Push for Innovation

The biggest blockbuster drug, Lipitor, lost its patent protection on November 30. While losing patent protection is not new, what Lipitor has done to combat its competition is new. In a New York Times report, Pfizer is offering co-pays for Lipitor at the same cost as the generic, Atorvastatin. This not only nets a tremendous saving to its users, but will also help ensure less brand switching now and if/when Lipitor becomes an over-the-counter product in the future. However, Sens. Baucus, Grassley and Kohl have sent a letter to Pfizer (and five other companies) expressing concerns over the offer. (See our In Brief story on page 6 for more details.)

Regardless, Pfizer is showing some real innovation in creating such an agreement for consumers. Typically, a brand would stop or slow advertising, perhaps making way for a new formulation or product. But it is originality such as this that will keep our industry moving forward. In a panel session during our recent Marketing to the Digital Consumer Conference, Brent McCallum, director of innovation at Novartis, and John Vieira, senior director of marketing operations and strategic services for Daiichi Sankyo, concurrently commented that innovations love constraint. Constraints shouldn’t limit the industry though; it should force marketers to be more creative. (Read the post-conference report, beginning on page 20.) Marketers that provide a unique value to consumers are often the ones that win out in the long-run.

In another clever maneuver, Pfizer maintained its heavy promotions for the drug throughout the year. Rather than risk losing the market share it worked so hard to gain, this tactic helps their brand remain relevant among consumers. According to Nielsen data, the cholesterol treatment spent $170.9 million in the first three quarters of 2011. Despite the nearly nine percent decrease compared to the prior year’s period, it was still enough to earn Lipitor the top spot among DTC brands. (See the Spending Review on page 10 for additional data.)

2012 DTC National Returns Home

In honor of the election year, the DTC National Conference has moved back to its home of Washington, D.C. The 2012 DTC National will be held on April 10-12 at the J.W. Marriott hotel. Some regulatory gurus and futurists confirmed so far include: Paul Starr, a Pulitzer Prize winning author and Princeton University Professor; former White House policy advisor Peter Ferrera; Dr. C. William Hanson, III, from the University of Pennsylvania Health System; and Michael Sayers and Helen Sullivan of Office of Prescription Drug Promotion (OPDP; formerly DDMAC). Check out our website for more details as they are made available.

Best wishes for a safe and enjoyable holiday season!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Haug