

Use the magic word

Illuminate the branding process using simple, powerful insights magnified with great storytelling

'Insight' is the most important word in our business but, within healthcare communications, it remains the most misunderstood and perhaps even the most abused, word.

All too often, both client and agency focus their energies on demonstrating the functional attributes of a product or make a random attempt to depict quality of life. This is often the result of either a complete absence of insight or a misinterpretation of what an insight actually is.

For those who do not remember, or have not seen, the UK's Transport for London 'Look out for cyclists' campaign, please stop reading this article now and view the clip at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahg6qccoay4>

I have played this clip the world over as part of the introduction to brand building workshops. The reaction to the question "but did you see the moon-walking bear?" is consistent: shock and disbelief. When they view it again, the participants wonder how they failed to see the bear the first time.

This example serves as a reminder that it is very easy to miss something when you are not looking for it. It demonstrates that a significant new finding can be so obvious in retrospect, but it is only obvious after it is discovered. Sometimes, it can be staring you in the face and you will never see it.

I find the clip a great way to set the scene for an insight-mining session that delves into the human context of our business, providing brands with the opportunity to connect at a human level.

After all, behind the doctor's white coat and stethoscope is a real, living, breathing human being who has beliefs, values, habits, desires, motives, feelings and needs that have an impact on his or her relationship with disease, patient and brand.

Amazing power

To understand the power of insight requires us to believe that a brand exists as interconnected images, ideas, feelings, associations and facts in people's minds. And,



yes, doctors are people.

To be entitled to use the word 'insight', we must subscribe to the thought that the business of healthcare communications is all about identifying insights into the customer, the cultural context, the communications environment and the brand, so we can define the most powerful promise and benefit that will connect the brand to the customer.

It is about defining what the brand's magic is and what it means to doctors and their patients.

Getting this platform right is the most important task; everything else should flow from that, because the right insight has amazing power.

Insight drives positioning, brand communication ideas and brand engagement ideas and sits at the heart of enduring brand platforms. However, unlike in other industries, these assertions are still not widely held true in the healthcare sector. There are many examples of brand communication ideas that are not derived from insight, clearly. Open a medical journal right now and count the number of brand ideas that rely on a mode-of-action visual, a piece of scientific data, an airbrushed molecule, a metaphor depicting what the product does, or a happy patient, arms outstretched, now liberated

from one of a number of diseases.

They contain all the facts, but offer a weak or non-existent emotional connection. They are concerned with what the brand wants to say about itself, not what the customer needs to hear. The irony is that the customers themselves tell us that functional depictions of what a product does, or generic quality-of-life promises, are not distinctive, relevant or differentiating, yet we keep churning them out.

So, where does the problem lie? Why are communications ideas still being generated that are not based on insight? Are we not speaking the right language? Are clients not listening?

Well, based on the experience of a multitude of client briefs and agency presentations from all networks, all over the world, the problem is endemic in our industry. Perhaps all the information that tends to surround healthcare brands means we get caught up in the detail and cannot see the bigger picture. Perhaps we lose sight of what we are really looking for. Perhaps we are obsessed with the evidence, at the expense of insight.

So, what should we be seeking?

Brutal honesty

I know what I am looking for; that fresh and not yet obvious understanding of customer beliefs, values, habits, desires,

motives, feelings or needs that the brand can own and which can become the basis for a competitive advantage.

Look into the lives of doctors, as well as their patients. Some of the most powerful brand campaigns targeting healthcare professionals have been based on a patient insight.

Question conventional beliefs and current assumptions with brutal honesty. Try to expose the ugly and beautiful truths, in order to establish the most pressing and actionable needs as well as the most fundamental opportunities.

Search for those universal human truths that cut across cultures and borders.

Look deeply into the mind of the customer to find the space you want the brand to occupy. Do this for every brand with which you engage to create energy out of facts and words, to stir desire and impel action.

The goal must be to find simple, powerful insights that can be magnified through great creative storytelling.

Wasted opportunity

There are many potential sources of insight. Initial instincts are always helpful, but a disciplined insight search usually

leads to a more compelling solution. A well-considered piece of qualitative research can make all the difference.

Lack of interaction

Unfortunately, more often than not, communications agencies and clients' market research agencies rarely get the opportunity to interact, resulting in market research reports that contain a lot of data and facts, but little insight. This presents a great opportunity to improve the quality of the insights driving healthcare brand communication platforms.

Communications agencies have a perspective that complements what clients often want to gain from market research; one that requires early and intimate involvement. This should include a contribution to preparing the brief, reviewing discussion guides and methodology and observing the fieldwork.

The research agencies have so much more to offer beyond delivering the final report. At the very least they should be participating in the brand planning meetings that utilise the research, including the workshops that mine for insights.

The quality of insight is a direct result of the methodology. We must recognise doctors as human beings with a complex array of feelings and emotions that drive their beliefs and behaviours, as well as their relationships with brands. To really understand the customers, we must permit them to express themselves through non-rational mechanisms like drawings ("how do you feel when..."), collages (picture sort), creating a story, role playing, sentence completion, word association, Gestalt rooms, cartoon strips and so on.

Customer understanding

The winning healthcare brands benefit from taking the time to understand the customer, to uncover the universal human truths, to make the evidence personally relevant by defining the most meaningful role that the brand can play in his or her life. They bring the evidence to life and tell the truth well.

The Author

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