



MULTICHANNEL MARKETING (MCM) IN PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

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Abstract:

Advancements in the usage of various technological interfaces are influencing the physician's decision at various stages of the decision making process. These effects are driven by various factors like channels selection, planning, integration etc. Rapid rise in the customer utility of various communication channels has given rise to the multichannel marketing. This practice has evolved with objectives of uplifting customer satisfaction. The present article describe the key requirements, factors, channels, planning, and guidance in developing an effective multichannel marketing for better business to consumer (B2C) situations.

Key words: Multichannel, Marketing, Physician, Communication, Message, Adaptability, Feedback

1. Introduction

In traditional marketing to physician, a typical face-to-face communication channel with the representative use to be followed with the product sample and detailing aids to market the prescription drugs, which ultimately give away the market to the product. The majority of these marketing practices work on the premise of one-way conversations, with Pharma informing consumers of the benefits of its products, as well as the risks of a particular drug as required by law. In recent times, reduction in the active time allocation by the physicians towards to representatives selling has become significant.

The advent of digitalization all around the globe have altered the shifted marketers strategy towards utilization these technologies in marketing a product in more significantly and conveniently. This concept has driven a way to multichannel marketing (MCM). Simply, multichannel marketing can be defined as the marketing strategies for the customers who are using more than one channel of interaction with an organization for marketing a product [1]. Multichannel marketing in pharmaceutical industry approaches with various coordinated communication channels to reach consumers, patients, and physicians with marketing communications or product/marketing information at the appropriate point in their product selection decision cycles [2].

In MCM the integrated use of internet based diversified multiple marketing channels, facilitated pharma companies to render better presentation of the products to end consumers in business to consumer model. MCM prevailed over limitations of a single channel i.e., follow customers where a sales representative cannot, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It promises to save marketing departments money by allowing them to use the most efficient method to contact each of their customers. However, MCM pose a great managerial challenge to the firms, in terms of complexity and involvement many components, processes, and decisions, such as those concerning customers, channels for distribution, sales, and communication. Multichannel marketing systems are not only larger than single-channel systems, but also require integration, coordination, and the oversight of many components that previously functioned in a relatively independent manner [3]. The present paper provides an overview on the multichannel marketing for pharmaceutical industry.



2. Key requirements for success in multichannel marketing

A successful MCM in a pharmaceutical organization is a combined effort of the product and business branches of the organization. In the process of MCM, streamlining the activities of the teams, processes and administration of the organization towards the aim of the MCM, which is customer centric. In MCM, communicating the message core generates a meaning, impact and flexibility[4]. This ultimately affects the instrumental process of decision making of product selection. This mode of communication to the physical is different from conventional marketing; while communicating in MCM the message and conversation shall be based on valid data support and is insightful.

Listening to the customer in MCM is as important as conveying message. At every stage and each personnel involve in MCM must be a good listener to customers along with thoughtful speaking. By listening to customers, the teams of the firm could be able to recognize the necessities and persuade the actual needs, like more data on the product from trials, mete data of usage and payer information. This will help in identifying unmet needs of following MCM cycle.

The requirements for MCM include thorough understanding of customers and their needs, strategies to optimally align channels and content to the right customers, organizational capabilities (infrastructure and people) to implement, and leadership to set goals and keep the team on track. MCM strategies should consider their relative strengths in terms of how they meet customers' needs around receipt of information. A successful MCM enforce 'pull' marketing strategy on the market, which allows the customer to quickly receive the information they want on their terms.

3. Selection of channels

A successful MCM strategy works on the support of selection of suitable channels for transfer and understanding of the message to the customers. In this selection, focus on only advertising and marketing would not yield the best results, here the connectivity and grouping between the channels would create a value in channels. Value of a channel is a fixed on cost and benefits of it. A successful multichannel strategy requires a good understanding of the value proposition offered by each channel, including channel strengths and weaknesses, and determining where channel synergies occur. Though, working with multiple channels is not cost-free, as substantial, additional IT and coordination costs can be associated with multichannel marketing. This being the case, there must exist a balance between human interaction and electronic touch points such that there is both a value proposition to the customer and a fit with the organization's cost model.

