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Emotional vs. Scientific Claims: Which is Better for Increasing Brand Loyalty?

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Emotional vs. Scientific Claims: Which is Better for Increasing Brand Loyalty?

Panorama by Mike Mabey and Scott Garrison on August 19th, 2015

When marketers are preparing for a new product launch, they must focus almost exclusively on efficacy, safety profile and other functional and scientific reasons to prescribe their new product. But within a few years they will need to evolve that communications strategy to include emotional, lifestyle and aspirational benefits.

Initially, sales are driven by physicians deciding to prescribe the product, and those physicians often desire concrete evidence for why they should prescribe a new drug. Of course, payers also want to see strong evidence of why they should pay for the new drug being prescribed. Some specialty drugs, for instance those for treating cancer, never move beyond this construct.

But for more mainstream drugs, the communications strategy eventually moves along the continuum from one-dimensional, purely functional messaging aimed at healthcare professionals (HCPs) toward multidimensional messaging aimed at HCPs and patients, while at the same time becoming more nuanced in presenting benefits. Multidimensional messaging includes more intangible aspects of the product benefit package and incorporates more emotional, lifestyle and patient-centric components. In other words, communications become more consumer-oriented.

These intangible components—if done well—can significantly improve compliance and adherence, so it is somewhat counter-productive that the communications strategy does not include these intangible benefits from the beginning. Decision-influence modeling consistently reveals a gap between what the physician hears and transmits to patients, and what patients want to know. The closer these two communications are, the more likely there is to be compliance and adherence.

This progression from functional or evidence-based communications to those that are more nuanced and include “emotional” components happens when patients start becoming more involved in the decision-making process. Another driver is the introduction of competing branded products and the efforts of marketers to help physicians decide which product to prescribe. As the drug's lifecycle matures, the threat of future generics competitors enters the landscape. This creates an urgent need for brands to further differentiate themselves from generic drugs through the articulation of non-functional benefits—basically building and leveraging brand equity.

As this evolution occurs, claims tend to focus more on what is in it for the prescriber and user by describing the experience that comes with using a

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Emotional vs. Scientific Claims: Which is Better for Increasing Brand Loyalty?

product, or the impact the use of a product may have on the user's life, thus bringing them closer to their aspirations. In consumer markets, emotional claims aim to connect a brand with the consumer on a deeper level that creates and then strengthens a relationship. This relationship creates differentiation from other brands and becomes critical to success. After loss of exclusivity (LOE) occurs, that continuum of communications plays out in black and white when the very functional generic competitor and the aspirational, lifestyle branded product battle for market share.

Managing the Move Along the Functional-Emotional Continuum

The number of big brands facing patent cliffs has forced pharma marketers to think differently. The implications of patent cliffs on communication strategy are wide ranging and include both the introduction of generic competition for branded products as well as going OTC.

In this context, purely functional marketing claims are no longer the solution. Brand managers are becoming more consumer-like in their marketing communications. The purpose of claims is not essentially different in healthcare versus consumer marketing; both aim to help audiences understand what to use and why to use it, and both endeavor to create differentiation in a crowded market. However, pharmaceutical marketers face one essential differentiator: The HCP decision maker and the need to understand what resonates with them in their decision process. In addition, the use of claims in healthcare has a number of legal and structural constraints that enforce a focus on being informative and neutral, whereas in consumer marketing it is slightly more openly meant to be persuasive and activating—aimed at driving sales.

The above challenges and constraints result in a number of questions and challenges associated with the need for a more nuanced multidimensional communications strategy. First of all, what does the competitive environment look like? Are additional branded products entering the market, or is LOE resulting in the introduction of a generic or biosimilar competitor? If so, a number of avenues should be considered:

- How will marketers determine the best claims to capture the functional and emotional components of the product?
- How should brand managers and marketers decide when to start moving along the continuum, and how fast should they move?
- How can the impact of potential claims and messages on patients and physicians be measured?

You can begin to craft a more nuanced communications plan by looking at how the introduction of new non-functional information will affect the brand. This can be accomplished by mapping the competitive landscape on an emotional scale to see where each brand fits. This helps to identify the realm(s) where the future communications strategy should focus.

Mapping and Managing the Balance Between Functional and Emotional Marketing

Determining the balance between functional and emotional marketing depends greatly on the environment in which the pharmaceutical marketing will live. Some strategies for driving HCP and patient decision behavior focus on the positive, aspirational aspects of a brand. Others, especially when defending a brand against generic or biosimilar competition, focus on the language associated with risk reduction and brand loyalty. In any scenario, marketers should start by mapping the words, emotions, benefits and aspirations close to their brand, while at the same time gaining an understanding as to where the current and potential competitors reside.

