

Interbrand Wood Healthcare

The Worth of Words

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The Worth of Words

Language may be common currency, but its value depends on what we say and how we say it. In an increasingly brand-literate market place, language needs to be leveraged creatively and effectively to ensure a brand stands out.

Pharmaceutical companies are under increasing pressure to build, maintain and extend value across each brand asset within their portfolio. New brands are faced with the battle for brand stand-out within increasingly crowded therapy areas, maturing brands are subject to harder and faster attacks from generics, and companies are having to look beyond the blockbuster to maintain revenue streams. Being clear about what a brand stands for and conveying that message is crucial.

The strongest brands start with clarity of vision — of what they are and where they are going. The role of brand language in helping to translate that vision, from the brand name and supporting nomenclature to all aspects of verbal communications, is increasingly being held under the spotlight.

A brand is a relationship that secures future earnings by securing preference and loyalty. Relationships are forged by the signals (both tangible and intangible) that a brand sends out. In the pharmaceutical industry, perhaps more than in any other, these signals need to reach — and have resonance with — a wide and varied set of target audiences. In today's heavily-branded environment, prescribers are bombarded with a barrage of messages, while patients are not only more informed than ever before, but also more demanding. The need to engage with an increasingly enfranchised end-user has created a paradigm shift in the approach to the development of a brand, causing healthcare companies to rise to the challenge of speaking the patient's language as much as the prescriber's.

Keeping a good name

The name is the one element of the brand that will endure from pre-launch communications to post-patent platform for brand



extensions. Patent life may be finite, but we should not forget that a brand name *can* last forever. Trademarks constitute a long-term intellectual property asset — providing they are used, they can be renewed *ad infinitum*. The role of the brand name is not to be underestimated, as companies recognize the value of establishing early-stage equity in the lead-up to launch and acknowledge that a brand name is for life, not just for launch.

With the pharmaceutical industry becoming more crowded every year, marketers continue to search for ways to separate their products from the rest of the pack. Differentiation is the name of the game, but with diminished ‘white space’ around which to develop the proposition for your brand, the battle for brand stand-out is hard won.

In the dim and perhaps not so distant past, approaches to naming tended to range from referencing the generic to ‘tying’ a name so tightly to the respective disease or illness that the name merely functioned as a mnemonic for the patient’s condition. Brand monikers became predictable, with many brands in a specific disease category sounding like everyone else’s.



If, as an industry, we regard ourselves as being in the business of wellness rather than illness, surely we would seek to reflect that in the one enduring element of a brand? A name needs not only to have credibility with, but also resonance beyond the prescribing community. Within high-exposure, direct-to-

consumer (DTC) environments, names that speak less to functionality and more to end-benefits can help to cut through the clutter of a crowded therapy area. ‘Benefit-led’ names are more directly communicative across and relevant to a wider set of target audiences. Celebrex, for example, speaks to a quality of life message, evoking the end benefits for the end-user, while at the same time, celebrating the science of celecoxib.

If you are in the position of being first in a new class, a tactical approach to the name might be to align it to the scientific story; leveraging terminology specific to that class can play a key part in taking ownership of crucial ‘white space.’ A good example of this approach is Namenda, Forest Lab’s Alzheimer’s treatment. Encoding NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartate) within the name provided both a meaningful mnemonic for the prescribing audience, and a brilliant blocking strategy to prevent others following suit.

The question of longevity also applies to ‘future-proofing’ a name for the long-term brand opportunity. From Amazon to Virgin, the ‘stretchability’ of brand names has long been attested to in other industries. While pharmaceutical brands



are under somewhat different constraints, the issue of stretch is not to be underestimated. As companies are looking to build longer-lasting brands, consider the need for the equity of an established pharmaceutical brand name to be leveraged within the over-the-counter (OTC) environment. Consider also the number of biologics that have the potential to target more than one condition.



The value of a future-proof approach is exemplified in the strategy adopted for the development of the brand name Enbrel. Etanercept was a new genetically engineered molecule for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and other potential indications. The name Enbrel resulted from a benefit-aligned strategy, which would speak to quality of life messages relevant for the launch indication in RA, but also for subsequent indications. Enbrel speaks to the concept of ‘enabling relief,’ which was relevant at the point of FDA approval in 1998 as well as for its approval for a second indication in psoriasis.

The critical determinant in developing a moniker for your compound, provided regulatory and dispensing criteria are met, is a strategy that looks to optimize the opportunity for the brand. It seeks to establish relevance, differentiation and credibility, and stretch across target audiences. Ultimately, recognition is what is required of a name, not repetition!

