

# Have you asked your pharmacist?

This article refers specifically to some do's and don'ts when working with the South African pharmaceutical industry, but there are many aspects of it that can be applied to other industries as well, throughout Africa.

Global agencies have often been criticized for not moving with the times. Words like staid and phrases such as 'too above-the-line-focused' have been bandied about. When criticized for being old school, you have two choices – you can either reinforce this perception by getting your back up and letting your ego do the talking, or you can use the opportunity to revive a brand that has given the industry the big idea and strategic planning, amongst other things.

Thys de Beer, Strategic Planner at JWT Cape Town says: "In this spirit JWT embarked on a new journey in 2006. We have not only moved with the times, but have embraced time as the new currency, whether it be waiting time, quiet time, chow time, changing time or past-your-bed time."

"We all grew up learning the adage that time is money ('So shut-up and get rich', right?), and yet when it comes to communicating with people, agencies seem to be masters at wasting consumers' time. Haven't we all got something we'd rather be doing with than watch or read advertising messages?"

De Beer continues: "Communicators need to stop interrupting what people are interested in and be what people are interested in. Let's be honest, real life makes advertising look rather dull."

In this spirit, JWT Cape Town takes on new challenges to ensure that they understand their clients' audiences better to stop wasting their time. This agency works on several pharmaceutical brands and therefore has a better understanding of the day-to-day realities of the pharmaceutical rep, the pharmacist and team.

In the expediency of time, JWT Cape Town has identified seven quick and simple rules when working with the pharmaceutical industry.

## 1. You are judged by the company you keep

If you ignore all the other rules, just remember this one! The rep is the face of the Manufacturer and Product brand. They are not merely sales people taking and delivering orders. Some of the pharmacists JWT Cape Town spoke to admitted that if they don't like the rep, they will not give the brands that they represent much attention. The pharmacist and staff expect reps to always be professional, helpful and informed. And if the rep cannot assist them, they expect speedy and respectful service higher up in the organization.

## 2. Knowledge is power

Empower the pharmacist with relevant brand and product knowledge on a regular basis. Pharmacists want sufficient staff training, whilst the pharmacy staff expects regular refresher-training and product updates to ensure that they are always able to assist customers. It is simple really: the more you empower them, the more they empower your brand.

### **3. One for all and all for one**

Help them to help you by making all of them your allies. Where possible, aim to train the whole team as opposed to just the pharmacist and his or her assistant. And remember the front shop assistants too (first point of contact!) Research indicates that they are often not included in training.

This includes keeping pharmacy staff in the loop when running promotions. Ensure that the staff is familiar with the communications and promotions, especially when it comes to the in-store logistics of such promotions. It is hugely frustrating for the customer and the pharmacy staff to try and decode a promotion if you haven't done your homework properly, and promotions often fail as a result of a lack of clear communication between the pharmaceutical brand and the pharmacy team.

### **4. Don't tell me you love me, show me you love me**

The Manufacturer/Pharmacy relationship is an on-going relationship. And like all successful relationships Pharmacists prefer personal service to e-mails and mail pieces. Some won't see you without appointments, others refuse to make appointments. Nobody said they're an easy bunch to work with. The point really is to show that you understand the realities of their business.

Pharmacy staff expects and appreciate acknowledgement for their efforts. Incentivising is banned, but JWT Cape Town's research indicates that money and incentives do still matter. This does not mean taking an unethical or illegal route, but merely identifying opportunities where one can add real value to their business. Regular, relevant staff training can go a long in cementing the manufacturer-pharmacist relationship. This is not only limited to your brands' information, but can also include skills-enhancement to assist the pharmacist and his team to run a more efficient business, for example.

### **5. Start spreading the news**

Expecting the pharmacist to do your communication for you is a bit optimistic. Research shows that Above-the-Line communications often makes their jobs easier. It creates the necessary awareness and pull and ensures that consumers visit their pharmacies on a regular basis.

*The most effective approach is the simplest:*

- Create awareness via Above the line channels like Television, community press and print advertising;
- Consider co-op advertising as a cost-effective way to advertise with the bigger corporates. This helps stretch advertising budget, and ensures increased brand awareness;
- If your message is clear and consumers remember brand name or benefits and ask for specific brands that they saw on television a pharmacist will in most instances sell that product to the customer (unless they feel it is a sub-standard product);
- Never circumvent the pharmacist. In-pharmacy navigation can be a nightmare for a consumer, so the in-store trade push should not be underestimated.

### **6. Less is more**

Simplify the consumer's in-pharmacy navigation. We often forget that consumers are not in a competition mindset when they enter a pharmacy. Consumers do not want to fill in forms, so when running competitions keep it simple.

Some staff felt that keeping competitions local ensures interest and entries. If consumers know it is a national competition with only one big prize, they are more reluctant to enter.

Professional knowledgeable, well-trained in-store promoters work well as they assist consumers and pharmacy staff. Disinterested students that slouch around trying to ignore desperate customers could cost your relationship dearly.

## **7. Give a little R.E.S.P.E.C.T.**

Pharmacists are respected members of their communities, are knowledgeable and care about the people they serve. They therefore expect the same respect from pharmaceutical manufacturers and reps.

Most pharmacists interviewed said that they received little or no assistance from pharmaceutical manufacturers when the new far-reaching legislation was introduced in South Africa. This is a golden opportunity to cement relationships lost.

"So what? This isn't brain surgery!" Although we seldom like to admit it, marketing and brand communication seldom is. In summary: There is a dire need to build and maintain professional relationships in a time when manufacturers can play a crucial role in the lives of the pharmacist and their teams. But in order to do this properly we need to move beyond the comfort of our corner offices (or cubicles). Have you asked your pharmacist?

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