Below is an example of this type of emotional landscape mapping for a brand. This type of research provides marketers with an understanding of how to best



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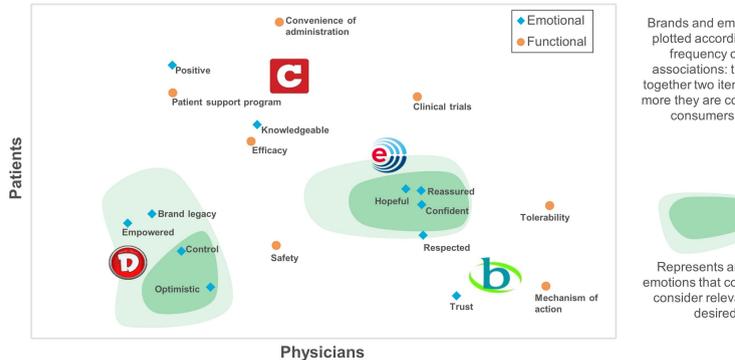
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proceed with the generation of marketing materials. By understanding the landscape of a brand or product, and what value it has in the minds of consumers, marketers uncover what area(s) represent fertile grounds, and what is viewed as too far outside the realm of possibility.

Figure I: Functional-Emotional Map



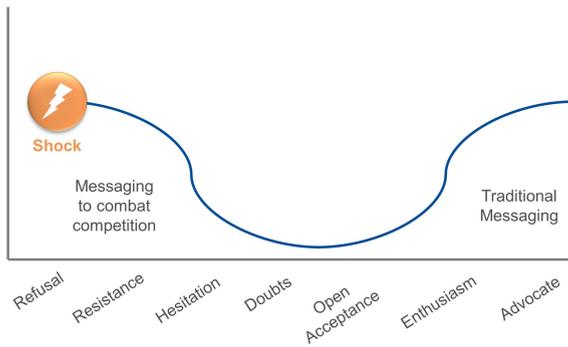
The next step is to map the competitive landscape and determine where each brand sits in terms of functional and emotional ownership and opportunities. Existing brands already carry certain images and connotations which can help or hinder marketing efforts. Emotions and functionalities that are easily marketed for one brand may not be seen as credible or unique from another. By also researching competitors, which typically inhabit different spaces within the broader landscape, marketers are able to determine the optimal balance between functional and emotional marketing.

With this understanding in place, the next step is to measure the effectiveness of marketing claims. The challenge for marketers when moving along the functional-emotional continuum is to determine what constitutes an “effective” claim. It becomes even more important to determine the key metrics to measure. When focusing marketing efforts on functional claims, it is often enough to simply measure impact or purchase intent. However, emotional marketing typically goes one step further.

For example, the primary goal of some campaigns is to evoke a certain emotion or create a particular brand perception rather than drive purchase. In these situations, where the emotional impact is vital, it is still beneficial to understand what impact a claim has on driving action. Therefore, a balance needs to be struck between the emotional impact of a claim and the tangible action being driven. The communications strategy and understanding of the drivers of HCP and patient decision behavior should drive the balance.

Another method is to closely examine the differences that need to be highlighted in order to stand out from the competition, especially generic or biosimilar. The example below is a modified Emotional Change Curve that uses claims-based research to help clients understand the differences in strategy that can defend a brand against competition from biosimilars. This model is focused on desired emotional connections, while the actual claims utilize more functional attributes to drive impact. However, the generic or biosimilar competitor has fairly similar functional attributes, so again it is important to go back to the functional-emotional landscape to identify strong themes for defensive claims.

Figure 2. The Emotional Change Curve



Claims are an important marketing instrument allowing brands to deliver promises to the market about their products and brands in a succinct way. While this can certainly be achieved to an extent through more informative and neutral marketing messaging, leveraging emotions is becoming ever more necessary for creating a connection and standing out in a crowded marketplace.

As Justin McCullough, Vice President of E-Commerce, National Small Business at Capital One said: "Marketing is emotional storytelling, not logical explanations¹." As brands continue to progress along the continuum from functional to emotional marketing, incorporating emotional context in traditional pharmaceutical marketing will become more important than ever. Having a strong understanding of where your brand sits on the competitive functional-emotional landscape is critical for developing a winning communications strategy.

References:

1. <http://justinmccullough.com/marketing-that-doesnt-suck-emotional-marketing>



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