

PREVENTION AWARENESS

In the last decade, people went from being reactive to proactive in regards to their health. The huge rise of casual runners, evidenced by the success of marathons sponsored by major brands such as Nike and Gatorade and the impressive amount of emerging nutrition and healthy food blogs are proof that there is a growing collective interest for mental and physical wellbeing.

Before this shift, people started being concerned at the onset of advanced signs of physical distress. However, today people anticipate and try to avoid classical problems such as cholesterol, diabetes and high blood pressure, by reducing sedentary habits and looking for recommendations on better nutrition. Consumer brands have fostered these efforts, on one hand by trying to promote their reputation as “healthy” enterprises and, on the other, by establishing a relation of empathy and affinity with the people involved in these movements.

Whether it is due to marketing needs or the firm belief that healthcare has to be promoted, companies must understand that this is not a passing trend but the cornerstone of any future communication strategy.

DIGITAL VADEMECUM

The number of people using internet to try to “self-diagnose” the source of their discomfort and find possible solutions is increasingly growing. Websites such as WebMD have become the compulsory Health Wikipedia and digital magazines like Women’s and Men’s Health are now symbols of aspirational wellness. People first refer to these sources to solve their problems and, only when these fail, seek medical advice through health experts.

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Internet has helped reduce the perception of doctors as the only authority in the field and pharmaceutical companies need to adapt to these consumer needs and realities. It is not a matter of replacing HCP’s, but to better understand patient habits and provide better information through several channels.

In this sense, many changes can be seen on the websites of pharmaceutical labs, which are no longer showing the boxes and logos of their products, but pictures of people who’s quality of life they have helped improve. There is still a long way to go, but CEOs have already

understood that this is a high-speed train that they have to board ASAP.

The only way for the industry to avoid being isolated from the consumer in the near future is to actively participate and create online conversations, through which they can once again become main players in the health arena.

FROM CONSUMER TO BRAND SPOKESPERSON

The words spoken by a satisfied customer carry significantly more weight than those of a medical director on payroll. Why? For a simple reason, there are no monetary interests involved. The credibility of pharmaceutical products is not just based on advertisement, doctor prescriptions or brand spokespersons, but on word of mouth of both offline and online consumers.

The patient testimonials are the media hook that companies have to take advantage of to promote their products, thus selling the most valuable attribute for a potential consumer - real human benefits, evidenced by *real* people.

Nothing generates more empathy than the stories of those who have fought a disease and managed to overcome it thanks to pharmaceutical research and science. Statistically, the stories with greater impact are those marked by suffering, conflict, climax and a positive outcome, like any movie or book worth reading. Do we want to sell products or offer life? The latter is definitely more viable for an industry that will increasingly depend on their patients, rather than vice versa.

CONCLUSION

As long as consumers progressively continue to be interested in their health and seek complete transparency from healthcare companies, these will need to find new communication messages and means to bring them closer to this humane approach and move away from the previous perception. The key, once again, is creating an emotional link to strengthen loyalties and to win long lasting connections.





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