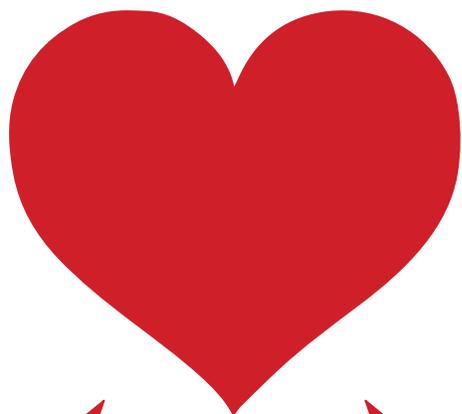


Four Lessons Healthcare Doesn't Need to Learn the Hard Way...

Because

CPG
Already
Did



By: Sourabh Sharma

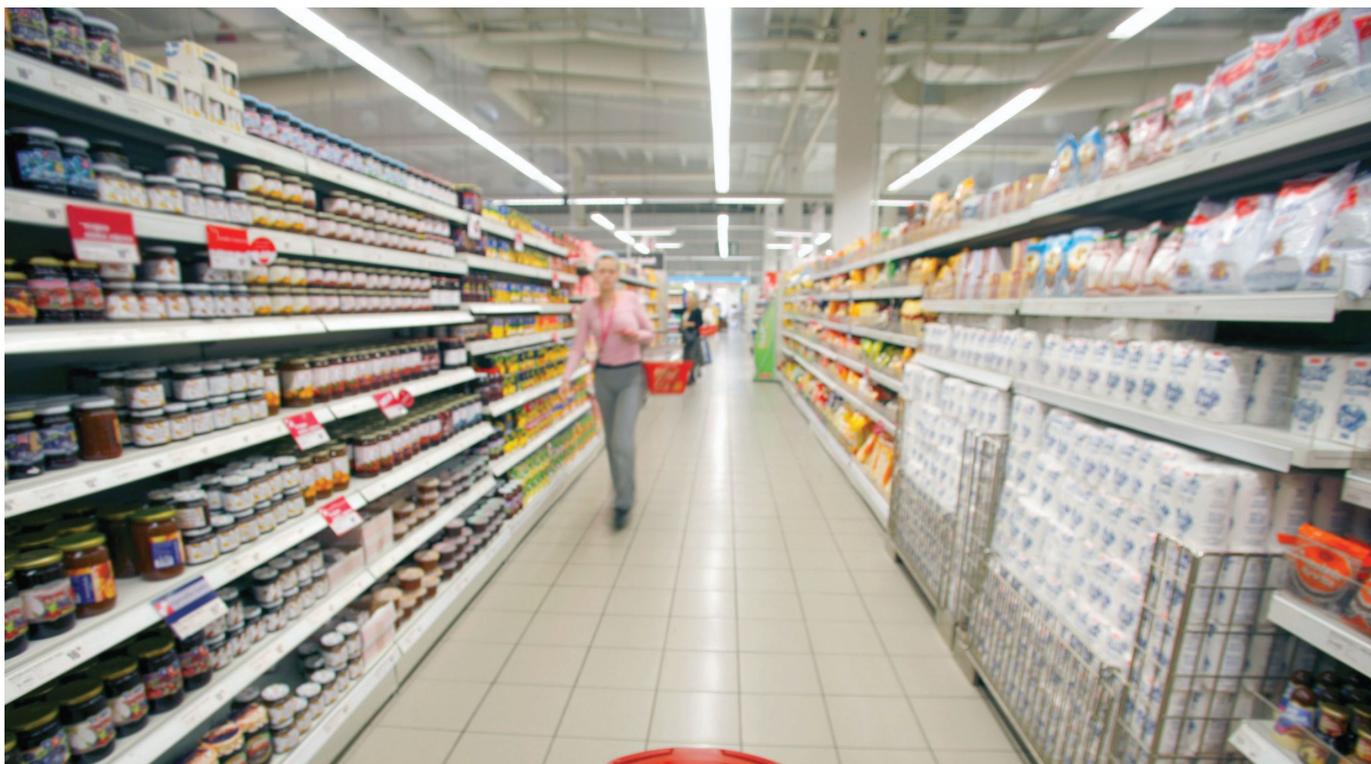
Consumer packaged goods, more than any other sector, pioneered the use of social media engagement for business purposes. On the other end of the spectrum we have the healthcare industry. Whether out of concern for regulatory compliance or simple fear of the unknown, healthcare (with a few exceptions) is the Johnny-come-lately of the social media realm.

Early social media pioneers may have had the limelight advantage, but they were also first to encounter—and even succumb

to—the perils of social media. Healthcare organizations and brands need not make the same mistakes as their CPG predecessors. There's no better time than now to get off the sidelines and into the social media game.

Listen...even to the stuff you don't want to hear.

In the world of social media “listening,” there is virtually no end to the ways you can slice, dice and cull social media content.



This makes it easy to filter out valuable competitive insights by listening too narrowly, such as by ruling out content from rogue bloggers and advertisements that could prove useful.

CPG has learned that to boost awareness and equity, it is often wise to turn to bloggers and unsolicited sources of advertising, which often work in tandem with, or instead of, traditional efforts. When legacy brands like Burberry and Oscar de la Renta each launched products on Facebook (sampling included), their competitors surely took notice. Even well-established food and fashion brands have advertising budgets set aside for bloggers, a.k.a. the influencers and thought leaders of the digital realm.

