

The 4D's and other marketing lessons from the fascinating world of medical advertising.

The pharmaceutical fraternity has been doing for ages what the FMCG brands are now facing – communicating to an empowered consumer. Doctors, like the modern consumer, are very, very busy people.

However, ethical* drug manufacturers need to ply their trade by getting the doctor to prescribe their brands, and doctors need to be updated on the best remedies available for their patients.

Although ethical drug advertising can be as complex as paroxysmal ventricular tachycardia, the heart is still just a pump with valves. And the doctor is also still just a consumer with needs (although strictly speaking, he/she is the prescriber/decider).

A job bag in a medical ad agency is pretty standard: Print ad, detail aid, dosage card and giveaway. Sometimes you have the added excitement of a conference stand or TV ad, but basically every job bag has these four items. They are listed in the table below, together with their objectives - summarised as the 4D's:

Element	Function	Objective : the 4D's
Print ad	To encapsulate in words and pictures what the brand is all about, and where it 'fits' (the positioning).	Differentiation
Detail Aid	To support, with proof and examples, what we're saying. It's a detailer that the representative uses as a guide when 'detailing' the doctor. Contains lots of graphs. If the rep is a storyteller, then the detailer is the storybook.	Demonstration
The dosage card	This is left behind to assist the doctor with the use of the brand. It contains specific directions, such as the adult and child dosage.	Doing
The giveaway	A gift related to the theme of the promotion – for doctors to remember the brand, and feel good about prescribing it.	Donation

Shortly after purchasing my first automatic washing machine (a magnificent gloss-white Bosch WFB 2001), I proceeded to the supermarket to purchase powder for my new 'baby'. I chose the one recommended by all the manufacturers, including Mr Bosch. The directions on the side of the box illustrated quite clearly that I needed to add one-and-a-half scoops to lightly soiled loads. However, although I did have a lightly soiled load - I was devastated – I did not have a scoop.

Fortunately, the side panel on the box informed that this was no disaster, and that if I left my details on voicemail at the given number, a scoop would be

dispatched immediately. Wow – now I felt I was part of the global (washing) community. And I was not disappointed – within only two weeks I received an interesting cardboard tube which I opened with a feverish excitement to commence my foray into the world of automatic washing.

However, inside was a scoop. Nothing else. Just a scoop. Check, here's the pic:



You could argue that if someone wants a scoop, they want a scoop - and not a relationship with the company that makes the washing powder. But, if this relationship was treated with the same depth as an ethical drug, things may have been very different (I now use another washing powder).

Applying the 4D's

Differentiation : They did not tell me why and how this scoop would change my life. I was not told why I had made such an amazing choice in the first place, and why the ongoing use of this

washing powder was a no-brainer. I probably experimented with other powders unnecessarily, but I just did not know any better. Because no one told me.

Demonstration : There would have been no harm in sending me two swatches – one washed with, and the other without, the powder in question. Words are not proof. Proof is proof.

Doing : A 'dosage card' would have been crucial, taking into consideration the confusing standard of instruction that came with my washing machine (although directions were in six languages). Even if you are dealing with an expert consumer, they need to be told explicitly what to do to get the brand experience.

Donation : give me something. Anything. A sample of an associated product would have been perfect.

Whether you sell popsicles or proton pump inhibitors, the principles remain the same: people want to know why you're different, what you can do for them, exactly how to use you and how much you love them. Like any relationship - ethical or otherwise.

*Ethical drugs are medicines that need a doctor's prescription to be sold by a pharmacist. Drugs, which can be sold without prescription, are OTCs (over-the-counter). Ethical drugs are usually not handled by conventional full-service agencies, but by specialist medical ad agencies, well versed in the distribution channel where the doctor is 'channel captain'.

About the author

Sid Peimer qualified in pharmacy before entering the field of marketing. His favourite party trick is to name at least two drugs for every letter of the alphabet. He provides consulting, training and support to marketing strategists. His [website](#) is the seat of strategy on the web.