

The Audit: A useful tool for your persistency programs?

by Rick Berard and Victor Strecher

Organizational structure, large brand teams, hectic schedules and shareholder-driven deadlines have led to a tightly defined division of labor for many pharmaceutical manufacturers. But is this a good thing?

On the one hand, building a staff of product marketing managers who have intimate knowledge of one specific market is critical to the development of materials that resonate with and impact a target audience. However, while this approach adds value at the tactical level, it can also result in a huge loss of strategic opportunity.

When initiatives are complementary and integrated across teams they can add up to an exponential return – often at a fraction of the cost. Many organizations recognize the “silo” dilemma – but increasing communication between divisions takes time, and the hectic schedules and tight timelines in the pharma world aren’t going away anytime soon.

Cross-team communication is even more essential when addressing an overarching organizational imperative like increased patient retention. The Consumer team needs to incorporate information about access programs as well as barrier management in patient communications; the Professional team must address pro-active side-effect management with the treatment team; the Market Research group must help the brand teams understand the

demographics of the target market, including co-morbidities and socioeconomic status; just to name a few. Broadening the “silo” to include just one organizational imperative like persistency is a clearly a challenge.

!Thinking outside the box

Traditional solutions to increasing cross-team communication and integrating marketing initiatives have included everything from simple status meetings to complete reorganizations of the marketing team structure. The simplest solution of all could literally be found outside of the box...an audit by a neutral third party. The benefits to be gained from implementing a third-party audit are many — not the least of which is a fresh point of view.

Is it possible for a company to do its own audit? Not if you consider the fact that teams, by their very nature, have a vested interest in winning. Sweat equity and ownership is built-in to each of the initiatives a marketing team produces. Trying to bring everyone – Consumer, Professional, Managed Market, E-healthcare and Market Research – to the table to share a single point of view is worthy, but challenging, to say the least – and may sacrifice the tactical advantage gained by developing these highly-skilled market experts.

Another audit benefit is expertise. An initial reaction to a cross-team organizational audit might be to bring in a large consulting firm. But first examine your end-goal: Are you trying to meet an organizational imperative to increase adherence? Then bring in an organization that specializes in consumer behavior change. Consider this an opportunity to get to know a vendor, see how they handle the sticky position of cross-team politics, and understand their strategic approach at a fraction of the monetary investment and time commitment. Make sure that whatever organization you do employ has a validated audit tool and a sound methodology behind their approach.

In addition to determining what’s missing from your initiatives or programs, an audit is an effective way to identify organizational best practices — figuring out what you are doing well. Key learnings can be distributed for adoption across the company, and teams are more willing to engage in improvements after receiving reinforcement for what they are doing right. An audit makes for stronger teams that are more inclined to cross team boundaries for the good of the company. Overall it’s a powerful component to keep in your toolbox for organization change.

Read on for a case study example of how Biogen-Idec used a behavior change audit to increase brand persistency and identify key areas for improvement.

Anatomy of an Audit:

A Case Study on Biogen-Idec’s Persistency Programs for Avonex

!SITUATION:

Patient support programs are considered the “cost of doing business” for manufacturers of disease modifying therapies (DMT’s) in the multiple sclerosis marketplace. Biogen-Idec, however, has gone above and beyond the traditional services to provide a comprehensive array of quality initiatives to assist their consumers in everything from receiving product (Avonex) to self-injection training. A full customer-service call center stands ready to answer patient inquiries and resolve acquisition barriers. In addition, consumers are encouraged to participate in any number of persistency programs, including: telephonic case management/ongoing therapy support, retail pharmacy & mail order programs, tailored direct mail campaigns, local live educational programs and web-based MS peer mentor/buddy systems.

These innovative and comprehensive persistency initiatives had been developed over time and within a variety of departments. Rick Berard, a Neurology Marketing Director with Biogen-Idec, was looking to better understand the relative efficacy of each program & gain incremental improvements throughout all the programs in order to better meet the needs of their patients. As responsibility for the Avonex persistency programs is spread throughout the Biogen-Idec organizational structure, Rick’s first move was to seek a neutral third party to come in and review these initiatives.

