

Common missteps in melting-pot marketing

Pharmaceutical marketers must learn more, avoid half-measures, and broaden their channel selection to have any hope of reaching multicultural audiences.

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Pharmaceutical marketers have fallen into some bad habits when attempting to appeal to ethnic audiences. With some effort, however, marketers can learn from the common mistakes of multicultural marketing and learn to more effectively tease out the subtleties and communication processes of each community. Marketers can then use what they learn to develop multichannel, culturally conscious, community-specific campaigns.

One bad habit pharmaceutical marketers have fallen into when attempting to appeal to ethnic audiences is trying to please everyone with the actors or models used in ads, according to Cara Cocroft, account director, AbelsonTaylor Inc. (abelsontaylor.com). “There is currently a trend to cast a talent that is ‘ethnic ambiguous,’ which, quite frankly, creates confusion regarding who the brand is speaking to and may be viewed as dismissive among specific ethnic consumers,” Ms. Cocroft says.

Another such habit is forgetting that physicians and patients may not share ethnic backgrounds.

“Often there is reticence among ethnic consumers to question the expertise of healthcare providers, which can lead to a breakdown in communications and may ultimately compromise care,” Ms. Cocroft says. “It is paramount that marketers offer tools to empower patients as well as assist healthcare providers in becoming more culturally competent.”

As an example of this, Ms. Cocroft cites Pfizer Inc.’s (pfizer.com) *Amigos En Salud* (Friends in Health) program.

“*[Amigos En Salud]* provides culturally relevant education, outreach, access, and self-management tools to help Latino patients manage diabetes, diabetes-related complications, and co-morbid depression through reducing modifiable risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition,” she says.

Marketers must diversify their approach to succeed with multicultural audiences – and every step in that diversified approach must be informed by hard knowledge of what works and what doesn’t in a given community.

“We advise our clients to use a multichannel communication plan that recognizes multicultural consumers’ unique pathway to a prescription solution,” says Andy Bagnall, VP, account director, Prime Access. “Differences tracing to culture and language affect their pathway and the brand’s ability to favorably influence key points along that path.”

These differences include baseline awareness of the disease state – especially for consumers whose primary language is not

English because of limited access to in-language information – the greater influence of caregivers, the greater imbalance of power between healthcare providers and patients, and overall communication styles that challenge the health advocacy message of many pharmaceutical communications.

“For example, ‘talk to your doctor about ...’ isn’t so simple if there are multiple barriers to this conversation,” Mr. Bagnall says.

Authenticity is key, and marketers may pay a high price for missing the boat.

“On the delivery path, we should continue to increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts by focusing on providing a deeper level of authentic connectivity when addressing multicultural audiences,” says Alma Azua-Cassady, a consultant on Hispanics and healthcare. “In order to achieve this, we need to focus on better understanding the differences of patients and caregivers’ perspectives in an effort to improve healthcare treatment outcomes, which means having a deep understanding of all the patients’ clinical, practical, cultural, and emotional drivers. The opportunity for companies to market with cultural competence and capability and reap the benefits from it is of major proportions, particularly considering the demographic and purchasing power of these audiences.”

Go all the way

Ms. Cocroft believes that good multicultural marketing is an all-or-nothing situation. If marketers are not going to make an investment to understand the multicultural audience and develop insight-based communications, then they shouldn’t spend their money on multicultural promotions. It is not enough to merely translate language or cast multicultural talent.

“Successful marketers invest in up-front market research with ethnic populations to uncover personal and cultural insights related to their category and brands, thereby ensuring communications are relevant and resonate with their intended audience,” Ms. Cocroft says.

This view of multicultural marketing approaches – that all-in is best, and half-hearted is likely worse than nothing at all – is common among multicultural marketing veterans. Ms. Azua-Cassady believes that, in attempting to appeal to ethnic audiences, a little at a time doesn’t work very well.

“Results are not as compelling when the tactics are added bit by bit,” Ms. Azua-Cassady says. “It pays off to invest the time up

front, do market research, and identify which channels your audience is most responsive to, then allocate your positioning strategy and budget levels accordingly. When considering appropriate media mix, it is best for marketers to treat individual audience segments in the marketing plan independently, and consider what is relevant to the therapeutic area.”

Don’t just translate

Perhaps the most egregious example of half-heartedness in multicultural marketing is the simple “translation.”

