

## Up Front

### Pharma Marketing vs. Healthcare Communication

I was interviewed by phone a few weekends ago about the reputations of global pharmaceutical companies. The interview was sponsored by a company that is trying to remake its image in the US market.

I was asked to rate several companies on a number of attributes that impact their reputations. These attributes included how each company promoted access to its medicines (eg, patient assistance programs), its ethics, transparency, innovation, and how well it listened to patient needs.

At one point I was asked my opinion about a tag line that the sponsor company was testing. It included the phrase "healthcare company" as in "A global healthcare company that... yadda, yadda, yadda."

Whenever someone refers to a pharmaceutical company as a "healthcare company" the hairs on the back of my neck (where I still have some hair) rise up. This often happens when I speak to agencies that do consulting work for pharmaceutical companies and talk about "healthcare communications" when they actually mean pharmaceutical marketing.

Are pharmaceutical companies healthcare companies? Should we replace "pharmaceutical marketing" with "healthcare communications?"

The way I see it, pharmaceutical companies are NOT healthcare companies because most pharma companies do NOT deliver health care and do not collect information directly from patients for the express purpose of delivering health care and processing healthcare data. If they did, they would be subject to HIPAA privacy regulations. Pharma companies have rightly denied that they must obey HIPAA regulations precisely on the grounds that they are not healthcare providers (ie, delivering health care).

There are some exceptions to this "rule" as one anonymous Pharma Marketing Blog commentator pointed out: "Healthcare is indeed provided by



Pharma for some products requiring intensive home management (e.g. parenteral nutrition, drug cartridge replacements). In these cases a Pharma employed nurse is used. However, strict segregation of the confidential patient data is made from company systems and the HCPs also operate to their professional code of conduct as they would in any hospital or other healthcare setting."

In my view, for the most part, the pharmaceutical industry is to healthcare as the defense industry is to warfare. Just as the

defense industry provides weapons to warfare delivery organizations (eg, armies and navies) to fight wars, the pharmaceutical industry delivers weapons (ie, drugs) to healthcare providers (eg, doctors) to fight diseases and improve people's health.

I thought the analogy was useful for explaining why I did not like a pharmaceutical company tagline that referred to the company as a "healthcare company."

Maybe, however, all pharmaceutical companies will someday evolve to become healthcare companies by merging with, say, hospital systems or managed care organizations. Just a thought.

Back to "healthcare communications" vs. "pharma marketing." Although I addressed the "healthcare" vs. "pharma" part in the above comments, the relationship between "communications" and "marketing" is a bit more complex.

Kevin Kruse, Kru Research, said "this topic is really close to home for me. As you know, my newsletter and conference is intended to build bridges between pharma marketers, public health educators, and hospital marketers (and others). But trying to promote stuff with the umbrella term 'healthcare communications' doesn't sound right to pharma, and of course 'life science marketing' doesn't sound right to the public health folks. I wish I knew the right term for all, because there IS significant overlap IMHO."

*Continues...*

It may be interesting to see examples of overlap, but the point I am trying to make is whether or not marketing can be called communication.

This is more than a symantic issue. If you believe "communication" is a one-way flow of information from a source to a receiver, then "marketing" may be said to communicate. But these days, communication is taking on a new meaning: two-way conversation where the receiver can become the source and vice versa. And that's something pharma marketing has not yet mastered.

I welcome your thoughts on this issue. Please submit comments to Pharma Marketing Blog here: <http://bit.ly/5rLPbQ>



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**John Mack, Editor**



**Use of Behavioral Targeting by Pharma**

**Pharma Marketing News Survey**

When is it acceptable for pharma to use Behavioral Targeting to deliver ads online?  
Should pharma adopt BT principles?

"The practice of advertising has clearly been revolutionized by the emergence of the Internet. Today, we can match the content of an ad to the interests of the consumer in ways undreamed of just a few short years ago," said Nancy Hill, President & CEO, 4A's.

Survey questions include:

- Have you ever used behavioral targeting in an online advertising campaign?
- Should the pharmaceutical industry adopt similar self-regulatory principles that were established by media and marketing trade associations to protect consumer privacy when employing behavioral targeting?
- Should pharma marketers use behavioral targeting at all?
- If they do use it, when is it appropriate?

Please take 2 minutes to answer this survey relating to the use of behavioral targeting to deliver ads online.

Take the survey here: <http://bit.ly/7oJCun>

You will be able to see a summary of up-to-date de-identified results upon completion of the survey.

Your comments are confidential (anonymous) unless you specifically provide your contact information at the end of the survey and allow us to attribute comments to you personally..

**TAKE THE SURVEY ONLINE HERE:** <http://bit.ly/7oJCun>