Creating a new class

The opportunity for the creation of ‘official’ nomenclature around a new product, such as class and sub-class names, is another critical component of the language around a brand. Official nomenclature can be leveraged to build awareness and define difference. Drug class denotes a compound’s chemical structure or method of action, and groups it with others sharing similar chemical or pharmacological characteristics.

A new class will serve as a positioning tool to separate out the compound from other treatments in the same therapeutic category. In so doing, a company gives itself the opportunity of fighting the marketing battle on new terms, bringing with it a number of advantages:

- creation of early interest in the product, prior to FDA/ European Medicines Agency (EMA) approval
- a platform for differentiation — a means by which to take ownership of ‘newness’, of the story behind the science
- the ability to shape the perspective of the market in the lead-up to launch.

With the successful adoption of a new class, the compound has an edge prior to reaching the market. Pharmaceutical companies that are proactively creating this nomenclature give themselves this edge, instead of having a classification handed

to them. For example, when Astra introduced Losec, the H2 antagonist category was represented by very successful and well-entrenched billion-dollar brands such as Tagamet, Zantac and Pepcid. Losec was launched as the first proton pump inhibitor. Would Losec/Prilosec have become the largest-selling drug in the world if it had been the sixth or seventh entry into the H2 antagonist category, rather than the first entry in the proton pump inhibitor class?



Another example is the antihypertensive category. Over the years, it has been subdivided into calcium channel blockers, ACE inhibitors and now angiotensin 2 antagonists (A2As). Each of these classes represented a significant difference in treatment, either through method of action or chemistry, and

therefore warranted new nomenclature to classify the treatments and differentiate new products from older ones.

Although novelty is sometimes difficult to define, there should be a genuine 'first' in order to legitimately create a new class. You are in a strong position if your compound revolutionizes a treatment category that is based on entirely new science, utilizing an entirely different mode of action.

Class names and subclasses do not go through the same testing and approval process that nonproprietary and trade names are subjected to. The World Health Organization (WHO), United States Approved Names (USAN), FDA and the EMEA have no formal role in either selecting or putting class names in place, and because there is no existing formal process, the adoption of the nomenclature by key opinion leaders (KOLs) is the 'route to approval.' Through publications, industry presentations and liaison with organizations such as the American Chemical Society (ACS) and US Pharmacopeia, KOLs are the key to uptake.



Breaking down barriers

Having looked at the role of nomenclature in supporting the science, what about its role in supporting and championing a treatment approach or a condition? The cynics may shout this down as 'popularizing a condition,' but branding is also about creating clarity and understanding; language around the brand can play a key role in articulating conditions that are otherwise unspoken and meeting needs that are otherwise unmet.

"Words are the only things that last forever." William Hazlitt (1778–1830)

Perhaps the most well-known example is Pfizer's use of the term 'erectile dysfunction.' Impotence was a silent, unspoken and suboptimally treated condition. Through the use of terminology that was nonthreatening and nonstigmatizing, things began to change. Whereas 'impotence' was disempowering and disenfranchising, 'erectile dysfunction' established the condition as something over which the individual is not held to be responsible. In the true spirit of brand evolution, a further migration has since taken place, in the subsequent shortenings to the acronym 'ED' and further, to the 'anonymity' of 'SD' (sexual dysfunction).

Often, conditions that are non-life threatening can be the cause of great stigma or social disablement. The simple fact that these problems go unmentioned means that sufferers may go untreated. The act of giving voice to a condition can play a significant role in helping to create awareness, shift mindsets and change behaviour.

Last words

The use of language to create awareness and build brand recognition is, of course, only part of the brand story. However, the successful brands will be those that, in adopting an early and integrated approach to development, seek to differentiate through optimizing all elements of the brand. How many times is a good product let down by bad service? The same could be said of our approach to what a brand says and how it says it. However, although language is universal, I am not suggesting a universal application of some of the examples outlined here. What is certain is that it has become a war of words out there, as therapy areas become more crowded and brands need to shout louder, and with more distinction, to be heard. If we look at the name, nomenclature and the language around the brand as an opportunity to foster a dialogue that is relevant, credible and differentiated, we can further enable our brands to cut through the clutter of messages with which all our audiences — from KOLs to the end-user — are faced. In the words of Apple, we need to "think different" and, by extension, act different, in terms of developing a more creative and precise approach to the use of language around our brands. ■

