

## Service Review

# Stop Wasting \$Millions on Ineffective DTC Ads!

*Testing Technology Can Help Improve Ads and Engage Viewers*

By John Mack



**Lee Weinblatt**

You're wasting hundreds of millions of dollars on ads that aren't delivering your key messages! And it has nothing to do with FDA rules.

That's the opinion of Lee Weinblatt, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the [PreTesting Company](#).

Weinblatt's company has been measuring the effectiveness of drug ads

since 1974. Of course, at that time there were only print ads aimed at physicians in medical journals. Today, the pharmaceutical industry spends in excess of \$5 billion per year on direct to consumer (DTC) advertising and billions more on physician ads.

Mr. Weinblatt was a guest on a [recent Pharma Marketing Talk podcast](#), where he spoke about some of the major mistakes that pharmaceutical advertisers make with regard to measuring the effectiveness of their ads.

### Three Common Mistakes

According to Weinblatt, the three common mistakes made by most advertisers—including pharmaceutical advertisers—are:

**MISTAKE # 1.** Depending on "forced exposure" as a measure of effectiveness. Because it's cheap and can be done quickly, most ad testing—whether it's TV, radio or print ad testing—is being done on forced exposure, either in a focus group or individually. The subject is asked to look at an ad and say what he or she likes or dislikes. That's not how people are exposed to ads in the real world.

**MISTAKE # 2.** Excluding the competition from the testing. It's a big mistake to say that a brand A ad got this amount of recall and x amount of playback (see below) without also having competitor ads in the mix. This gives you a false sense of security because the competitors may have a much stronger message.

**MISTAKE #3.** Not measuring "competitive imagery." The true measure of whether a DTC ad is going to work is if the viewer believes that the advertised product is better than another product the consumer has been using or better than doing nothing if that is what they have been doing up to this point. If the ad does not change the viewer's attitude towards either his or her problem or the product, a great deal of money and/or opportunity has been wasted.

### The Package Goods Path is the Wrong Path

"In the good old days," said Weinblatt, "only pharmaceutical specialist agencies handled medical ads, most of which were directed at physicians. Today, many pharmaceutical DTC advertisers are using the matrix that packaged goods advertisers use to measure effectiveness and "this is leading them down the wrong path," says Weinblatt.

The three key metrics that make up this matrix are (1) recall of the brand name, (2) playback of anything the brand says, and (3) will they take some action (ie, see their doctor)?

For most advertised products, "unaided recall" guides the consumer, who sees products on the shelf and buys the ones he or she heard about in an ad. This does not work for pharmaceutical products—there are many more steps before consumers can get their hands on a drug that they saw advertised. Imagine you are the consumer. First, you have to admit that you are sick or that you need help. Then, you have to make time to see your doctor.

"The problem is," says Weinblatt, "for 90% of the cases, these metrics don't work for consumer products and they are the WORST measures that could possibly be used for drug ads, which require much more of the consumer than grabbing toilet paper off the shelf!"

Most people will not remember the name of a product. What they will do is either tear an ad out of a magazine or write it down. "If you consider that to be your major accomplishment," says Weinblatt, "then you've wasted a lot of money."

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Ads produced by agencies that use the packaged goods effectiveness measurement matrix may win awards, but that is no guarantee of an ad's success. In 1997, the Budweiser "Whassup!?" TV commercial won the Gold Lion, which is the international Oscar of the advertising world. No one mentioned, however, that Budweiser lost over 20% of its market share (sales) that year!

### **PreTesting Technology**

There are technologies that have been out there for quite a while that can almost immediately tell a pharmaceutical advertiser whether or not the ad is talking to the right audience and on their wavelength.

For 31 years, PreTesting has used eye movement recorders to see if consumers, on their own—*not* with forced exposure—stop to look at an ad and read it when scanning a magazine.

"If that kind of commitment is not made," says Weinblatt, "the ad is missing them by a mile, even if the consumer remembers the name of the drug."

For print ads, PreTesting uses eye movement recorders hidden in reading lamps. It records when the subject reads headlines, key body copy, and how much time is spent looking at these areas, and other measures.

The same type of measurements can be made with TV ads.

What PreTesting measures is Saccadic Eye Motion. You cannot see without this motion. Humans and other animals do not look at a scene in a steady way. Instead, the eyes move around, locating interesting parts of the scene and building up a mental 'map' corresponding to the scene.