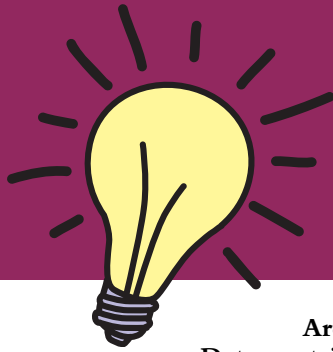
!SOLUTION:

Rick engaged HealthMedia, a behavior change company that specializes in improving medication adherence within the pharmaceutical marketplace, to audit the Biogen-Idec persistency materials and programs.

HealthMedia has developed criteria for evaluating any behavioral focused program, including persistency related initiatives. This 5-point evaluation has the acronym, **I.D.E.A.L.**, which focuses on the Integrated, Data-centric, Evidence-based, Adaptive, and Longitudinal nature of behavioral programming.

These criteria include the following:

Are the program components well Integrated? Most programs are put together in a piecemeal fashion over time, with limited integration. This development format is the root of inefficiencies and reduced effectiveness.



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Are the program components Data-centric?

Modern, population-based behavior change programs should be data-centric. It is unacceptable for such programs to include undocumented, non-standardized interactions with clients. The data management programming should be integrated with the behavioral intervention such that data analyses can document intervention pathways, identify modal pathways, and link these pathways to outcomes in a timely, efficient manner.

Are the program components Evidence-based? Two aspects of evidence-based thinking are important: (1) the behavioral components of disease management programs must be subject to the same evidence-based processes of any medical aspect of disease management, and (2) the data collected in behavioral programming should be organized and utilized for process and outcome evaluation.

Are the program components Adaptive? While it is clear that some intervention options are more efficient than others, it is also clear that clients express preferences for particular behaviors on which to work, and message channel with which to interact. Adaptive communication tailored to individual needs should remove extraneous feedback while focusing on the feedback required by the client. Moreover, within any behavioral issue of concern, some individuals may be considered to be at higher versus lower risk of adopting or maintaining an unhealthy behavior. Adapting behavioral programming to the specific priority status, needs and interests of the client will result in stronger outcomes.

Are the program components Longitudinal? Programmatic content should adapt over time to the changing needs of the client. Likewise, the frequency of interaction may need to change depending on both the preferences and needs of the client.

! RESULTS:

HealthMedia's team of behavior change experts reviewed all of the Biogen-Idec persistency materials, interviewed the many teams involved, and visited the Case Management and Customer Service Call Centers. What did they find?

Examples of Excellence: The Avonex teams were doing a lot of things really right. These best practices became immediately apparent to an outside observer. For example: communication was constant between the customer service center (a direct line to the needs of the consumer) and the brand team (the heart of the marketing message). Case

managers and care coordinators were empowered to put consumer needs first, and teams felt a sense of "ownership and pride" from working in this environment. Some of these best practices were captured and will be applied to future product launches within the MS category.

A fresh view can challenge the status quo: Certain perceptions of what an MS patient looked like and what they wanted from therapy had developed into an organizationally accepted "standard way of thinking". An outsider's perspective enriched this patient view and offered a fresh perspective and depth to this critical target market.

Tactical expertise and experience is waiting to be exposed: It's surprising how often the people who are actually doing the work are overlooked when seeking opportunities for improvement. At Biogen-Idec, some of the best and simplest solutions for addressing customer needs - extending work hours, offering consumers materials in their choice of media, and new program enrollment options - all came from in-depth interviews with team members and by asking old questions a new way.

Incremental changes can result in exponential return: By reviewing resource allocation and current constraints, HealthMedia was able to counsel Biogen-Idec to consolidate several initiatives into one program and develop a measurement tool for calculating call volume against resource requirements. This tool will help to calculate loss or gain of Avonex persistency from different case management call levels and resource allocations. Now Rick can implement changes with a higher expectation of outcomes and reduce the losses from a "hit or miss" approach.

Overall, the Avonex team found the audit experience enlightening and felt that they benefited from the simple exercise of taking a moment to examine their day-to-day activities. When asked if he would do it again, Rick Berard said, "It's certainly the first time I heard the word "Audit" and didn't cringe. Could we have identified these issues ourselves? Probably - given enough time, resources and energy. But bringing in an outside team was simple, quick and relatively painless - and the insights we gained will be valuable as we continue to grow our brand." ■

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