Completing the marketing cycle

Marketing should be a cyclical process where the release of a well-tailored message is just the start of the communication process and measuring its effectiveness and making adjustments as necessary ensure the best results.

If we were to implement the measurement of established key performance indicators (KPIs), what would the future hold for healthcare communications? Today's ultimate goal – the release of a well-tailored marketing message – would become only the initial stage of our communication. It would be followed by a series of improvements addressing concerns and misinterpretations of the initial message, which we would be able to pick up online. Thus we would be able to create even more bespoke and effective communication. Sounds good, doesn't it?

So how do we prepare for this cyclical process?

As with any project, whether data-related or not, we should establish 'what' and 'how', i.e. our ultimate communication goal and the specific tactics that lead to it. As obvious as it may seem, we must understand what we want to communicate and, therefore, measure. This is not just an idea, but a concise and unambiguous concept that can be shared with everyone involved in its creation.

Some concepts are relatively easy to determine. For example, the purpose of a new drug launch campaign is to inform the market about the launch of a new drug. But other communication messages might not be so intuitively grasped. If you decide that you want to have a brand website, ask yourself what it would be for. Is it simply to inform the user about the brand's products? Or should it also give support to HCPs in treating their patients? What feeling about the brand do we want to establish, if any? Whatever our communication goal might be, it should be clearly established.

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Second, the overall strategic idea needs to be translated into concrete messages. For instance, something as big as establishing leadership within a particular market is a great goal, but how would a campaign or a website go about making users feel that the product is a leading brand? What can we do or say to make them award us that desirable position? Creating the right message is quite tricky to do and this is precisely where the KPI-based thinking should be activated. Having tracked the response to our concrete messages, we want to be able to infer whether the users understand and agree with our ultimate communication idea. Therefore, our messages should be specific enough to be measurable, but also broad enough to allow us to extrapolate from them.

The third step is to establish the KPIs and metrics. The effective way to assess the performance of a digital tool or a strategy is not against the success or otherwise of the end communication goal, such as sales or market share, because many factors influence those. Instead we should be looking at proximate and intermediary KPIs set by us. These can be general analytics measurements, like search words that generate traffic, number of visits, or session times. The general measurements can be supplemented by content measures, a little like the question Microsoft asks on its help pages: 'Was this information helpful?'

The idea sounds trivial, but if it is executed properly, and if the data is interpreted correctly, it can make all the difference. For example, instead of just counting visits we can decide to target a user clicking though to our website as a result of a specific keyword search, landing on our drug description page, then moving on to a dosage page before downloading the drug's prescribing information. This is our proximate KPI for HCPs intending to prescribe the drug, so we will count the number of users who follow the same path in order to measure this as a key performance metric.

Embedded content, such as a pop-up knowledge recap or an opinion poll, can also vary in its degree of sophistication. Here, cleverly designed questions and answers are the key to successful segmentation of the

audience. If your message is 'solution A solves problem B', you will want to count those who agree or disagree; but you will also want to know how many did not understand that A was the solution, or if there are some who don't even perceive B as a problem.

"Metrics measurement should never interrupt the user-engagement flow"

It is worth remembering that data collection is never the sole purpose of any project. Metrics measurement should never interrupt the user-engagement flow, i.e. embedded content should be visually delicate and short. Remember we want a perfectly tailored user experience.

Last, after the measurement preparation steps are completed and our digital project is released, we should start gathering the data. It may take a while – a few months perhaps – and it is easy to tick off the project in our minds, but fight the temptation. To make our previous efforts worthwhile, we need to review and interpret the collected information, and then act on it. The picture we draw from the process might not always be clear, and we might need to try a few different things and remain aware of further incoming information. But only by completing the full cycle will we make our project truly results-orientated, our message truly bespoke, and our communication fully optimised.

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