Healthcare brands can benefit from listening to patient and provider reviews of themselves and their competitors, perusing online ads, and monitoring the blogosphere for competitive intelligence. Social media is also a great way to keep up with the industry reaction to regulatory changes including interpretations and opinions.

Patients, vendors, clinicians and providers—the entire healthcare stakeholder community—are interconnected via the Twitter patient safety hashtag #ptsafety. Within minutes of the Supreme Court's ruling on the Affordable Care Act, the hashtags #ObamaCare, #ACA, #HealthCare and #HCR proliferated. To this day, organizations like Deloitte Health Care, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, and The Kaiser Family Foundation are using these hashtags to publicly explore the meaning and implications of this new law. Even a quick search using the hashtag #breastcancer reveals event promotions and thought leadership from a number of provider organizations.

Love is a two-way street.

Brands love to love themselves, and social media lets them do it on a grand scale. However, CPG brands have learned that the key to mutually fulfilling social media relationships is to give and take. By actively engaging stakeholders in a two-way dialogue through platforms like online communities, Twitter and Facebook, the “brand” itself becomes the facilitator of insightful conversations—not simply a “pusher” of self-serving promotional content. Several CPG brands have made a name for themselves by engaging with brand followers. Whole Foods has become a thought leader in the realm of natural and organic nutrition; sportswear brands like Nike showcase athletes and motivate aspirants; and Starbucks openly engages in customer Q&A online.

Healthcare and pharmaceuticals are particularly segmented industries with complex decision-making ecosystems. Whereas in the “real world” this presents a marketing research challenge, social media is the perfect place to find self-segmented groups. Physician groups, disease-specific support groups and health care news aggregators are online right now, exchanging unedited, unfiltered insights. Those insights are an invaluable complement to traditional marketing and advertising. Consumer engagement also pays off as an immediate measure of marketing ROI. While classic campaigns usually take time to reveal their true impact—usually in the form of subjective, anecdotal measures—social media can provide an immediate understanding of customer reaction. Just ask The Gap and JC Penney what social media listening told them about their new ad campaigns.

Similar to Facebook “likes” for brands as an indicator of brand loyalty and favoritism, hospitals and doctors have launched Facebook pages wherein the “like” is an indicator of patient comfort, positive experience and overall quality. The ultimate goal is one of increased interaction. Studies show that patients who are engaged in email communication with clinicians and have accessible online records also have stronger relationships with those clinicians. Those “online relationships” pave the way for more fulfilling traditional office visits.

Tell me something I don't already know.

Personal care CPG brands know the value of using Twitter to share a beauty tip, not just a coupon. Social media thought leadership content is all about enlightened self-interest. Healthcare brands have an opportunity to share highly relevant, altruistic content with highly segmented audiences that have “opted in” to what the brand has to say. And by sharing high value information, the notion of “benefits before brands” can really strengthen a brand's credibility.

In order to provide quality healthcare in our fast moving modern world, healthcare professionals have to stay on top of an almost overwhelming amount of information. Social media is already being used as a tool that filters, aggregates and delivers information that is specifically relevant to various practitioners. In return, they are contributing to the conversation.

Organic food brands have a particularly good track record of preaching the efficacy and quality of ingredients and products over actual brands. Similarly, healthcare thought leaders have an opportunity to share more about conditions, ailments and medical processes in lieu of “brand” positioning. When doctors at a Houston hospital live tweeted the Caesarean delivery of a baby boy in February 2013, the result was an educational experience, not an infomercial. More than 72,000 people “tuned in,” including medical school students and moms-to-be. Similarly, Swedish Health Services recently live tweeted an ear surgery, also as a means to share knowledge and information. Such examples show that even in an industry fragmented by highly specialized, highly segmented areas of expertise, social media facilitates becoming a niche thought leader.

Whether you're an organic food manufacturer or a cancer treatment provider, when you turn stakeholders into subject matter experts, they become brand ambassadors. And social media can turn one hit wonders into viral thought leaders overnight.

If you're not listening, you're definitely missing something.

Classical research usually delivers insights based on a brand in the absence of competition, or within a constructed, stagnant competitive environment. The insights are usually brand-specific, and a function of the questions asked. But social media

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lets marketers see the whole, dynamic competitive ecosystem, as everybody chats about everything. And since everyone in this ecosystem has access to the exact same information, the first to stake a claim wins. The healthcare industry still has lots of unclaimed territory on the social media space. While several studies have revealed that over two thirds of medical practitioners utilize social media weekly for professional purposes, the activity can be harnessed by patients or brands alike.

News spreads faster on social media than any other means. Studies have proven that Google Flu trends performed in direct correlation with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in terms of measuring flu cases. But Google provided results a week earlier! Had such social networking existed at the time of the swine flu outbreak of 2009, medical professionals would not have waited for medical surveillance and consequential precautionary measures to treat the first patients, by which time the virus had spread around the nation.

This example alone indicates how drug companies could benefit from simply listening to what's happening in the world with regard to relevant health conditions. Spread and response time within healthcare is critical, and can be managed and harnessed for the benefit of both a consumer and a producer.

In reality, every patient, physician, practitioner and healthcare professional is actually a consumer of everything from knowledge to products. And every consumer expects a relationship from the organizations with which they engage. The strength of social media is that it caters to this very expectation. Learning from the successes and failures of CPG brands, healthcare brands are ideally positioned to give their stakeholders exactly what they're looking for: a mutually beneficial, authentic relationship.

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