the message coming from the marketer.

Consumer marketing involves enormous detail to ensure effective execution. Be thorough and stay doggedly focused to insure that the elements of the program rollouts are well coordinated and synchronized. The best strategies can and often do fail in delivery.

Do not dream that time will stand still. Direct-to-consumer advertising is a very complex, time-consuming, and time-sensitive undertaking. Most brands start too late – two years before launch provides time for distinction. Excellent execution takes time to create, refine, and nurture. Bolster a brand's performance by taking time among agency partners for hon-

ing elements of positioning, developing a creative brief, or identifying a breakthrough ad.

Ads with higher persuasion often take several rounds of creative refinement and research. When the consumer has been an integral part of early planning and clinical design, claims and messages will be most relevant and differentiating. Key opportunities for integration and synergies with physician marketing will also emerge.

Next, select and manage partnerships as though success depends on each one. Take time to communicate, collaborate, and get to know what will enable each partner to do its best work. Organizational and cultural differences between companies and external resources, like advertising agencies, add a layer of complexity to DTC efforts. Select partners that know how to collaborate with other partners. This is a must

for today's marketing success.

Finally, believing that being smart pre-empts taking time to learn is a major costly mistake. Design a continuing, disciplined learning process that allows for real-time adapting. This includes capturing and disseminating best practices and ideas across all brands and timely "deep dives" for each brand to review what's working and what's not across all customers and tactics.

The world is changing fast – what worked in the past may not work in the future. Don't allow the brand team to be too busy to participate in the learning process.

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10 common DTC mistakes

1. **Believing you're a swan when you might actually be a duck**
2. **Thinking that what you don't know can't hurt you**
3. **Cutting before you measure**
4. **Creating a plan without actually planning**
5. **Presuming that you can't be broke since you still have checks left**
6. **Approaching consumer marketing as "one size fits all"**
7. **Imagining you can fool the devil in the details**
8. **Dreaming that time will stand still if you need it to**
9. **Grabbing a tiger by the tail when you really need a bull by the horns**
10. **Believing that being smart pre-empts taking time to learn**