Tailored communication

The more personalised the message, the more relevant it becomes to the recipient.

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HOW well do you know your customers? The more you know about them, the better you will be able to communicate with them. In the past, marketers have been limited by traditional mass media distribution, which does not encourage a conversation between seller and customer. This subversion of interactive communication and lack of knowledge about the customer likens the marketer to a stranger. Because the same messages are sent to all recipients, marketers sacrifice individual communication for those of the largest or most lucrative market segment.

More recently, marketers have turned to segmentation techniques in an effort to get closer to the customer. These, too, have failed because, even though marketers craft and deliver messages to targeted segments, they are assuming that each member of a segment (usually based on demographic data and survey results) is the same. Obviously, for pharmaceutical marketers, this will not work because each individual’s profile is unique.

In both cases, feedback does not exist between the company and product user. Take the example of communicating with a friend: without receiving your responses, a friend would have a difficult time gathering enough meaningful information to maintain a connection with you. Until companies engage in conversations with their customers, they are receiving only a fraction of the benefits that their marketing investment could provide. Hence the need for a new generation of marketing communications - called ‘tailored communication’.

Tailored messages

Tailored communication is the practice of delivering messages that are specifically prepared for an individual. A successfully communicated message conveys both relevance and intimacy to the receiver. Focusing on relevance ensures that only information of interest to the recipient is provided. Intimacy refers to the sender of the message relating to the recipient. Individually tailored messages are more likely to achieve the desired effects because generic material cannot readily be adapted to the changing needs of the individual - whereas tailored material can.

The healthcare industry - and pharmaceutical companies in particular - has a tremendous opportunity to take advantage of tailored communication to establish meaningful conversations and strong relationships with patients. Research indicates that providing health promotion, disease prevention and disease self-management information that is individually tailored to a patient’s needs, interests and comprehension skills can significantly impact changes in the patient’s health-related behaviours. Tailored communication enables disease self-management at the individual level by removing information in a given curriculum that does not pertain to the individual’s condition, needs or interests.

MicroMass Communications Inc, a customer relationship management company, uses a system that, with data collected from the individual, develops a profile to help determine the most pertinent information - and the best way to present...
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It to the individual. From the profile, a customised message is assembled, formatted and sent to the patient. A key part of the message is the opportunity for interaction - for example, a business reply card, e-mail or a Web-based form - to help create a dialogue with the patient. The patient's response is used to update his or her profile, enriching the database and facilitating the next, current communication with the patient.

This direct-to-patient communication is intended to present information of real value to patients - informing, instructing and motivating them, as well as prompting a call to action. By using a blend of innovative techniques and breakthrough technologies, a company can engage in a comprehensive dialogue with its customers - and build stronger relationships. The tremendous benefits of direct-to-patient communication include improved brand loyalty, increased customer retention and extension, and expanded re-sell, cross-sell and up-sell opportunities.

A case study

The following real-life case study of a smoking cessation programme demonstrates the impact that a tailored communication programme can have on direct-to-patient communication. The results are impressive and significantly impact patient welfare.

The challenge In the US, over 47 million people smoke. Each year nearly 16 million of them attempt to quit. Success depends on the ability to break both the physical and psychological addictions to nicotine. The success rate is low. Most people who try to quit begin smoking again within a month.

Smoking cessation products are effective in helping smokers to quit by blunting the physical symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, so the body can adjust to life without cigarettes. However, most smokers who purchase these products - which must be taken consistently over a period of time - usually do not remain compliant with the programme and, as a result, begin to smoke again. This is a result of the psychological addiction. The reason people decide to quit smoking, and the reasons they sometimes fail, are as individual as the patients are.

This truth motivated MicroMass Communications to learn more about individual smokers. The company worked with smoking cessation experts to determine the factors that contribute to a smoker's chance of successfully quitting, such as how long the person has smoked, how often the person smokes, whether the person's partner or family members smoke, and the person's work environment, education level, fears and motivations.

The strategy SmithKline Beecham Consumer Healthcare (SBCH), a major manufacturer of smoking cessation products, decided to improve the effectiveness of its smoking cessation programmes. The company partnered with MicroMass to design a personalised smoking cessation education and support programme to help smokers kick the habit by addressing their individual fears, barriers to quitting, smoking habits, health and lifestyle. Creative, behavioural science and engineering teams worked together to develop effective content. Using MicroMass’ innovative tailored interaction technology, the programme integrates call centre operations, a behaviour-modification curriculum, a dynamic customer database, a state-of-the-art on-demand fulfilment facility, additional retail partnerships and co-marketing promotions into one seamless operation.

Participants enrol in the programme by calling a toll-free number and answering questions about their motives to quit smoking, risky situations that tempt them to smoke and barriers to quitting. This profile information becomes the data that drives the customised behavioural change programme. Each day, the system receives data from programme participants through a call centre. The system then sends this data through the tailored interaction technology to generate individually customised direct mail pieces for the participants. Over the course of ten weeks, and along with the use of the medication, a series of customised materials - with offers, motivations, reminders and lifestyle recommendations - are mailed to the participants, discouraging their use of cigarettes. Participants can update their profile at any time, and each subsequent direct mail piece will be tailored accordingly. Upon successful completion of the programme, participants are rewarded with personalised certificates.

The results This programme has proven to be remarkably successful. According to Saul Shiffman, PhD, director of the Smoking Research Group at the University of Pittsburgh, smokers who participate in the programme are 50 per cent more likely to stop smoking (based on a 28-day continuous quit rate) than those who do not participate.

By communicating directly with individuals, lasting relationships can be established - and this translates into loyal customers. The more personalised the message, the more relevant it becomes to the recipient. Meaningful relationships significantly contribute to brand loyalty. In fact, studies have shown a 30 per cent rise in response rates if the recipient is offered tailored, personalised information. Although the field of tailored communication is relatively new, it has been demonstrated that tailoring disease self-management curricula to individual patients can significantly increase the effectiveness and improve the outcomes of disease management programmes.