

Digital campaigns: the right time?

Such pan-European campaigns can involve a complex and lengthy process of planning, buying, reporting and continued support. However, anyone venturing into this area is still a bit of a pioneer, and it can be hugely rewarding for brand owners and agencies alike

Detailed campaign planning from start to finish gives a great insight into the world of digital advertising and how the pharmaceutical industry has different requirements from digital campaigns for consumer brands. Time, patience and expert knowledge of technical processes are all necessary, because it is not a smooth road. It is also a long road, which is well lit and clear in places, while foggy and dim in others.

Smart digital media planning is all about optimal engagement and relevance: understanding not only who is visiting media sites and portals, but how they are using them and what they want from them. So digital media planning should never be tackled in isolation from the creative content, overall marketing strategy and the technology and interactivity that can be brought to bear within the digital landscape.

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Thus, the key is working with media owners and agencies to find the most innovative, engaging and relevant and measurable ways to put content and messaging in front of specific audiences. Here are some of the key learnings, challenges and obstacles encountered when planning pharmaceutical pan-European digital media campaigns.

BENEFIT FROM THE TIME LAG

Getting approvals from medical and legal departments every step of the way is a necessary part of the process. This takes a lot of time: to plan, approve, book media, approve, change, approve, update, approve, report, approve again. It rarely runs smoothly and will probably take longer than your most conservative estimate, but there is a real benefit to this. The length of time it takes for regulatory approvals means that the media planner and buyer has time to become a master in creating great relationships and deals with media owners in the run-up to the campaign going live.

The digital planning stage can take six to nine months for big projects across Europe. This, in itself, can be a very long time in the ever-evolving world of digital media. New platforms, new solutions, new rules and deletion of services can all happen. Because of this, it is preferable to plan and approve quickly.

This is easy enough when campaigning only in one country,

but multiply that by ten countries and the perfect start dates, ad strategy and planned dates for the various bursts of activity all start to break apart. This can mean handling ten very different campaigns across a much wider timescale.

So keep abreast of all new rules and regulations and, although the plan is for a multi-market campaign, make sure there is also a country by country back-up plan.

GO LOCAL

It has become second nature for media planners and buyers to concentrate advertising with the pan-European and global medical websites. They offer reach, targeted ad-serving, ease of booking and robust statistical information. The downside is that they can be very expensive.

The big medical websites do offer a fine service, but they are less inclined to push the boundaries with regard to medical advertising rules and codes. It is only a matter of time before the dam breaks and pharmaceutical companies find a wider range of advertising opportunities, perhaps through mobile phone and personalised media. Maybe then there will be more cost-effective advertising opportunities offered by the 'big boys'.

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There is another way. Few media planners and buyers have the knowledge or inclination to search every country for the best local medical specialist websites offering advertising. But this is definitely worth doing. Localised web ads work much better than a 'one ad fits all' strategy; clickthrough rates and user engagement are simply much higher when content and language are localised.

NATIVE OR UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE?

Using major global medical websites across Europe does mean the most prevalent language is English. This can be both a help and a hindrance. Certainly, it helps to create one copy to fit all, ease of medical/legal compliance and the ability to get one message across. But it is a hindrance, as healthcare professionals in non-English speaking countries prefer adverts in their own language and engage with native language ads to a higher degree.

The best approach is to use a combination of native and universal language ad copy and regularly assess the impact of both. Of course, this means more ads will need to be created and taken through regulatory approvals. Plus, this will have to be allowed for in the budget and timings. However, this approach yields some of the best results.

SEARCH - THE GOOGLE DILEMMA

Pharmaceutical companies are increasingly wishing to integrate search, as a natural platform, into their online marketing efforts. The challenge with this is that on one hand, Google wants to attract pharmaceutical spend and, then, on the other hand, it pushes pharma away with all-encompassing rules that do little to differentiate between a highly respected and qualified global pharmaceutical

→ company and a ‘black hat drug e-tailer’ website with dubious legal status. The whole industry is viewed the same way.

Google cannot keep pace with change and demand from new sectors that want to search and advertise with it in different ways. This should not be the case. The amount of untapped money ready to be spent by pharma should be reason enough to concentrate resources at Google. But fear of litigation means that search will continue to be a challenge for pharma for the foreseeable future. So display media and promotional content will be the stalwarts of digital advertising campaigns until Google relents or the advertising code is relaxed.

COST-EFFICIENT SOLUTIONS

In contrast to the cost issues, creativity can make the whole digital marketing plan more efficient. An audience can be targeted, but to truly unlock its potential, engaging creative execution is vital.

Both online and mobile phone adverts offer opportunities to deliver much more than a banner and those types of solutions are increasingly seeing better returns. Again, compliance issues must be addressed. These can be overcome by using dynamic multi-functional adverts. Plus, offering the user more options and engagement areas increases clickthrough and engagement tenfold or more.

MEASUREMENT AND CHANGE

Setting key performance indicators enables ongoing measurement and improvements to the effectiveness of the campaign. But be aware that it is more difficult to make changes to a campaign mid-stream. Due to lengthy legal approvals and transcription into several languages, more ads need to be created at the outset so that they are ready to run six months later. What takes only a few days in typical consumer advertising can take weeks or months in pharmaceutical media buying.

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Measuring audience delivery to site and what visitors do is possible by tagging ads with unique identifiers and reporting goals achieved. Analytical packages are not totally robust, but once a campaign is under way, a baseline is created and any optimisation can then be observed in the daily, weekly and monthly results. Different pieces of ad copy can be distilled to use only the best and improve ongoing results. Then learnings can be remembered for future activity.

MAKE DATA MEANINGFUL

Online multi-market media campaigns are planned not only on cost per ad, but also on targeted audience reach, known engagement, relevance and ad format opportunities. So it is important to measure the number of ads served and clicked, as well as the audience navigation and actions people take on the final destination website.

Third-party adserving solutions can act as verifiers for the number of ads served and clicked. Advertisers usually use free Google Analytics or paid-for analytical solutions like Doubleclick or Mediaplex, but none reports the same

numbers as the website owners. So make sure someone in the agency has expertise in how best to surmise ad delivery and its effect once users click through to the website and/or create an action to make data meaningful.

CONCLUSION

There is no magic formula when it comes to pan-European digital media and it is not just a simple numbers game. Clearly, cost is important, but value and effectiveness, expressed ultimately in return on investment, is the real goal. Just because something is difficult to do, does not mean it should not be attempted and successful.



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Executive summary

- Digital media campaigners are ‘trail-blazers’
- Never tackle digital media planning in isolation from the creative content, strategy and technology
- Use the time it takes for regulatory approvals to develop great deals with media owners
- Prepare everyone to be nimble and always have a back-up plan in the very likely event that delays happen
- Localised web ads work much better than a ‘one ad fits all’ strategy
- Display media and promotional content will be the stalwart of an advertising campaign until Google relents or the advertising code is relaxed
- Use dynamic multi-functional adverts to increase clickthrough and engagement
- Make data meaningful beyond clickthroughs
- Keep up to date with the ever-changing digital media landscape.