



The Retail Pharmacy - Effective Environment to Reach Targeted Consumers

by Gary Norman

Although there are more than 50,000 stores spread across the nation and nearly 15 million shoppers per day, the retail pharmacy is perhaps the most untapped medium for direct-to-consumer marketing. DTC spending has nearly tripled since 1997 and more than 98 percent of the annual \$3 billion is spent on broadcast and print advertising. The remaining two percent is devoted to Internet initiatives and outdoor advertising. Currently, spending on point-of-sale marketing initiatives is so limited it is not tracked on annual DTC spending surveys.

But with a growing movement of “self-care” among millions of American consumers, the retail pharmacy is becoming a significant point to reach consumers to deliver in-depth information, and drive dialogue and discussion in the doctor’s office.

Great opportunity

Not only do retail pharmacies out number the leading fast food chain, but also new chain drug stores are popping up on every



major street corner across the United States. With the baby boomer population aging, the outlook for continued growth remains positive. Up until recently, there has not been an effective way to reach the in-store audience on a national level.

Today, more than ever before in history, Americans suffering from a variety of common illnesses are more inclined to first treat themselves before seeking the advice of a physician, according to a Roper Starch study. The increased availability of information and over-the-counter remedies has led to a “do-it-yourself” attitude among consumers.

One of the first places many people head for relief is the over-the-counter section of their local pharmacy. With the proliferation of the number of OTC medications available today, consumers have multiple choices and therefore, tend to spend more time making their purchase decisions. Many people are empowered by the information available to them and take the time to read packaging to determine what product will fulfill their needs.

The retail pharmacy location offers DTC marketers one of the most targeted marketing opportunities available. New nationwide in-store vehicles are emerging to help pharmaceutical manufacturers reach this audience. The in-store environment provides the unique ability to reach specific consumers based on the particular products they may purchase. For example, if diabetics are the target audience, what better place to reach them than in the aisle where diabetic accessories are sold.

The same holds true for dozens of other health conditions. For many conditions, such as allergies, heartburn and skin problems, there are over-the-counter treatments that provide prescription drug marketers the ideal location to supply information to consumers who are currently experiencing symptoms or may be suffering from a chronic illness. In many instances where there is not an OTC alternative, there are many locations within the retail pharmacy to reach target

consumers. Information related to erectile dysfunction can be placed near men’s toiletries; osteoporosis near the shelf where calcium supplements are sold.

With this receptive audience, pharmaceutical companies have the opportunity to provide consumers with detailed information they seek about their specific condition and available treatment alternatives. Because booklets and pamphlets provide ample space for information and can be placed at the shelf near targeted products, they allow pharmaceutical companies the ability to educate consumers about the disease or condition, the symptoms, and the full benefits and side effects of a prescription drug.

In addition, the drug store has a distinct advantage over other media options - a licensed pharmacist is within reach to answer any questions. The pharmacist can reinforce the message, discuss the applicability of the information provided, and refer the patient to his or her physician.

Proven track record

Although the dollars spent to reach consumers in the retail pharmacy have been minimal, pharmaceutical companies that have ventured into the less navigated waters have been successful. Several at-shelf marketing programs have been tested and measured in CVS stores and other major retailers nationwide. The programs were closely monitored and measured, and included both test and control sites to capture accurate data.

As part of an overall DTC marketing strategy, the retail pharmacy has a strong role. By reaching consumers at perhaps their first step toward finding treatment, DTC marketers have the opportunity to help educate consumers about specific ailments and conditions, provide needed information on prescription alternatives, and direct them to their physicians for advice. ■

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