

Project House Newsletter

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Scientific Publications: Orphans of the Marketing Department?

If you're slated to manage a product that's now in the pipeline--either under development at your company or to be acquired--you may wish that all decisions concerning its marketing were in your hands. It's more than probable, however, that the course of your product's market introduction will also be influenced by publication decisions made by the researchers, either internal or outside the company. This can be a problem if nobody takes responsibility for overall strategic planning of publications. But when Marketing and Research work together right from the start, all activities on behalf of the coming product are kept on course through the guidance of both concerned, informed, and communicating "parents."

Developing Strategies

Nothing lends more strength and credibility to a marketing strategy than publication of appropriately timed and targeted articles in the scientific literature. Often, however, the appearance of such publications as well as the presentation of research results at medical meetings is beyond the control of the department ultimately responsible for product sales. In fact, marketing and scientific personnel sometimes have very different concerns and don't view each other as partners mutually responsible for the development of an effective publication plan. It's not unusual, for example, for researchers to feel that publication is warranted only by new data--while marketing managers, trained to think promotionally, realize that review articles based on published data can help point out concerns about competing products, build anticipation and need for the product, and educate the market about product indications. If the departments communicate, however, a coherent overall plan is possible.

The Value of Pre-planning

It usually takes at least a year from the beginning of manuscript preparation to publication in a respected peer-reviewed journal, so crafting any publication plan requires a long-term, coordinated strategy. Marketing can start working with the research department before clinical trials even begin, by reviewing the Investigators' Brochure. Since clinical investigators in multicenter trials form their initial impressions of the product based on the Investigators' Brochure, this brochure is actually the first crucial step in product positioning.

The marketing department probably sees the advantages of orchestrating the publication of scientific articles in accordance with a strategic marketing plan, but sometimes the researchers have their own publication plans. In that case, it's crucial for Marketing to be kept apprised of articles in progress and to be offered the opportunity to have input into their content. This guards against a situation in which, for example, Marketing develops a plan to position the product as a fourth-generation cephalosporin, only to learn too late that numerous articles describing the structure and pharmacokinetics of a new third-generation cephalosporin have already appeared in the US and European literature.

Sharing Responsibility

While marketers have primary responsibility for ensuring that the publication plan is in line with product positioning and marketing objectives, they depend on the researchers to inform them of the product's potential. The key is communication--and a mutual commitment to keep it flowing. How the publication plan is actually implemented depends on the structure of the particular pharmaceutical firm, as the following examples show:

In-house medical writers

Some companies--notably Glaxo Wellcome, Hoechst Marion Roussel, CIBA-Geigy, and Roche--have historically had internal medical writing departments. This type of administrative arrangement allows other departments, such as R&D, Sales, Sales Training, and Marketing, to commission the company's on-staff medical writers to produce the desired publications. Internally produced materials often include product monographs, selling sheets, sales force backgrounders and Plans of Action, research publications, scientific abstracts and posters for medical meetings, package inserts, and standard replies to medical inquiries. Some departments--CIBA-Geigy's advertising team, for example--also have the capability of producing such creative marketing communications as video scripts, visual aids, file cards, and journal ads.

Cross-departmental teams

In companies such as Wyeth-Ayerst and Schering-Plough, particular products or therapeutic areas may be handled by interdisciplinary teams. There is no universal strategy for literature production--rather, these teams consider and implement strategies on a product-by-product basis. The actual writing may be assigned to advertising agencies and created by the agency's writers or freelancers, or it may be assigned to medical communications companies that specialize in scientific publication.

Advisory publications groups

Other companies, such as Merck and Sandoz, have chosen to create small advisory publications groups within their organizations, while the actual writing is done by outside vendors such as freelance medical writers or medical communications companies. The advisory group supports the product manager by assuring the timeliness of publications, the quality of the writing, and the appropriateness of the costs involved.

However a company chooses to assign administrative and creative responsibilities, good "parenting" cooperation and communication among all departments involved, is the key to creating effective publication strategies and a flow of appropriately targeted publications that contribute to a successful market introduction.

SIX TIPS FOR IMPROVING PUBLICATION PROCEDURES

Taking steps to improve internal communication will encourage effective publication within your own company.

1. Organize a central coordinating group for generating publications, and make someone within it directly responsible for ensuring that publication content is consistent with product positioning.

2. Develop standard publication procedures to be used for newly acquired products and products in development that have no assigned manager.
3. Make sure that Marketing is closely involved in all phases of new product development.
4. Consider assigning outside vendors to write or submit papers to journals if the R&D group is too busy preparing the NDA.
5. Encourage company scientists to communicate with Marketing if they're writing their own manuscripts.
6. Strive to keep open lines of communication with the product researchers, even when research was done by a contract research organization, by a division of the company outside the United States, by researchers lost through reorganization, or by another company entirely.

The Journals Dermatologists Read Most*

Journal	Circulation	% articles accepted	Accepts unsolicited reviews?	Typical time to publication Submission to acceptance / Acceptance to print
<i>Journal of the AAD</i>	16,000	40%	Yes	4 - 6 weeks / 6 - 8 months
<i>Archives of Dermatology</i>	16,000	40%	Yes	4 - 6 weeks / 5 - 7 months
<i>Cutis</i>	49,500	60%	Yes	6 - 8 weeks / 9 - 11 months
<i>British Journal of Dermatology</i>	2,100	N/A	Yes	4 - 6 weeks / 4 - 9 months

*Survey results, 1996 American Academy of Dermatology Meeting