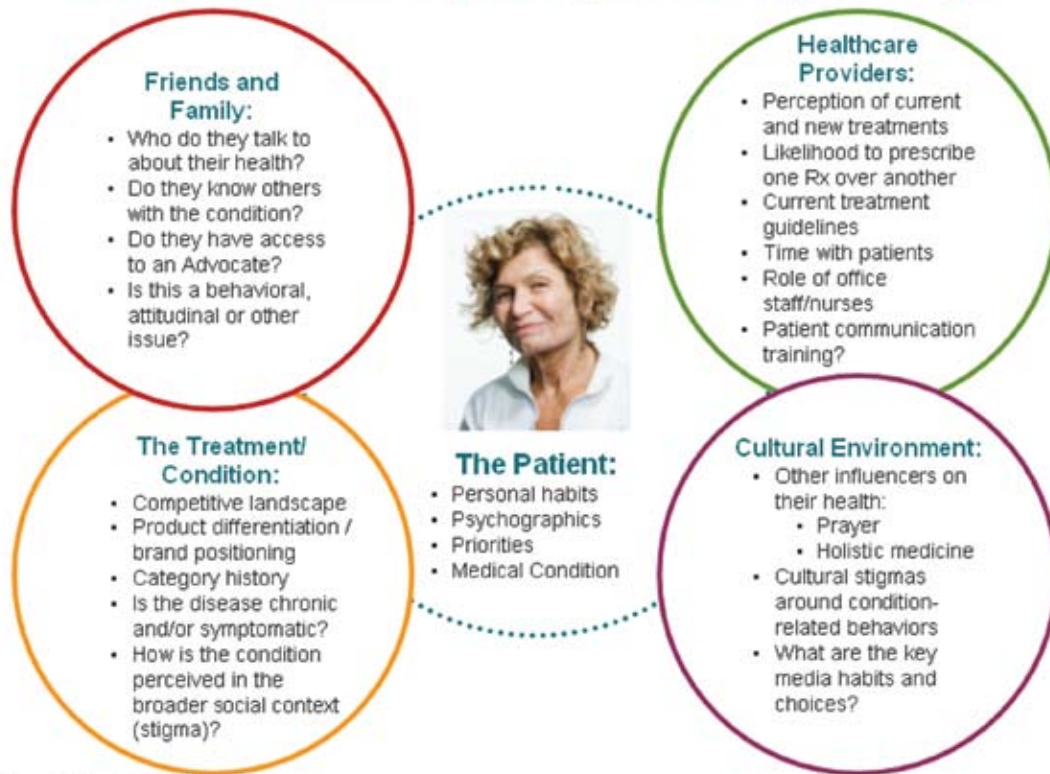


Seeing Patients as People Requires 360 Degree Insight



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The Patient Trust Deficit In Pharmaceutical Marketing

Patient-centric relationship marketing offers marketers the opportunity to create trust, loyalty and advocates of pharmaceutical brands.

By Alfred O'Neill

Imagine you've tumbled down a rabbit-hole and found a bottle labeled "drink me." Its contents could potentially ease symptoms that have troubled you, and improve your health and quality of life. But so far you have only the word of the manufacturer — a well-known pharmaceutical brand — to help you decide whether "drink me" might be worth your serious consideration.

It could be helpful to consult your peers, ask expert advice and check sources of reference information. Barring that, your response most likely would turn on one emotionally laden word: **trust**. If you recognize the brand behind "drink me," how inclined are you to trust it? Despite all you hear, how sure are you it will work for you? For pharmaceutical companies, shaping an answer to that question has grown more difficult than ever before: marketing noise, skepticism of corporate messaging around drug safety and DTC in

particular, have bruised the loyalty and trust that, in most other industries, results from a more direct consumer-marketer relationship.

For all concerned, it has been a bumpy ride down the rabbit hole.

But the ride can be worth the bruises when it leads to a new approach for brand communications between pharmaceutical companies and patients. By placing patients at the center of a more informative communications structure that is highly interactive and responsive to individual concerns, pharmaceutical companies can recapture the "good guy" image that earns the benefit of the doubt — an image leveraging the traditional associations of cures, benefits and patient welfare, not the headline-grabbing issues of risk, pricing and lawsuits.

