

Editorial

Internet Marketing - Pay to Play but Beware of the Buzz

The March 2006 issue of *PharmaMarketing News* offers coverage of two hot topics:

1. Results of a survey on whether pharmaceutical marketers should use paid inclusion to improve search results
2. The legitimacy (or not) of buzz & blogs as a life science marketing tactic

At Siren, we advise a cautious approach to both. We think that paid inclusion is a legitimate tactic for driving more traffic to product and disease state websites, but only when coupled with organic search optimization to achieve the objective of delivering of respectful, relevant and educational content to patients and caregivers. In addition, ethical (also known as “white hat”) best practices must be observed.

Buzz marketing, especially blogging, is a riskier proposition and not appropriate for many brands as a direct-to-consumer communication tactic. In general, we advise our clients to pay attention to blogs as a means of monitoring feedback from some of their most active patient populations, but we don't recommend that marketers try to influence the conversation directly. Sponsorship may be a more feasible strategy in the short term.

A JupiterResearch report released last year highlighted the importance of this “consumer-created health content” (CCHC) and its influence on patients. According to Jupiter analyst Monique Levy, approximately four out of five online CCHC users said they have changed their behavior, improved their emotional well-being, or enhanced their understanding of their condition as a result of visiting such groups.

The same engaged consumers that access this information are also those most likely to use search engines and opt in to email newsletters, so marketers have other opportunities to reach them with their messages. This content is valuable to them precisely because it comes from other consumers with similar issues, unfiltered by the marketing department of a large corporation.

Nonetheless, it makes sense to monitor these new technologies to see how they evolve. If damaging information is being widely disseminated, an appropriate response plan can be formulated that may range from positive postings elsewhere by a credible subject matter expert to a direct challenge, depending on the nature of the threat.

A link to the online survey that PMN is conducting on this topic is included in the article so feel free to weigh in with your opinion (you may have to register) or email me and let us know what you think.

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Recommended Reading:

Hagans, Andy, “High Accessibility is Effective Search Engine Optimization.” A List Apart. 8 Nov. 2005. <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/accessibilityseo>

Hart, Christopher & Blackshaw, Pete. “Internet Inferno.” Marketing Management. January/February 2006: 19-25.