

Taking Pharmaceutical Marketing Online: Making Relevant Connections

As more consumers migrate online to find health information, marketers are beginning to re-allocate media dollars to online advertising platforms. As marketers attempt to recognize the Internet's overall value, however, they first must understand consumer behavior as it relates to the Web and how they are searching for this information on better health.

By Mary Ann Belliveau

Of the adult Internet-using population, 83 percent look online for healthcare information. This represents a 184 percent increase since 2002, according to Manhattan Research. When looking for health information, the majority of consumers – 66 percent according to Manhattan Research – start with a search engine. Fitness, nutrition and health sites received about 230 million visits in June 2007 through search engines, according to Nielsen//NetRatings. Google directed 69 percent of this traffic, Yahoo referred 21 percent and MSN directed 6 percent.

Individuals often don't have a Web site in mind when they go online looking for answers to their health questions or concerns. In addition, many health-related search terms – such as drug names, generic names and complicated conditions – are often difficult to spell, making search engines particularly useful.

Health searches are often complicated, and people will do multiple queries to help answer their questions. On average, Google users perform three searches when trying to get an answer to a health question or concern. Users tend to perform an average of seven searches for serious conditions such as cancer, according to a Harris Interactive survey commissioned by Google in March 2007.

The Web also is a major resource for physicians, 87 percent of whom use the Internet to find health, medical or prescription drug information. Of those physicians, 40 percent turn to search engines first when they go online for health information, according to a Harris Interactive Physician Survey conducted in May 2007. Physicians are often pressed for time and need to get answers to patient, treatment and drug-related questions during their day. Search engines and sites on the Web aid them tremendously in their practices.

Everyday events impact search

We live in a 24/7 news environment. People are now accustomed to getting information whenever they want because the Internet is available to many Americans. And for health marketers, that means making sure your marketing is “always on.”

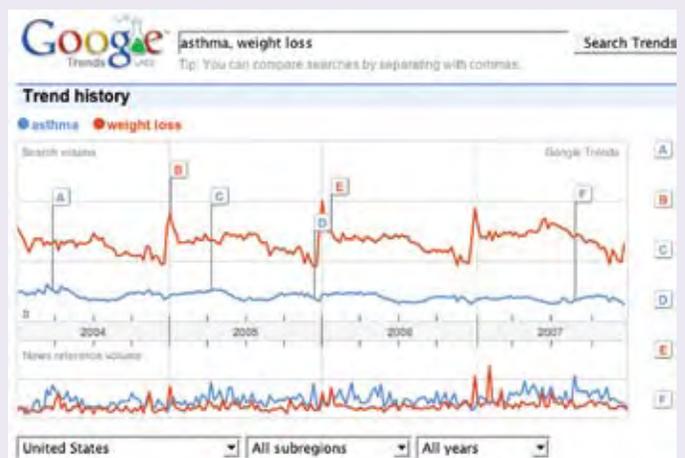
For example, consider the relative search volume for the terms “asthma” and “weight loss” (see chart). This chart is from Google Trends (<http://www.google.com/trends>), which allows anyone to take a glance at keyword search trends on Google.

Searches for “asthma” fluctuate a bit during the year, but it's important to note that Americans are always searching for information regarding asthma. While most asthma marketing campaigns are seasonal, the reality is that many Americans never stop seeking-out information about asthma.

In other cases, it's important to consider how the offline world impacts online searches. For example, searches for “weight loss” spike around the New Year's holiday. It's safe to presume that the annual wave of New Year's resolutions is responsible for this increase.

Another example of how offline events affected the online world is from last fall, when the actress Jenny McCarthy appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show to talk about her son's autism. By the end of the day, autism-related searches became the 16th top search term on Google.

Any given online information seeker may be looking for information at different times about particular ailments, treatments or medicines. What links all Web searches is that people are always looking for specific, relevant information.



We live in a 24/7 news environment, with people accustomed to getting information whenever they want it via the Internet. This means that brand leaders must make sure that their marketing is “always on.”

Online marketing allows advertisers to connect with information seekers at that distinct moment of relevance. By targeting messages to appear next to relevant health content on web pages and search results, health marketers can reach people “raising their hand” looking for information.

Companies that connect with someone at a moment of relevance will form a more lasting and authentic connection with that person. At that moment, individuals will elect to learn more and interact with content instead of passively viewing an advertisement.

Connections made across Web properties

Internet users connect with your brand across the Web, not just on brand and disease awareness sites. Caregivers and patients may read an article on news Web sites or subscribe to RSS feeds. They also may join an online community by posting on message boards and watching educational videos on YouTube.

As *healthcare* brand marketers continue to study how Americans find and interact with online health information, they should keep in mind that their Web marketing strategy needs to be relevant and make connections. Connecting online requires marketers to create compelling content to attract engaged viewers.

The “digitalization” of health information will continue to change marketing strategies. Media consumption patterns will continue to change the marketing landscape. In a world where consumers find information whenever and however it suits them, the future of pharma marketing will continue to evolve.

Mary Ann Belliveau is an industry director of health at Google. She is responsible for developing and managing Google's relationships with health and pharmaceutical companies, working on both DTC and DTP campaigns. She can be reached at Maryann@google.com.



Reach DTC Marketers for Less Advertise in *DTC Perspectives Magazine*

- **Targeted Reach** – The only industry trade publication focused solely on DTC Marketing
- **Cost Effective** – Pay significantly less than with other journals and reach over 2,000 pharma marketers out of a total circulation of 6,800 industry pros
- **Engaged Readers** – Premium content delivers practical insights, read cover-to-cover by the people you want to reach

For more information please contact Lauren Griffith at Lauren@dtcperspectives.com or 973-377-2106 x 228

Value-added packages available for 4 time advertisers. Opportunity for integrated presence through *DTC Perspectives* and the DTC National Conference