

The pharma marketer as change agent

Craig Dixon - Aug 9, 2010

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How marketers can drive change within the teams and brands they manage.

Charles Darwin once wrote: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives, it is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

Change has always been a constant in the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries.

However, now more than ever, the pressures for change within the industry are powerful and quite undeniable.

Real, meaningful change needs to be driven at all levels within the organization.

Senior management must have a clear vision and strong leadership to evolve the culture of the organization.

Staff need to feel they can trust senior management and that they are active participants in the journey.

So what is the role of the marketer during a time of change?

The role of the marketer

The best marketers pull together departments and resources right across the organization and align them to the needs of the customer.

They are able to pull people together, define and articulate common goals, and subsequently mobilize people.

The marketer therefore needs to engage, enthuse, and align a network of people involved with the brand, people over whom they normally have no line authority.

Not always an easy task, if you think about the wide range of stakeholders a strong marketer needs to bring together: regulatory, market access, medical, supply chain, clinical, communications, compliance, and, of course, sales.

The best marketers appreciate that bringing these important stakeholders on board as active participants in the planning process and tactical execution results in a better output for customers and, therefore, the brand.

Marketers, working at their best, can therefore be important facilitators and even drivers of change within the team of people around the brands they manage.

So, as a marketer, how do you make sure you are performing to the peak of your ability?



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As a manager, how do you make sure your people are operating at their best when you need it the most?

Change is about people, and we want to make sure that we are investing enough in the right people in the right areas to help them perform at their best.

For organizations, the best way to approach this is through auditing, not just a marketing audit per se, but including an audit of performance standards.

Based on the insights from the audit, you can determine the areas you are good at (so you keep doing them) and the areas that could benefit from support.

From experience, to ensure marketing teams are performing at their best, audit insights normally result in programs based around three key areas: the right knowledge, the right skills, and the right processes.

The right knowledge

A strong understanding of the therapy area and brand has always been required.

In many pharma companies, a scientific qualification has been, and still is, a prerequisite.

This certainly does help with scientific terminology.

The industry has a lot of terminology to master: scientific, medical, regulatory, supply chain, marketing, and sales jargon.

The evolution of healthcare and regulatory environments has led to new departments—such as compliance, market access, and e-communications—and with them have come their own new languages.

Marketers need to fully understand these internal stakeholder functions and terminology to ‘speak their language’ and fully integrate internal functions into the brand (or therapy) teams to ultimately get the best result for the brand.

We also need to remember that marketing itself has a lot of terminology, which can be a source of confusion to those in other departments.

So we also need to be aware of this and be able to articulate in everyday language.

A working knowledge of functions, and being able to articulate them in simple language, is an invaluable asset that will not only aid communication but also help build rapport and pull the team together.

This knowledge underpins the interpersonal skills the marketer needs.

The right skills

The Pareto principle—success is 20% strategy and 80% implementation—is often applied when the marketing plan is signed off.

The marketer’s job is therefore only just beginning.

With multiple channels of communication, the marketer needs to be confident that the plan is being implemented as envisioned.

A good working knowledge of selling skills and the processes that customer-facing staff utilize is therefore essential not only to ensure strategies are tactically grounded but also to ensure they can effectively get off the page and deliver value.

Coaching and strong interpersonal skills are therefore vital to ensure effective implementation. (For more on coaching, see [‘Coaching for sales effectiveness’](#).)

Ideally, the marketer will bring all the internal stakeholders together to have input into the plans through the planning process.

Good facilitation skills will enable the marketer to produce a more robust plan while allowing each stakeholder to have ownership, thus managing to get all the internal stakeholders brought into the strategy.

The time taken to achieve buy in will be paid back several times over, as this will help with the tactical implementation.

The right process

Having a clear understanding of the type(s) of patient you want to target, how they get to your prescriber, and physicians’ decision-making processes is no longer enough.

The marketing process needs to consider the array of stakeholders, medical and non-medical alike, who are becoming increasingly important, including the patient and the payer as well as the physician.

Decision-making within the modern healthcare environment is a multifaceted process that needs an aligned multifaceted approach from the industry.

This has to start within the brand planning process, utilizing a process that encompasses all customers that we as an industry now have.

Each of these customers has different needs and different environmental pressures that need to be determined and considered.

The identified stakeholders’ influence and their potential alignment to the marketing objectives need to be taken into account when establishing how to influence the decision-making process.

Understanding the ability of your brand to demonstrate an economical and health benefit is essential, with a clear understanding of the value your brand offers and (most importantly) how this value relates to each of your stakeholders.

Each stakeholder type therefore needs bespoke communication messages, delivered through relevant channels in a way to which they will respond.

In short, your brand planning process needs to carry each stakeholder right through the process to deliver a strategy that can be implemented in an aligned fashion.

Darwin was right

Ultimately, the changes we will see in the industry in the years to come are impossible to predict with any degree of accuracy.

But change is guaranteed, and the industry will have to adapt to the changing healthcare environment.

In *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin wrote: "In the struggle for survival, the fittest win out at the expense of their rivals because they succeed in adapting themselves best to their environment."

To actively shape the healthcare environment and adapt as an organization will take strong leadership, trust, and marketers with the right knowledge, skills, and processes.

It will all come down to survival of the fittest.

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