Only the central part of the retina, the fovea, has a high concentration of color sensitive photoreceptor cells called cone cells. The rest of the retina is mainly made up of monochrome photoreceptor cells called rod cells, which are especially good for motion detection. Consequently, the fovea makes up the high-resolution central part of the human retina. By moving the eye so that small parts of a scene can be sensed with greater resolution, body resources can be used more efficiently.

"The speed at which your eyes vibrate depends completely upon your emotional interest in whatever you're viewing," says Weinblatt. "The vibrations are controlled by the brain's desire to

obtain more visual information. If someone is engaged in a visual, the brain will seek more details and specifics, creating more focus points, and thus, faster vibrations."

"We measure eye motion second by second in a target audience to determine whether or not a certain commercial has captured the visual attention of viewers and if they are really involved with the commercial," says Weinblatt.

### **Case Study: Sleep Aid Ads**

Chris Benecchi, director of Rozerem marketing for Takeda Pharmaceuticals North America, claims that the new Rozerem ads, "Catch the Bus" and "Off to Work", have higher brand recall. "Brand linkage metrics, consumer awareness numbers have all steadily progressed over the life of the product," says Benecch. "Now 'Rozerem' is coming through much more strongly."

"Recall by itself means very little to consumers," says Weinblatt. "They can recall many products, but if you do not make it emotionally important to them—especially when you asking them to call up a doctor, make an appointment, pay a co-pay, and admit to having a problem—you are really going down the wrong path."

"Talking about dreams means nothing to older people who cannot sleep through the night," says Weinblatt. "They may keep looking at the beaver, but wondering what Rozerem has to do with dreams."

When PreTesting tested the Lunesta TV ad, it discovered 2 amazing things. When the moth alighted on the faces of the people in the ad, not only did the viewer's eye shift from the moth to the person falling asleep, but the saccadic motion and fixation went up incredibly. "They couldn't wait to see the person's eyes close!," says Weinblatt.

Compare this to the Rozerem ad. There is very high activity on the beaver, not so much on Abe Lincoln. But the problem is that the beaver does not have anything to do with sleeping! In fact, a beaver represents the opposite of sleep. "I would be very careful about having a beaver around if I wanted to fall asleep," quips Weinblatt.

Only in recent Rozerem commercials – eg, "Catch the Bus" – is Rozerem's main advantage (ie, it is non-habit forming) espoused by the beaver! But that line goes so fast that if I had taken another bite of snack food I would have missed it!

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**Jarvik vs. Sally**

Although Weinblatt wouldn't reveal the actress's name, he mentioned an ad for a bone loss drug featuring an actress whose first name begins with the letter 'S.'

"She's not wearing a beaver hat, there are no moths flitting around, but the saccadic eye motion of the target audience is incredible when she is talking to the camera," says Weinblatt. "The viewing audience really has an emotional bond with her."

The same could not be said for the Lipitor ads featuring Dr. Jarvik. "The saccadic eye motion in the audience was virtually nil," says Weinblatt.

**Typical Jobs for PreTesting Company**

PreTesting typically measures the potential of various executions of ad from pharmaceutical and other clients. There may be a number of different executions and clients want to know which has the best potential.

"Sometimes, however, clients come to us after a campaign has been running for a month with very little impact—eg, no bump-up in sales, very few people calling the 1-800 number, etc.," says Weinblatt.

Weinblatt insists there is a strong correlation between the potential his company measures and the success of DTC ads to drive prescriptions. He cites the erectile dysfunction (ED) drug market as an example.

"We've been warning for some time about ED drug ads," says Weinblatt. "Most of the ED drug ads are going over everyone's heads. One of our key findings about ED advertising is the need to make the target male audience feel young again and believe that they are still masculine. Most recent ED drug ads do not address that and sales of ED drugs have been flat or even gone down."

The old "Joe" Viagra ads, which showed a man comfortable with his sexual prowess, elicited incredible scores in PreTesting's tests, although the male subjects never verbalized that the ads made them feel like men again.

Weinblatt declined to comment on the new "Viva Viagra" TV ad. His company had not done any tests on this ad. It remains to be seen whether or not men engaged in youthful garage-band activity elicits the kind of eye movement that Weinblatt is talking about.

**Testing TV Ads in a TiVO World**

PreTesting now has over 100 testing sites for TV ads across the US. This patented home viewing simulator has consumers feel as if they are watching TV in the comfort of their own homes.

