

MAXIMIZING THE POTENTIAL OF SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING FOR NICHE AND SPECIALTY PHARMACEUTICAL BRANDS



ONLINE SEARCH IS A GROWING AND INTEGRAL PART OF OUR DAILY LIVES. ComScore consistently charts increases in rankings for Google, Yahoo, and MSN search engines as more and more American consumers turn to the web for a wide variety of information.¹ As a result, search engine advertising is quickly becoming an integral component of the marketing mix for many business models.

This poses important questions with regard to life science marketing. How are patients and healthcare professionals using the internet in general, and search specifically? What are the benefits of search engine marketing? Is this a trend the pharmaceutical and medical product community can afford to ignore?

Of course, the answer to the last question is a resounding 'no.' Strategic search marketing is essential for pharmaceutical companies. This traditionally conservative industry—particularly the specialty pharma and biopharmaceutical segments—can safely profit from the new environment and level the competitive playing field for smaller brands. However, for product marketers to succeed online, they must understand their key audiences, utilize efficient targeting, analyze results, and show a willingness to seize opportunities that would have been impossible in the past.

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

New external pressures and access to the internet is changing the perspective of both patients and healthcare professionals regarding health information, treatment options, and how the two audiences relate to each other. The following trends and subsequent impact will continue to play a major role:

- **Patients** – especially those with chronic diseases – want more control and a stronger role in diagnoses and treatment decisions. The Pew Internet Project reports that patients want to manage as much of their own health care as they possibly can.² It is no surprise then that 80 percent of adult internet users, including patients and families, have looked online for health information.³ And this is not just casual use. The web leads other sources, including healthcare professionals, as the primary source for household healthcare information.⁴
- **Healthcare Professionals** are looking for more education and support, yet have less time to spend with pharma reps, thanks in large part to managed care. They see increased value in education, information, and support programs for themselves and for patients,⁵ while the overall time spent with pharma reps has decreased 10 percent.⁶ These results are illustrated in healthcare professionals' use of the online channel: 99 percent of practicing US physicians use the internet and 80% have looked for pharmaceutical information online.⁷

These patient and healthcare professional trends alone have precipitated major shifts in pharmaceutical marketing. However, industry-wide profitability and communication challenges play into the mix as well.

- Overall pharmaceutical industry revenue growth is projected to slow to 5-6 percent for 2008, but niche products and specialty pharma expect to see 14-15 percent growth in the same time period.⁸
- Due in part to these trends, many of the largest pharmaceutical companies are cutting sales staff typically tasked with marketing directly to physicians.⁹

THE ONLINE OPPORTUNITY

The market is changing and there are no signs of that change slowing. If we view these trends as opportunities rather than as challenges, all three groups – patients, healthcare professionals, and pharma marketers – can benefit. Properly leveraged, search engine marketing offers an ideal solution.

For healthcare professionals and their patients, search engines provide the means to access and filter the vast array of available information.

- Search engines are the number one resource for those seeking health information – they are used by 86 percent of those with health inquiries.¹⁰
- Search engines act as a point of entry, with 66 percent of health information seekers beginning their most recent online health inquiry at a search engine.¹¹
- Healthcare professionals also rely on search engines: more than half of US physicians report having downloaded the Google search toolbar to their desktops.¹²

By understanding this new environment and behavior, pharma marketers can reach a receptive audience at the moment of decision making. Search engine marketing (SEM) allows pharma marketers to leverage this new pull medium in which users control how they access information, as opposed to the older push system of broadcasting a one-way message. And search marketing will only become more essential for pharma marketers as the industry focus shifts from blockbuster drugs to targeted, niche therapies.

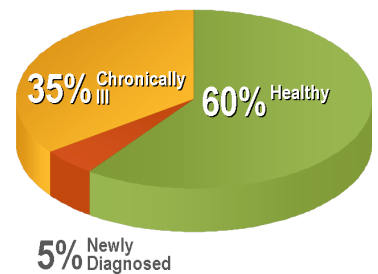
NICHE MARKETS RIPE FOR SEM

Search marketing uniquely and effectively serves niche pharma markets due to the increased use of the online channel and the effectiveness of search. Two key segments of the health information-seeking population – newly diagnosed and chronically ill patients – actively use the online channel and search specifically.

