

PRWeek

ON THE BEAT | Marketing

Pharma companies adjust to better-informed consumers



Poise was counting on Whoopi Goldberg's popularity in an effort to get consumers more comfortable discussing bladder leakage

By Alexandra Bruell

Colgate-Palmolive recently enhanced its "Healthy Mouth, Healthy Body" program with a campaign that aims to educate women about the association between heart and gum disease.

In addition, Ketchum launched a research tool for CPG and over-the-counter health products that communicates wellness benefits, due to consumers taking more responsibility for their health. At the time, the firm told *PRWeek* (prweekus.com, December) consumers spend nearly 20% of their monthly disposable income on brands with health and wellness attributes.

Growing relationship

The pharma and consumer lifestyle industries have enjoyed a companionship since at least the blogosphere's inception. However, better-educated and health-conscious consumers, as well as healthcare professionals' longing to leverage the regulation-riddled social Web, have driven today's more sophisticated convergence of pharma and consumer lifestyle brands and promotions.

Diana Littman Paige, MD at Marina Maher Communications, a lifestyle agency with clients including Cover Girl, Poise, Kotex, and the recently won Merck women's health business, says, "People are taking more responsibility for their own healthcare and a more lifestyle-oriented approach that helps them manage their disease."

She explains that to effectively reach consumers, particularly women, about a consumer health product, the team develops messaging that evokes "meaning" to distinguish the brand from others in the confusing "OTC aisle."

"Women do a lot of information gathering before they make healthcare decisions," adds Paige. "They are more educated before walking into the doctor's office."

The firm facilitated a union between client Novo Nordisk and racecar driver Charlie Kimball to educate patients about managing diabetes. In a similar campaign for Poise liners, Whoopi Goldberg was featured in an effort to get consumers more comfortable talking about bladder leakage.

According to recent findings by Edelman, a majority of general consumers are point-checking the information they get online with their physician, and vice versa. This is a trend Susan Isenberg, EVP and GM in the firm's health practice, supports.

She and other marketers attribute this to consumers thinking beyond their bodies and more holistically about their mental, spiritual, and financial well being.

"We've always talked about the industry and looked at patients," adds Isenberg. "Now, we're looking at people. We see this on the consumer marketing side, too."

As a result, she says Edelman is "looking at more prevention and health and wellness types of messages, as well as partnering with different types of organizations," oftentimes promoting the efforts via Internet platforms.

Non-traditional tactics

Biogen Idec, a biotech company that manufactures and markets products to help patients with multiple sclerosis (MS), noticed the trend at the industry level. It decided patient lifestyle management needed to go beyond traditional disease therapy.

The company launched its semi-unbranded My MS Yoga in early 2010, in line with its MS ActiveSource program, which promotes wellness for MS patients beyond drug treat-



Seeking a non-traditional path, Biogen Idec teamed with Baron Baptiste to launch My MS Yoga