



# Three things that will make an impact on Marketing Healthcare, on the road to 2010

In recent times, the concept of marketing 'healthcare' is coming into its own. As our perception of health changes to encompass other aspects like well being, internal and topical wellness, the way we receive messages pertaining to healthcare products are also fundamentally altered, impacting our purchase decisions.

Three emerging trends, which are expanding the scope of and changing the nature of healthcare marketing, are discussed below.

## Illness to Wellness and the Rise of 'Herbal' OTCs

Traditionally, health meant a state of no-illness. Today, however, health is defined holistically and is a function of lifestyle, diet and fitness, physical, emotional and even spiritual well being.

With the focus changing from treatment of illness to maintenance of wellness, health management has become the new mantra. People are increasingly concerned with prevention of diseases and this has led to the rising popularity of Over-the-Counter medicines and supplements.

OTC products are available to treat or prevent several lifestyle related disorders like stress, hypertension, lowered immunity, and diabetes among others. Consumers are increasingly aware of the causes of these conditions and are seeking ways to prevent them from occurring. Since OTC products are mostly taken on a long-term basis, people favour herbal or natural products vis-à-vis chemical based supplements. Of course, consumers are not going to buy in to a particular supplement because it is herbal, but will closely evaluate factors like the brand, research validating product claims and proven efficacy.

Herbal OTC growth is also driven by consumer demand for permanent rather than temporary solutions. To elaborate, previously consumers with skincare concerns would use a cream, lotion or some homemade remedy, which was applied topically. For example, the use of Neem paste for acne treatment. However, today consumers want to 'detox' from within and hence prefer to use a Neem capsule, which cleanses impurities from within and effectively treats several skincare problems. It is also convenient to use.

As more consumers begin to take decisions on lifestyle related health issues on their own, the role of information becomes crucial, leading us to the second trend impacting healthcare marketing.

## Age of the Informed Consumer

With information becoming easily available and widely accessible through the Internet, consumers now do their own extensive research before buying any product. As such, it is imperative that companies provide them with reliable, real-time information, in order to help them make an informed decision. Information needs to be tailored to

address concerns of specific stakeholders, clearly spelling out product features and benefits and backing these claims with empirical research, consumer experiences and testimonies. For instance, just stating that a product contains Neem is not sufficient but marketers will have to explain aspects like amount of Neem included, its specific benefits and results.

Word-of-mouth or viral marketing is also gaining importance as consumers trust products that have been recommended by experts and peers over commercials. Companies need to create several touch points depending on the nature of the market, demographic and psychographic profile of consumers.

And finally, the third trend that is impacting healthcare marketing and taking the concept of health to an altogether new level is the foray of healthcare companies into the personal care space.

## Personal Care, a matter of health

Interestingly, many healthcare or pharmaceutical companies over the last decade have entered the personal care space. Scientific research, the mainstay of drug discovery, is increasingly applied to personal care products, giving rise to the emergence of a different category of personal care products that focus on health and beauty. The age-old distinction between products that catered to health and others that catered to beauty is now blurred, with healthcare companies drawing on their vast knowledge base to develop high end cosmeceuticals or personal care products. These products are moving beyond the 'feel good' factor and encompassing the 'do-good' element. Previously molecular technology, chemical or plant based, was centered on drug development. Today, its scope is expanding to include personal care products. And here, healthcare companies have a distinct first-mover advantage.

For instance, earlier, a sunscreen was positioned as a product that prevented skin darkening, where the focus was on a cosmetic benefit. However, today, sunscreens are positioned as products that protect skin from harmful UV rays, which are cancer causing. Thus, there is a decisive shift in product messaging. Another example is that of weight management products. Products for weight control address the problem of obesity, which is a health concern and also help maintain a slim and fit body, which is tied in to notions of beauty. Thus, we are seeing a merging of health and beauty products, with marketing language veering towards focusing on the health platform and concrete product deliverables.

To sum up, in the present state of flux, markets will always be throwing up new challenges and new avenues to be explored. However, in the upcoming years, the above-mentioned trends will greatly influence the way the world healthcare and personal care market evolves.



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