NEWLY DIAGNOSED

- *Active:* Newly diagnosed patients represent 5 percent of the overall health seeker population, but 40 percent of the overall health-related web traffic. They yearn for 24/7 access to experts and patients dealing with the same condition.¹³
- *Engaged:* They search intensively and cover a lot of ground in the first few weeks following their diagnosis. Many cast a wide net for online information and reach out to enlist the help of a large, diffuse network of family and friends.

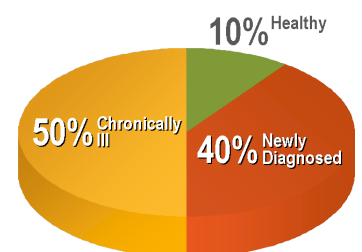
Online Health Info Seekers



CHRONICALLY ILL (AND CAREGIVERS)

- *Active:* Chronically ill patients represent 35 percent of the overall seeker population, but half of the health seeking traffic. They regularly search for new treatments and medications, drug information, diet information, alternative medicine information.¹⁴
- *Engaged:* They bookmark their favorite sites, chat online, belong to listservs and newsletters, and participate in online communities.

Online Health Activity



Chronically ill patients in particular are a good target audience for search marketing due to time-consuming disease management, their avid interest in health, and voracious online usage. This situation provides an opportunity for the pharmaceutical industry – and pharma marketers – to build trust and brand loyalty with the patient. Search marketing can provide the portal to building and maintaining that relationship.

A recent study from The Pew Internet and American Life Project illuminated chronically ill patients' online behavior:

- The chronically ill are more likely than other patients using online resources to report that web searches “affected treatment decisions, their interactions with doctors, their ability to cope with their condition, and their dieting and fitness regimen.”
- Chronically ill patients are potential brand ambassadors. Fifty-five percent said they felt eager to share new health or medical knowledge with others.
- Fifty-seven percent of chronically ill patients said the information they found online changed the way they cope with a chronic condition or manage pain (compared with 36 percent of other online patients).¹⁵

The chronically ill are a uniquely active segment of the health information-seeking population and they help illustrate the potential reach and impact of online search for pharma marketers.

CASE STUDY

There is no doubt that the pharmaceutical marketing landscape is changing. The internet and search in particular are altering the way patients, healthcare providers, and pharma marketers interact, find and use information, and manage disease. The fast-growing niche brand market is especially situated to take advantage of this online behavior, as is illustrated in the following case study which shows potential impact on a brand that must reach a very small and specific target patient population.

SITUATION

The brand team for a biopharmaceutical product faced an interesting business challenge: marketing a therapy for a genetic condition of which patients and their physicians may be largely unaware and, therefore, improperly and ineffectively treating.

The condition, Alpha1-Antitrypsin Deficiency (AATD), treated by this therapy is rare and frequently misdiagnosed as part of the broader and less malicious disease category, COPD. Though there are estimates of more than 100,000 people living with this condition, 95 percent are currently undiagnosed. Furthermore, the longer this disease goes undiagnosed, the more the patient's quality of life deteriorates, so early detection is essential to prolonging life.

Key marketing objectives were two-fold.

1. Increase awareness of AATD
2. Increase testing for the condition in the larger COPD disease state community

ONLINE SOLUTION

Only one percent of the COPD population suffers from AATD. The condition can be diagnosed via a simple blood test - which is made available through the product website and also through more traditional offline channels. The brand team needed to spread the word about the test to the undiagnosed population.

Siren Interactive Whitepaper

In response to this challenge, Siren worked with the brand team to design an online search campaign and specific online pathways to drive users to educational materials on the website to create awareness, and then to order test kit materials.