“We have found that direct translation or ‘transcreation’ – in other words, simply retouching or simple editing of a general market ad – especially replacing ethnic faces in ads – is a short-sighted and an ineffective solution,” says Jon Yokogawa, VP, managing director of InterTrend Communications Inc. (intertrend.com), a full-service communications agency that focuses on the Asian-American community. “Being culturally relevant and appealing to a specific need within the segment is what works. Trying to be all things to all people in a short 30-second spot or print ad is too general, and, in some ways, insults the audience when you have a product that also has so much information such as symptoms,



Pfizer’s *Amigos En Salud* provides culturally relevant education, outreach, access, and self-management tools to help Latino patients manage diabetes, diabetes-related complications, and comorbid depression.

side-effects, legal information, etc. You want the consumer to find out more information by having it speak directly to them. This will encourage pursuit of more information – again, especially if it is in-language.”

To effectively reach a multicultural audience, pharmaceutical marketers must learn the language of their audience – not just spoken language, but level of health literacy and processes of making health-related decisions. Companies must also support physicians by providing them with insights into any ethnic groups they might be treating.

“First, [marketers] have to cover the basics,” says Marcos Sánchez, account director for Prime Access (primeaccess.net), an agency focused on African-American, Hispanic, gay, and urban youth consumers. “Understand and speak directly to the health literacy of the multicultural audience you want to reach in order to help facilitate patient/doctor dialogue.”

This may mean providing materials to healthcare providers that improve their cultural competence and help them communicate more effectively. Consider all the key influencers in the household. For example, in Spanish-speaking households it is common that the decision to go on medication becomes a group decision made by both the patient and the family member or caregiver (often younger) who spoke directly with the healthcare provider in English.

“Be relevant,” Mr. Sánchez says. “Connect the benefit of therapy to the audience’s higher values, such as maintaining the ability to work and provide for the family or maintaining their current lifestyle.”

Use grassroots tactics

Executing such a strategy, though, is a continuous undertaking. Companies must commit to learning about the community they are targeting and use multiple communication tools and strategies to reach them. In addition, marketers have to think creatively about channel selection, because the usual suspects might not work.

“For multicultural audiences, pharma companies need to build credibility, since many multicultural segments might be unfamiliar with the company, treatment, or even disease or illness,” Mr. Yokogawa told *Med Ad News*. “The pharma companies need to leverage more grassroots tactics – specifically

with hard-to-reach audiences or audiences where English is a second language – as part of their strategies. They should take advantage of community leaders, CBOs, and outreach programs to help provide clear benefits of the products and reduce cynicism.”

Maintain a strong infrastructure

A depth of support on the back end is also crucial. More emphasis should be placed on the pharmaceutical company’s support infrastructure, to follow through with the distribution and education of the products.

“Grassroots efforts, literature, et cetera, can drive inquiry and requests, but if the company does not have a support system for the multicultural client, the consumer will ultimately get frustrated and give up,” Mr. Yokogawa says. “Setting up ‘pop-up’ shops or point-of-sale advocates – as they do with other products – within the community or at events is one idea that might assist in those efforts.”

The idea of grassroots appeals to ethnic communities is a common thread among experts on multicultural marketing. Neeta Bhasin, president and CEO of ASB Communications (asbcommunications.com), a full-service communications agency dedicated to the South Asian and Middle Eastern markets in North America, believes that the usual broadspectrum TV commercials that pharmaceutical companies use simply do not touch chords or build trust in many ethnic communities.

“Pharma companies should start having more of a one-on-one association with the end user,” Ms. Bhasin says. “An information session addressing the target audience that explains uses, benefits, drawbacks, and more details should be presented. The event, however, should be followed by a tete-a-tete to give it a feeling of oneness and association.”

Tap into faith-based communities

Even though pharmaceutical companies understand that ethnic groups frequently have a greater incidence of some chronic conditions such as heart disease or diabetes, have growing purchasing power, and in many cases are underserved the great unmet challenge is the length of time it takes to inform, push a group into treatment, and have them stay adherent.

“Nearly all of the major pharmaceutical companies invest

periodically in spotty efforts to raise awareness and screen patients in areas with high ethnic concentrations,” says Larry Woodard, president and CEO of Vigilante Advertising (vigilantenc.com). “Virtually none of them have built comprehensive, multi-tiered programs that truly target ethnic populations by educating practitioners, raising disease state awareness, and screen, triage, and promote adherence through peer-to-peer and cultural organizations (like the African American church).”

Mr. Woodard believes that taking advantage of strong faith-based communities is one of pharma’s biggest missed opportunities. “With the striking increase in obesity over the past two decades and the resultant increase in heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses, I am not able to point to a single pharma company that has an effective strategy for reaching a market that is clearly there and clearly hurting,” he says. “The key is a mobilization of the very organized faith-based community in partnership with local and regional organizations. They all need to work against a single strategy where each benefits by the same outcome: healthier citizens, less of a drain on emergency rooms, a stronger work force, and more people on life-extending and life-saving medications.”

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