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Patient-centric RM: Catalyst for trust

Though the pharmaceutical marketplace encompasses many customer groups – including government, insurers and healthcare professionals – the rise of consumerism across American society today has positioned the consumer as king and the Internet as queen in the realm of healthcare communications. Manhattan Research reports that 116 million U.S. adults used the Internet to find such information in 2006, compared with 41 million in 2001. Some 70 million were looking for pharmaceutical information, and 29.1 million sought additional information after seeing an ad in another medium.

Significantly, many Americans report they are healthier today because of the Internet. It has rapidly become a primary source for health information and advice, and even rivals the family physician.

In this highly interactive communications environment, patients have virtually instantaneous access to other patients and to topical information, both accurate and spurious. Whose information will they read? Who will they believe? The antidote to their pervasive lack of trust for pharmaceutical companies is patient-centric relationship marketing.

While highly targeted programs, including direct mail, can connect consumers to brand or message advocates and ambassadors, the most effective method for true health engagement includes online patient communities.

Online patient communities harness the experience of actual users to deliver authentic, reality-based messages. This approach reverses the conventional “product as hero” strategy, positioning the patient as hero.

Without undermining the patient-physician relationship, patient-centric relationship marketing directly addresses

the “trust” issues that consumers encounter in making healthcare decisions. It creates more informed patients who have been encouraged and empowered to take responsibility for their health – while some portion of that group become advocates or ambassadors for the brands they consume.

Eight essentials for trust-based compliance

1. Money matters – understand how incentives can address compliance

Since cost is one of the top two reasons patients discontinue prescribed medication, incentives may be helpful. Still, it’s essential to know what the customer’s real need is – some might prefer coupons, others might want a gift and others still might prefer a helpful device, depending on their condition. Also, given the high level of competition in some categories, and the rise of generics, consider using pre-paid debit cards to defray cost. This type of incentive can powerfully differentiate your product.

2. Create a human touch in the program

Money is a barrier to conversion, and while it must be addressed, it should be seen as a first step in a multi-step value proposition for the patient. After money, the most popular of trial offers, people’s needs evolve and they have questions. Most questions do not occur when speaking to a doctor or in the office, but afterwards. In fact, given the average doctor-patient interchange averages around four minutes, it is amazing that any of our questions are answered. That is where your brand can provide service.

Dr. Eleanor Murdoch, a practicing psychologist, tells us that, “People who have made a decision to start a treatment will have lots of questions. They inevitably get frustrated at some point and will need answers. Not having the answers or knowing where to get them – this is the moment when those that help them, those that help take away those frustrations are the ones the patient ends up trusting most.”

That is why all good RM programs should have a call-center component – the human touch is powerful and a human being who can answer basic questions will set the tone for brand perception. This will surely help with those moments of doubt and potential non-compliance.

Great deal of confidence in:	1987	2003
Advice from doctors	69%	57%
Recommendations by pharmacists	64%	45%
TV news reports	54%	21%
Ads from corporations	20%	7%

For example, a real human being who is service-oriented can address frustration creating a new possibility for the patient by simply saying, “And if for any reason, you feel like you no longer need to take the medication or have things getting in the way, give us a call, and we can help.”

So, investing in some form of call-center, live nurse, call-in line, should be an essential component to your overall RM program. We are seeing it more and more. Don’t let your competition be the one to prove it works to increase conversion and compliance.

3. Cast patients as heroes

Today’s healthcare environment demands that patients be active, engaged partners with healthcare professionals. As an example of this, the recent unbranded Gardasil campaign generated disease awareness and showcased the target audience likely to be most directly concerned by HPV: mothers, friends and sisters.

Highly nuanced advertising conveyed subtly different, compatible messages at young women and girls versus mothers as adults and medical decision-makers. These women were cast as heroes. The campaign messages were built on empathy, peer influence and the women’s emotional connection to one another. The result was a powerful word-of-mouth campaign based on women’s real relationships. In assessing the campaign’s impact, one ObGyn said she had never before seen any pharma campaign drive nearly 100 percent of her patients to ask about a product.

4. Identify patients’ circles of influence

Identifying the characteristics of a patient’s “circles of influence” yields key insights that drive a relationship

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marketing campaign. The circles of influence, with the patient at the center, encompasses the patient’s psychographic and lifestyle profile, medical conditions, treatment, and approach to working with providers to make healthcare choices (paternalistic or collaborative).

