

» Communication in the pharmaceutical industry, from the product to the brand

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The pharmaceutical industry has traditionally focused its communication efforts on its products. Even if its budget depends on the marketing area of the product and despite its major legal limits, the standard communication of pharmaceutical companies has been and is mainly centered on raising awareness about the diseases that these drugs seek to cure.

Obviously, many corporate communication policies have also been developed with the media mainly those specialized in health and in some cases in general media or in media specializing in business management as well. This is evidenced by the great amount of journalistic awards promoted and/or sponsored by companies or CSR initiatives.

However, in spite of this communication effort, the pharmaceutical industry does not have a good reputation among society. Even if it is devoted to health and seeks to cure diseases and enhance people's quality of life, it is seen in many cases as a sector with enormous profits at the expense of people's health/illnesses, which does not get involved unless there are potential revenues, which does not support the people who need these treatments and have

no financial resources or even does not support the society or the Administration that finances the treatments. In response, the pharmaceutical sector has endeavored to explain the research processes, the expenditures incurred and their need to recoup the investment, although without much success.

MORE INVESTIGATION

Nevertheless, we are now facing a paradigmatic change of scenario. **The research has been "democratized"**. The amount of studies and researches on new drugs for old and new diseases has skyrocketed. Technology has become cheaper and conducting new studies is increasingly easier.

This leads to two situations that might significantly affect the communication of pharmaceutical companies.

On the one hand, there are fewer and fewer unique products to treat diseases. The strict legislation on communication prohibits explicitly mentioning the product –especially if it is only sold with a doctor's prescription– and thus, companies focus their efforts on the diseases for which they have the only or the best treatment. If we assume that there will be less and less diseases with just one treatment or, at least, with a medicine that clearly differs from the rest, communication efforts will have an increasingly smaller reward provided that they cannot mention the name of the medicine in question.

On the other hand, new medicines are only unique for a short period of time after being launched, since the constant innovation facilitates the rapid creation of new drugs for different diseases. The major efforts made to disseminate information on diseases and their treatments can thus be quickly "gobbled up" by the new drugs which, moreover, reduce prices. Let us just remember the case of Sovaldi for Hepatitis C. A little over a year after its launch, new companies are announcing the launch of cheaper and equally efficient medicines.

BRAND CONSTRUCTION

However this situation has already taken place in other sectors in which products are also increasingly similar and it is difficult to note the differences, even with advertisements. The communication strategies which merely focus on the products are being replaced by brand building policies. The automotive sector, for instance, has started to create brand concepts around the central axis to that defines the company and its cars. Associating brands to concepts such as sustainability and other concepts arising from it, has become a relevant element in almost all car brands. Special mention should also be made of the fact that, a few years ago, nobody knew the values behind a Procter & Gamble product and now we are thrilled by its viral videos supporting the mothers of athletes.



Here is where the corporate communication of the pharmaceutical industry starts to get stronger versus the communication of the product. Companies must necessarily identify which is their brand identity or what differentiates them from their competitors and also create an umbrella brand to protect and make their products more powerful and facilitate the launch of the new products beyond the disease and its curative action.

To that end, it will be necessary to implement innovative and different communication strategies with the aim of creating their own brand territory. Certain cases such as L'Oreal, which has focused its communication on women scientists or Coca-Cola in happiness and the brand experience are easily comparable to pharmaceutical communication.

Once our identity and our own brand territory are identified, a new communication strategy will have to be implemented, which shall foster and disseminate our position with all kinds of communication tools. From the most traditional ones, such as

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advocacy or the relation with the media to –and mainly– taking advantage of the new opportunities currently offered by communication, which require an innovative and digital transformation of the company and its communication activities. NetRelease (multimedia features with a strong emotional impact), Brand Journalism activities, Consumer Engagement or even gamification are some of the instruments that will enable us to establish ourselves in the desired territory.

The important thing is to know our space and be coherent, both in the messages and the communication instruments we will use to conquer it.

Focusing the core of the (corporate and product) communication in a concept that defines and differentiates us is the only way to explain our leadership beyond our products to the society and obtain the necessary “social license” (and much more in the health sector) to operate and, at the same time, grant an own identity and distinctive prestige to our products.



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