

# Cover all bases

## Use a multichannel strategy to help patients make informed decisions

The recent White Paper, *Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS*, sets out a vision for patients in England, ensuring they have choice over their treatment, based on the view that such involvement improves patient outcomes. The White Paper states: "In addition to NHS choices, third parties will be encouraged to provide information to support patient choice." This will include a range of online services to provide more information, education and data on all aspects of healthcare.

Patients will also be given access to their records and have the option to share these with patient groups and any other organisation they deem fit. The aim being to create "informed patients exercising choice" with the aid of a new consumer champion, Health Watch England, located in the Care Quality Commission.

The increase in channels of communication available to patients, such as the internet, direct-to-consumer disease awareness, self-help groups and communication through patient groups, has led to patients becoming more engaged with their treatment. Patients can act as advocates for your product in the clinic and, to some degree, become a voice for your product in the community.

This means, as an industry, we now have a triad of decision-makers to interact with: physician, payer and patients. Before setting your marketing strategy, the patient's role and the communication channels to them need to have been considered alongside the physician and the payer.

Kasha Witkos, Associate European Marketing Director at a major pharmaceutical company, notes: "Patients are becoming more informed about their diseases and available treatments, often asking the clinician to prescribe a specific product. In some disease areas, this can have quite a strong influence on the final treatment selection."

### Strategic planning

As decision-making in Europe's healthcare system is becoming multifaceted, the industry needs to adopt a similar approach. This has to start within the brand planning process, utilising methods that encompass all three customer groups. Each of these has different needs and different pressures that must be understood. Also, it is just as important to consider your audience's environment, which can vary greatly from disease to disease. For example, patients with certain conditions may gain 'heroic' status due to preconceptions of the disease or media portrayal. However, other conditions may have a stigma attached or be largely 'invisible'.

The identified stakeholders' influence and their potential alignment to the marketing objectives needs to be taken into account when establishing how to influence the decision-making process. Each stakeholder type therefore needs bespoke communication messages, delivered through relevant channels in a way that they will respond to. In short, the brand planning process needs to carry each stakeholder right through the process to deliver a strategy that can be implemented in an aligned fashion.

Once the strategy is defined and the tactical plan finalised, you may consider getting an agency on board for certain projects. The best way to approach this is to conduct a gap analysis to identify what skills and capabilities are missing internally. This way, you can determine what type of agency you need and what skills they need. With a clear idea on what you need an agency to deliver, you can start selecting suitable agencies for credentials presentations.

### Selecting agencies

The best place to start is to seek the views of your peers in the industry to ask which agencies have they worked with and which they would recommend. *Communiqué* is a good source of information to allow you to find an agency that is the right size for the budget you have. Ideally, your spend should account for enough of the agency turnover to remain important to them, but not make them reliant on your spend. Equally, *Communiqué* is also a good source to get a feel for therapeutic experience or any potential areas of conflict.

When inviting agencies in for credentials, always contact them by phone, as this will give you a feel for what they could be like to work with. Briefly explain what skills and experience you are looking for and enquire about their capacity. Be selective; do not invite too many agencies in – it wastes your time and theirs.

Before the presentations, set yourself some performance qualifiers that you and your team can rate the agencies against. This should be driven by your gap analysis, but will

also include some must-haves, such as quality of reference work, capacity and feel for likely relationships with key personnel. Drawing up a scorecard to include these factors will provide you with a quantitative way of comparing the agencies likely performance.

Depending on the level of spend, you may select an agency on the basis of the credentials presentations or select two or three agencies to go forward to a formal pitching process.

### Pitching for an agency

Firstly, as part of the housekeeping, get each agency to sign a confidentiality agreement. Secondly, get your brief right. Be specific about what you want: the target audience, the behaviours you are trying to change, timelines for delivery of projects, any constraints or guidelines to follow, what success looks like and finally, a guideline budget. It is also a good idea to insist that only agency staff that would work on the account on a day-to-day basis be involved in the pitch and attend the presentation. This avoids you buying the work of a senior staff that you never see again afterwards.

Your brief may also include a full market background from your strategic plan to allow the agency the opportunity to demonstrate added value by suggesting alternative tactics. Finally, be transparent about how

you are going to rate the agencies during the pitch.

Always provide the agencies with adequate time to prepare for the pitch and never invite an agency to pitch if you have no intension of working with them. Pitches consume considerable resources, so you need to make sure everyone invited can truly win the business.

### The pitch

Ask yourself the following about each agency: Did they ask astute questions? Did you enjoy interacting with them and would you enjoy working with them? Did they impart confidence? During the presentations, rate the agencies against your predefined criteria, probe on areas that you are unsure of to provide each agency the opportunity to shine. Finally, take notes to allow you to provide constructive and detailed feedback to all agencies post-pitch.



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### Key points:

- Changes to the NHS and an increase in information sources have empowered patients to take a more active role in their health and treatments
- Strategic plans need to consider the needs of not just the physician and payer, but also the patient, to allow marketers to devise the most effective strategy and tactical plans
- Gap analysis should be conducted to determine the skills and capabilities required to ensure success in this rapidly changing environment. If these are not available internally, then it is vital to outsource these to an external agency
- The process to select an external agency should be based around capability gaps, be transparent, structured and fair
- Integrating the agency into the brand team as can bring fresh ideas and challenge to allow you to approach physicians, payers and patients in the modern healthcare environment in an aligned fashion.

### Comments from:

Kasha Witkos, Associate European Marketing Director at a major pharmaceutical company

a quick look