"We have consumers watch their choice of television shows with remote controls in hand," says Weinblatt. "At the same time, we ensure that they'll see the test commercial twice throughout the programs. During the process, we gather in-depth feedback that points directly to a commercial's weak and strong points."

Behind the scenes, the technology is giving viewers the chance to switch back and forth between channels. The test commercial is systematically and simultaneously placed twice within each show—guaranteeing the consumer will see it. They believe they are evaluating the actual programs. This lets them absorb or avoid (zap) the commercial without bias, as they would at home.

During the viewing session, the Simulated Network™ records a Cumulative Zapping Score (or CZ) that tells PreTesting's clients precisely at what point in the commercial consumers are changing the channel—or "zapping" their commercials. The additional recording of Saccadic Eye Motion provides second-by-second measurement of actual viewer engagement.

**More Mistakes Advertisers Make**

PreTesting latest testing technology, MediaCheck, is now already in 30,000 homes in Austin, Omaha and San Diego. Using exclusive inaudible codes hidden within client commercials, it can record the second by second viewing habits of its audience, especially how test commercials are received.

"One of the biggest mistakes we see over and over again is the number of drug commercials that are on the wrong shows simply because they may have a larger audience than a more targeted venue," says Weinblatt.

"We find, for example, that ads for certain drugs—eg, for bone loss prevention, blood thinning, etc.—work much better in the local news slot between 4 and 6 PM than during prime time. Even if you are reaching the target audience for these products in prime time, they are in a different mood than during the 4 to 6 PM time period and are zapping more frequently during prime time."

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## How to Create an Effective Drug Ad

The following are a few of PreTesting's key findings from many years of testing physician-targeted and DTC print ads and TV commercials.

1. Never treat a pharmaceutical ad/commercial as "just another consumer execution." This is the greatest mistake made by most pharmaceutical companies and their agencies. They believe that their ads and commercials should have the same level of excitement as a typical consumer execution. It may work for recall, but not for sales.
2. Unlike a consumer's purchase of an off-the-shelf product, a DTC product usually requires the reader/viewer admitting that he/she has this problem (often embarrassing), requires a doctor's appointment, costs the patient real time off from work, requires a patient request from the doctor (often against the physician's recommendations) and entails a high co-pay expense.
3. Because of the above, the standard measures of recall, message playback and likeability are totally inadequate with which to judge the impact of an execution. The hurdle to have a change in consumer behavior or physician prescriptions goes well beyond those facing other commercials/ads. True change in competitive imagery for the brand is the most important measure in predicting future sales.
4. To measure true voluntary involvement, the test of a MD-directed ad or DTC execution must be well disguised and placed within its intended media to make sure the advertising has real break-through capabilities and engagement with the target audience. Focus groups, Internet exposure and forced exposure will provide totally misleading results.
5. Multiple exposures are required, while still presented in a "real world" exposure setting. Often, the first exposure gets some interest, but the real readership/attention comes on the second.
6. The presence of competition must be included in the same media exposure. If competitive executions exist in the real world, they should be in the test. Otherwise, you will be getting a false sense of security as to how well it will perform.
7. A true measure of second-by-second (TV) and line-by-line engagement (print) is required. Often, these findings can provide the insight needed to make the minor corrections that can change a weak execution into a strong one. A simple change in the position of a headline or the type of actors used could make or break the execution's ability to engage and inform.
8. Keep main communication points to a precious few. Even among physicians, too many messages dilute the impact of a key point of difference. If the MD or DTC product has both unique and standard features, only mention the unique ones.
9. For physicians, charts and bar graphs have been proven to be particularly effective in gaining believability of the message. However, these tables must be easy to understand and must appear to be "exciting news."
10. For DTC executions, the viewer/reader must immediately relate to the actor and understand that this is a unique treatment for him/her. Waiting until the middle of the commercial or the third line of the body copy assures failure.

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### Compliance Advertising

Many drug ads are for products that have been prescribed for quite a while and these products may be sitting in patients' medicine cabinets unused. In some cases, over 50% of patients who have received prescriptions have stopped taking the medication or don't take them as they are supposed to.

Weinblatt believes that the drug industry can develop effective ads that will increase patient compliance.

"If you have a drug ad that really engages your target audience," says Weinblatt, "you can actually convince them to go back to the medicine cabinet and start taking it again. It's so much cheaper to get someone who has already gone through the trouble of getting a prescription to start taking it again than to get someone new to go to the doctor and ask for a product."