Step 1 – Attract with relevant pay-per-click creative

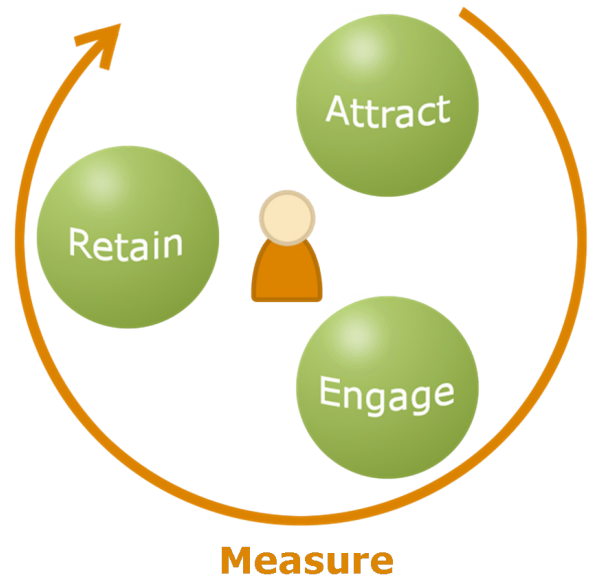
We conducted online intelligence and keyword research to determine how the umbrella patient community members identify themselves, discuss their lives, and how they search for answers. Then we created search engine ads, a challenge not dissimilar from writing haikus. By nature, the creative is quite constrained in terms of number of characters per line, but still needs to ensure communication of an impactful and driving message.

Step 2 – Engage with compelling content

The pay-per-click ads drove users to an interactive symptom checker designed to engage the audience in educational web-based content. Viral message potential was maximized in this situation, as family or personal history of COPD is a possible indicator of the target disease state. Once the symptom checker is completed, users were directed to results and additional information on ease of testing and downloadable PDFs on complimentary test kits that can be ordered by their physician. The primary call to action is to encourage testing.

Step 3 – Retain with consistent outreach

Patients and healthcare professionals that opted in for ongoing communications were provided with follow up information about the symptom checker and other resources made available on the website, as well as, a holiday message about the importance of being tested for family members.



RESULTS

- Overall site traffic increased by 100 percent
- New site visitors increased by 300 percent
- Visitors to the 'Considering Testing' pages increased 900 percent
- Downloads of the form "Should You be Tested?" PDF increased by 300 percent
- COPD related keywords now represent half of all website referrals from search engines
- The symptom checker became the top interactive offering on the site
- More than half of those who completed the symptom checker indicated a family or personal history of the disease state, yielding new potential patients/users

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Know your target audience.** Critical to the success of this type of program is clearly defining your audience before making a blanket statement to no one in particular.
2. **Customize your invitation.** Effective search begins with understanding the audience's health concerns, how they will look for information online, and customizing your search engine ad creative accordingly.
3. **Be ready to receive your visitors.** Ensure that your site contains content relevant to both the audience and to the advertisement. Think through the scenarios and pathing for visitor engagement.
4. **Give your audience a reason to return.** Have a strategy for opting visitors into an ongoing relationship with the brand and updating them when new information is available .
5. **You can't manage what you can't measure.** Define the key performance indicators that will best measure success, review them regularly and make adjustments accordingly. This will help you to look for ways to improve your search strategy and achieve the greatest ROI.
6. **You are never done.** This kind of strategy is only effective if you are willing to make an ongoing commitment to optimizing your brand's web presence.

CONCLUSION

Powerful industry trends that are changing the way pharma marketers interact with patients and healthcare providers show no signs of abating. So pharma marketers are faced with a choice: bury their heads in the proverbial sand, or actively engage patients and healthcare providers where they are.

Search marketing offers the ability to do just that, while providing marketers with an effective and measurable communication tool.

Will your brand join your customer online? Or will you continue to attempt to out-shout your competitors from soap boxes that are less and less relevant? Targeted search is just one element of a brand's online marketing strategy, but its importance cannot be over-stated.

There is a world of opportunity out there. Let's go explore it.

END NOTES

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