By understanding these key attributes, marketers can develop messages that genuinely speak to the patients. Just remember: if you know who they listen to, you will surely know what it takes for them to listen to you, too.

5. Patient attraction and engagement strategy

Marketers can use survey information – and the insights it provides – to hone their messages, accurately targeting specific consumer audiences with relevant, informative tools, and encouraging participation via a Web site. This can be particularly effective during pre-launch of a drug or post-launch to further target a relationship marketing campaign. Particularly effective would be to create an unbranded multi-channel campaign – instead.

What is Measured	Patient Responsiveness	Patient Attitudes, Beliefs & Bonds	Patient Behavior
	Redemption Rates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coupons • Mail-In Offers Response Rates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Interactivity • Correspondence 	Strength of Commitment/Bonds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word-of-mouth Brand Attributes Reaction to Elements in Program Shifts in Attitude	Time on Therapy Rx Dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial • Habit Building - Persistence • Advocacy • Cross-Sell
How it is Measured	Household Encoded <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coupons • Surveys Engagement Metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clicks/Time on Site • Repeat Visits • Registration Rate White Mail	Surveys (Phone/Mail/E-mail) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saliency/Top of Mind • Rating of Attributes • Tolerance of Price Disparity Advisory Panels	IMS Sales Data: NRx, TRx Physician Attitude Advisory Panels Self-Reported Data Patient Longitudinal Analysis

6. Create a compliance connection

Persuading consumers to remain on prescribed medication with proper dosing requires appealing to both logic and emotion. For a compliance connection, marketers must communicate with patients on an emotional level to build trust. Patients are much more likely to comply once they understand both a medication's risks and its benefits. This understanding particularly allays the fear of side effects, because they begin to be seen in a broader context.

One indispensable avenue of connection and support is an online environment where consumers can discuss their own needs, risks and benefits with others in the same situation. Creating an internet community can be achieved by holding a special event or through an advocacy group forum where issues that influence compliance can be openly discussed. Bringing in a healthcare professional may be appropriate, but not all patient groups require healthcare professional input. With alli and Novo Nordisk's "Voice of Diabetes," the industry is taking the first steps in this direction.

7. Create tools that encourage and empower

A patient-centric approach to relationship marketing only works if patients have the tools to make informed decisions about the risks and benefits of medications, and if they are encouraged to use them. Through empowerment and education, your brand advocates can be successfully activated by building an online community of like-minded consumers. This approach has succeeded in the consumer packaged goods sector, and has applications in pharmaceutical marketing.

For example, in Dove's Pro-Age campaign, the brand lived its promise by allowing women to candidly express their views about their self-image and aging. Dove's marketing team creatively executed this by asking women to make their own commercials about how they approached aging. The promotion garnered 1,800 self-produced commercials, with the winning entry featured on this year's televised Academy Awards. Recently, a division of Novartis supported a contest to create Web videos about how people felt about influenza.

8. Identify measurable responses

It's not relationship marketing unless it's measurable. By designing each contact to elicit a measurable response, marketers can accurately track ROI through specific actions that can be measured and adjusted based on results. Measurement criteria vary with the type of communications vehicle being used, including Web

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site traffic, phone responses to call-centers, moderated online participation, and the results of attitude/behavioral research. Before launching any relationship marketing strategy, however, one needs to decide which measurements are most appropriate. A range of options exist, and it's important to understand which are best for your program, and why.

Gaining a competitive advantage

The key to engagement with pharmaceutical products means providing both personal perspectives and valued, accurate information. While everyone knows we need to do a better job educating our patients, few discuss the need to service them as real customers. This content must be clear, jargon-free and provided by the "citizen" for the emotional and personal credibility, as well as medical experts with firsthand knowledge of patient concerns.

While these challenges may seem formidable, surmounting them leads to enormous opportunities. Companies who act quickly and strategically to build relationships gain the trust of patients, and a significant advantage in a competitive marketplace. Those who fail to act may well lose their chance for an active role in creating healthier communities, stronger patient-physician bonds, and a more dynamic, trusting relationship between pharmaceutical companies and consumers that leads to compliance and sales. ■

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