### Conclusion

No matter how much effort, experience, and expertise are involved in the preparation of an advertisement, there is always the risk that it will miss its mark and fail to achieve its goal partially or even completely. This is due to the fact that the anticipated effectiveness of the advertisement is based on the opinions of those who prepare it and these may not always coincide with its actual effect on the "typical" or "average" consumer.

Since the expenditures on advertisements are so high, it is clearly highly desirable to minimize these risks. The technology and techniques that PreTesting uses to measure an ad's effectiveness can go a long way towards achieving that goal.

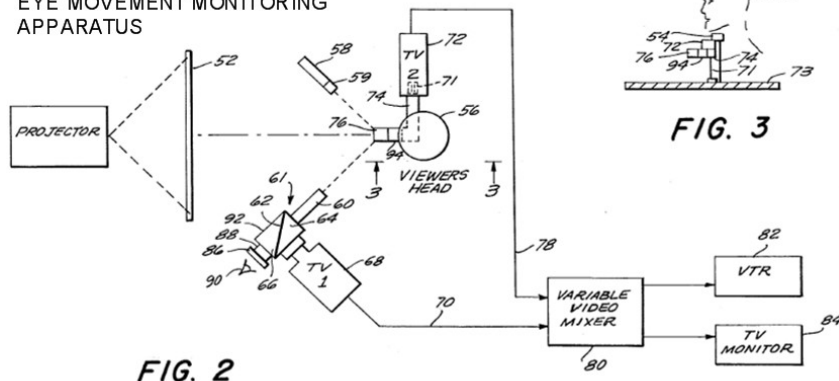
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## How to Create an Effective Drug Ad

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11. For most DTC executions, multiple media works best. The TV commercial often raises awareness and the print ad provides the details. Therefore, they must be tested as multiple media.
12. If an execution cannot significantly increase competitive imagery, an alternative execution should be considered. Don't kid yourself into saying "I'll use a stronger execution later on," as there might not be a later on.
13. Advertorials often increase both the readership and believability of DTC ads.
14. Double page ads should not have twice the copy of a single execution. They are best used to highlight the key product features.
15. One must continuously check for the wearing out of an ad or commercial. If readership falls and zapping climbs, have a slightly modified execution (with the same key theme) at the ready.
16. It is more important that a DTC ad communicate its key, relevant message than brand name recall. If the reader believes this product is for him, he will tear out the ad or write down the name.
17. The key look of a DTC ad should be the same as the MD directed ad or leave behind. This way the doctor is aware of the product under consideration, even if the patient forgot the name but described the product's claims.

PATENT #4,075,657  
EYE MOVEMENT MONITORING  
APPARATUS



Patent number: 4075657  
Filing date: Mar 3, 1977  
Issue date: Feb 21, 1978  
Inventor: Lee S. Weinblatt

An apparatus is disclosed for testing the eye movements of a viewer in response to visual stimuli, such as an advertisement, displayed on a screen.

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## Authors, Experts Consulted and/or Cited In Articles

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The following experts were mentioned or consulted in the preparation of articles for this issue.

- **Jane Chin**, President, [Medical Science Liaison Institute](http://www.MedicalScienceLiaisonInstitute.com) LLC, [jane@pharmrepclinic.com](mailto:jane@pharmrepclinic.com),
- **Joseph Puopolo**, Director of Marketing, [MERGE Rx](http://www.MERGE-Rx.com), [joseph.puopolo@merge-solutions.com](mailto:joseph.puopolo@merge-solutions.com), 416-588-9011 ext. 222
- **Lee Weinblatt**, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the [PreTesting Company](http://www.PreTestingCompany.com), [Lee.Weinblatt@pretesting.com](mailto:Lee.Weinblatt@pretesting.com)

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## Resources

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The following resources were used in the preparation of articles for this issue.

**Eye movement monitoring apparatus.** Patent number: 4075657; Issue date: Feb 21, 1978; Inventor: Lee S. Weinblatt. An apparatus is disclosed for testing the eye movements of a viewer in response to visual stimuli, such as an advertisement, displayed on a screen. See

<http://www.google.com/patents?id=BiA5AAAAEBAJ&dq=patent+4075657>

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#### Publisher & Executive Editor

**John Mack**  
VirSci Corporation  
[www.virsci.com](http://www.virsci.com)  
PO Box 760  
Newtown, PA 18940  
215-504-4164, 215-504-5739 FAX  
<mailto:editor@pharmamarketingnews.com>

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