

Maintaining a balance between creativity and analyses is key to effective marketing



MNG Health

A BALANCED APPROACH TO BRAND PLANNING

Helping clients create more 'winners' in their tactical plans

By Mark Heinold, CEO, MNG Health

It's the time of year again when summer vacations start to wind down, kids dread the first day of school, and pharma marketers make their final push to finish next year's tactical plans.

The pharma brand planning process relies on the fundamentals of business planning, but each company and its partners put a different spin on timing,

inputs and outputs, and the balance between the old and new.

At MNG Health, we have helped clients through this process for nearly 18 years, and together we've learned how to simplify and focus on doing more of what works and less of what doesn't. That sounds easy, but without consistent measurement and organizational memory, it can be difficult to sort the winners from the losers and develop a dependable and sustainable portfolio of successful tactics.

The task is made easier by starting with a foundation of tried and true tactics based on a massive volume of data-rich HCP interactions that yield deep insights about customer behaviors, preferences, and broader trends.

Balancing the known with the new

Effective marketing is most often a balance between unbounded right-brain creativity and systematic left-brain analyses, grounded in lots of data.



Planning is one of several marketing processes that requires both sides of the brain to collaborate and yield a solution that satisfies both the need for reliable results and the need for novelty and innovation. Planning can also be used as a tool to pressure test the strategy and ultimately make it better.

Sometimes innovation happens as a home run, but more often than not it happens as a series of singles and doubles. In fact, incrementally evolving and improving the things that work is sometimes a more valuable kind of innovation in an industry that has an allergic reaction to large and rapid changes.

While difficult to predict the impact of a new-to-the-world solution, innovation must sooner or later be accountable for business results. Otherwise it's just an experiment that doesn't scale and takes resources away from investments with more predictable returns.

Precision medicines, precision marketing

I've often thought because many of our clients create precision medicines, it's fitting we help them create HCP awareness and engagement using precision marketing. Precision marketing can also be called evidence-based marketing — using customer behaviors and responses; location and time of day, channel, content, and other preferences; and overall program performance data to inform the evolution of the tactics that make up the marketing system.

Tactic timing and duration are also important considerations in constructing an annual marketing plan. A combination of burst campaigns and long-term capabilities should ideally drive toward the same overall outcome — supporting or changing customer behaviors.

Often, brand teams and their external partners gravitate toward several stand-alone campaigns every few months, when they need a stable, longer term platform in place to capture, analyze, and activate the interest generated by those campaigns. Again, balance is the key to creating an effective ecosystem.

Include customers, suppliers in process

It may seem obvious that sound strategy and effective planning require a continuous closeness to the customer. Many brand teams have this connection with thought leaders. However,

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they can also benefit from their agencies' and other external partners' relationships with — and deep understanding of — a much broader population of prescribers.

At MNG Health, we practice what we preach: 90% of our successful new products originated with an idea from our customers during some type of planning exercise.

External partners also provide continuity during planning, execution, and optimization when there is turnover within the brand team or support functions. Further, with a wider view of the industry, they can help pharma companies optimize messaging and investments across their brands, portfolios, and key customer segments.

Particularly at the start of the planning process, it's critical to have as many partners as practical around

the table to align on a common understanding of what is working and what is not, based on all of the relevant data.

Timing is everything

Most life sciences companies have a finely tuned annual brand planning process with clear deliverables at defined points throughout most of the year. So, it's important to carefully time inputs such as customer insights, competitive assessments, program performance data, marketing mix analyses, and others so these are available when needed by the brand teams.

It's also critical to bring innovative ideas to the table during the tactical planning and budgeting phase, which for 2019 is happening now and will continue into early fall.

Often suppliers will wait until the new year turns over to shop around their new offerings, but unfortunately nearly all investment decisions have been made by that time.

As pharma brand teams near the end of 2019 “planning season,” they must focus on the fundamentals in order to drive more predictable results. After that, we recommend experimenting with new approaches to address their most important challenges.

Of course, having a thoughtful plan is only a starting point when the calendar turns over in January and your tactics start engaging real customers.

5 STEPS TO BALANCE TRIED-AND-TRUE WITH THE NEW

1. Clearly articulate which problems you are solving
2. Use data to understand if there are well-tested tactics that are already working
3. Do more of what's working, and less of what's not
4. Invest in small experiments to broaden your portfolio of “things that work”
5. Continuously measure and shift resources to the “winners” in your portfolio