



Want to try some impact marketing? Roy Carlisle of PharmaSolutions asks the question.

So what is impact marketing all about? It's about having a vision and having a clear understanding of what you are offering in rational and emotional terms to the customer.

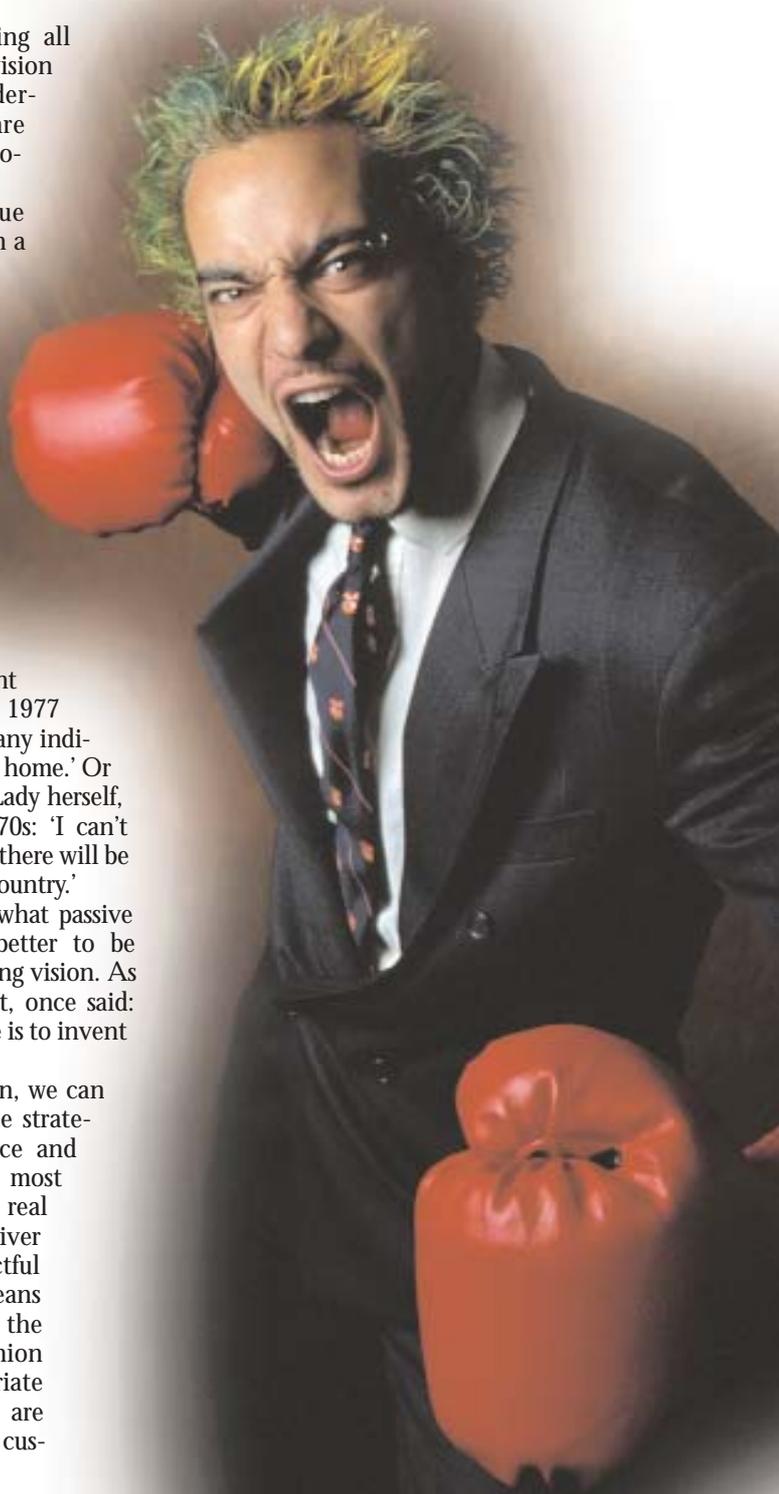
Some might, therefore, argue that the best place to start is with a crystal ball. After all, isn't a key element of marketing strategy centred on predicting the future to create that all-encompassing market vision?

However, being a futurist isn't that easy! As Benjamin Franklin said: 'It's easy to see, so hard to foresee.' Take the example of Ken Olsen, the former chief executive of the Digital Equipment Corporation, who was quoted in 1977 as saying: 'There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home.' Or even the perspective of the Iron Lady herself, Margaret Thatcher, in the mid-70s: 'I can't think of any circumstances where there will be a woman Prime Minister of this country.'

Given these examples of somewhat passive prediction, it is clearly much better to be proactive and create your marketing vision. As Denis Gabor, a business strategist, once said: 'The best way to predict the future is to invent it.'

If we proactively create a vision, we can then generate a range of possible strategies. True, judgement, experience and talent are needed to select the most likely strategic option, but the real trick in making the strategy deliver the vision is detailed and impactful tactical implementation. This means maximising all the elements in the marketing mix in a seamless fashion to ensure that the most appropriate promotional tools and resources are targeted to the highest potential customers.