4. Selection of a channel – Influencing factors

As marketing fundamental, before selecting a right approach MCM strategy should define the potential customer group and how to engage them with the your business objective. Following the customer group definition, ideal MCM mix includes consideration and impact assessment of internal and external factors that target. Majorly this mix composes:

4.1. Specialty area and product:

Targeted therapy area of the product and specialty features of the product are the key contributors in the selection and finalization of the channel grouping in MCM. This determines the core areas of marketing and the preferred channels to connect with customers. The channel selection, message frequency and information in it are innately affected with the market potential.

4.2. Phase of product lifecycle:

Multi-channel marketing is considered to be the best and useful mode of marketing for the product at initial stage of life cycle, i.e., launching. Right way of MCM facilitates the more penetration into the market and



encourages the adoptability by key opinion leader of the market. This widespread delivering of the information in the identified physician group creates multifold awareness than the rep marketing.

4.3. Message:

The message and its easiness in understanding in the process of flow through channel matrix play an instrumental role in the channel selection. The simple, complex nature of the message, way to reach the targeted customers with ease are affected by the use of right channels. The therapy area, customer group, size of market, competitive environment, safety and known information about the product to various kinds of stake holders.

4.4. Implementation capabilities / skills:

A successful implementation of the given plan to reach the customers is the pivotal step in the entire process of MCM, as the success of the MCM strategy is dependent on implementation. Trained personnel with spontaneous response and can respond to the requirements of individual customer needs, with understanding the best channel for message.

In addition to the above factors, the MCM also influenced by the internal factors like firms experience with channels, internal skill sets and priorities of the management. Operating market and targeted customers are the external factors.

5. Multi-channel planning - Key concerns

Ideal channel mix can be attained by following few critical steps in the planning of a successful integrated channel. The key considerations in MCM are

5.1. Be customer-centric:

Multichannel planning involves the segregation of identified customer pool and evaluating the unmet needs and to address them, identifying suitable route of information transfer, personalized approach to make customer to consider the message is more relevant to him, which ultimately drives into customer satisfaction and success to the MCM objective.

5.2. Excerpts from historical data:

Evaluation the historical data of the similar MCM strategies that have succeeded for products in similar therapeutic areas and territories. Analysis of similar events is useful in planning internal initiatives, assessing external support from the channel.

5.3. Suitability of message to the channel:

Message transfer with the use of a general aid will not yield good results for all the channels. Information from the message shall be flexible to the channels for effective communication. Though it involves time and cost, would add value to the strategy of MCM.

5.4. Focus on skills:

Know how nature of the diverse channels used in MCM is must required for the delivery of the message to the many customers. Therefore, effective training to marketing people would leads into efficient delivery of



message and its essence via various channels. Thus, resource training and skills acquisition creates a success path to MCM.

For the strategists involved in MCM and top level management involved it the process needs to coordinate the all the steps and personnel towards the achievement of the aim.

6. Adaptability

As continuous updates are inevitable in the dynamic market, a thoroughly planned MCM strategy might needs to get updated overtime. The changes in the market need to be gazed carefully and it's important to adopt the changes and implement them successfully. This changes and unmet needs have to be measures by developing a feedback loop.

7. Feedback linked with adaptation

A long term continuous practices like MCM needs to be monitored effectively on a time to time dynamics basis for vital like reach, response, message, resources and market [5]. Continuous monitoring facilitates for the early signs of warnings, changes to be incorporated and identify the highlights. Thus evaluation with wider acceptability through various channels indicates the campaign success in terms of factor by factor. This feedback is critical for early signs of response, channel merit, coordination between channels and message.

8. Conclusion

Integration of internet based diversified multiple marketing channels towards an aim of marketing by using MCM as a strategy has been facilitating pharma companies to render better presentation of the products to end consumers in business to consumer model. The continuous change in the market dynamics, customer orientation towards a product and demand for more information would be better addressed by using MCM, than the conventional marketing. In support to this, the technological advancements have been helping the industry to adopt the changes to reach customer expectations.

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