

Drug Ads: Why 30/15-Second Spots are Not Enough for Consumers

Competition from ORx, Generics and Other Factors Threaten Brands

The over-the-counter (OTC) market has seen private label competition rising co-incidental with a move to 15-second television advertising spots and also co-incidental with much greater system competition: \$4 generics, ORx (OTC medicines require a “prescription” from a health care provider), a system that recommends generics first, and a poor economy.

OTCs are sold like any other consumer brands and successful marketing of OTCs relies on building brand equity. Most of the major OTC brands built their equity as prescription medicines with a significant history of doctor endorsement and prescription use. So medicines are consumer brands that require serious consideration for selection and use.

It would be very surprising if the consumer’s decision was made only on price, and it is not. A survey by the Association of the European Self-Medication Industry (AESGP) of U.S. consumers found that such considerations as “I know it, it works, I have confidence in it and it is safe,” come far above price as a purchase consideration.

These attributes are both important, yet hard to establish in 15-second advertising.

- ❖ Personal experience in Japan where most TV commercials are 15-seconds is that this format may be acceptable for reminding consumers of a message they already know but persuasion (communicating a new message with proof) is tough, as is educating or emotionally connecting with consumers and telling them the end benefit or a feature of the medicine.

Also, 15-second advertising goes along with more advertisements and results in more audio-visual clutter, which adds to the communication challenge.

So what do consumers want; what would give them confidence to increase their self-care?

Their main answers in the same AESGP survey: more health education and more advice from the doctor or pharmacist.

The OTC industry needs a broader view of consumer communication media. There are so many new ways to connect with consumers that are more targeted and better linked to educational support and professional endorsement.

Sources

“Killing Off 30-Second Spot Is Bad Medicine for OTC Drug Industry,” *Ad Age*, September 13, 2010.

http://adage.com/mediaworks/article?article_id=145852 (requires free registration to view full-text of article)

“How To Drive Growth In Self Care—A Multi-Country Study,” AESGP/Nielsen, May 2008.