Deep Impact



The objective is to make the brand as successful as possible. However, the question is, do we really do this to best effect every time in the pharmaceutical industry? Many great ideas fail because of a lack of detailed thought about how the strategy will impact upon the customer. However, there are success stories, for example, Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic.

Having envisaged building an airline, Branson decided that part of his business strategy would be to carve out a larger slice of the holiday segment. So how did he make his airline look more attractive? By positioning the flight as the start of the holiday! As Adam Morgan in the book *Eating the Big Fish* says, Branson 'opted from the beginning for irreverence and entertainment, poking a symbolic finger in the eye of the airline establishment.'

And this meant a fresh approach from the design of the planes to the goodie bags, for example, drinks and snacks for the kids on boarding, lots of movies and choc ices at half time. In the business sector, Virgin Upper Class was entertaining and classy, with restaurant-standard food and neck massages. The staff were young, vibrant and customer focused, and 'the antithesis of the then matronly British Airways.'¹

Highly impactful, tactical implementation of a vision. But how do we apply such thinking to the pharmaceutical industry? In our increasingly competitive and difficult marketplace, perhaps it is time to think outside the box.

Integrated vision

Could it be that we need a vision of the pharmaceutical company culture as a seamless market and customer aligned operation, which includes R&D, clinical, regulatory affairs, medical affairs, sales, marketing and business information?

Indeed, a number of leading companies are trying to build marketing operations built on rational and emotional offerings, which are managed via the juggling of a number of parameters, which as shown in the impact marketing diagram, can be categorised as business skills, business processes or business culture. In the

words of Stephen Brown²: 'Marketing concepts assume that customers are clear and rational. Actually they are emotional too!'

In this model, the core brand offering will be the result of a crystallisation of our thinking and market analysis into the most rational and emotional values, to give our product the competitive edge. Crucially, if we relate back to the Branson example, the core brand offering is the perception we wish to leave in the customer's mind of the brand's key values and attributes.

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Deep impact? ▶

Looking at the example of Pfizer's Lipitor, Simon and Kotler³ note that, on the rational side, the offering was strongly evidence-based with science driven messages indicating the compound's high potency in cholesterol reduction. Inclusion in American Heart Association guidelines added to the rational credibility. Meanwhile, in terms of emotional appeal, the theme 'make it your gold standard number one' and the confidence the data evoked certainly convinced clinicians, making them feel they had made the best prescribing decision.

Now, referring back to the diagram, to deliver the core offering and maximise its benefit, three broad business skill areas could be considered: marketing aligned planning; market and customer segmentation; and, of course, brand development.

With market aligned planning we cross the chasm between what we know that customers want today and what they might want tomorrow. This means that, if we are going to magnify the impact of our offerings, we need to forecast resources and maximise the marketing mix. In fact, as Simon and Kotler say of pharmaceutical brands: 'There is clear evidence that the key to reaching megabrand status is a very early interface of marketing and R&D.'³

Early marketing intervention should enable development of a product with a competitive profile, which is realised in clinical trials with the right formulation and dosages. In addition, this interlinks with the rational part of the model by providing the necessary evidence base. A key component of maximising market aligned planning is early consultation with thought leaders and potential stakeholders from clinical, payer and patient perspectives, to ensure that the offering will deliver to their needs.

And this market alignment process links in a two-way fashion to the brand development element by using the strategy to help develop and maintain a defined brand image for the core offering over time, and vice versa. Strategically, we have to answer the question: 'Where are we taking this offering as a brand and to whom?' Therefore, in a classic sense, we also need to look at the product's positioning as part of market alignment. Ask yourself:

Who is it for? This should reflect the target patient profile and other customers, such as prescribers, payers and carers.

What is for? A clear statement of the functionality and where the brand will be used.

What does it replace? How will the brand position against current offerings or indeed the lack of any existing offering.

What does it offer? This is where we crystallise our value proposition and focus our competitive differentiation.

The key issues that need to be considered and addressed include: customer needs; disease prevalence/incidence/patient numbers; cur-

rent treatment algorithms; global branding; promotional spend; salesforce slots; and indications/licence.

Going back to Lipitor, Simon and Kotler³ claim that the key issue for this product was that it was late to market: fifth in fact. In a lot of organisations this product wouldn't have been launched. However, critical success factors identified by Pfizer, and according to Simon & Kotler, were: Right starting dose and comparative trial data; Correct pricing and managed care strategy; Evidence based positioning; High pre-launch investments; Solid manufacturing capability; and Decentralisation, allowing quick decisions and implementation.

So, this leads quite nicely to the concept of looking at analogues as part of creating impactful market alignment! For example, if you were going to be fifth to market in another area, wouldn't it make sense to look at the impact of other late market entrants, like Lipitor or Boehringer Ingelheim's Micardis, to see what influenced their performance?

However, if we consider that various Industry reports suggest thirteen of the top twenty launches by revenue have occurred over the last five or six years, we must be doing something right as marketeers in terms of market alignment and impact marketing!

Next time, Roy explores the role of communications in the success of your brand. ▲

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References

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