10 ways to improve your campaign effectiveness

A practical guide by Neil Dobson and Gary Killington

Campaign messaging in the field needs to be on target – not least because of the high costs involved in funding launch campaigns and deploying sales teams. Combine this with a highly competitive market environment, and the pressure's really on. Aside from the obvious challenges of creating a compelling campaign that truly differentiates your brand in the marketplace, there's also all too often a divide between marketing strategy and sales force messaging. A key problem can be a lack of internal communication between the two groups to ensure messaging is clearly communicated with minimal 'message drift' after the campaign launch. Campaign effectiveness can only really be achieved when an integrated model is used for measuring and tracking it from day one. Considering that the largest outlay is often on field-based activity, it is worth this relatively small amount of resource to ensure that this asset is being directed effectively. Here's some advice on how best to achieve this...
1. TESTING THE CONCEPT
There is a very real danger that initial concepts and ideas originated for promotional campaigns are simply not in line with what’s required for the appropriate target market. First of all, it’s crucial to assess whether they are realistic, appropriate and impactful – before spending time and money on sales and marketing materials that may not drive your brand forward.

Concept testing is the first exposure of marketing ideas to customers. It assesses ideas, story-flow, tone and key messages to go into promotional materials and detail aids. Focus groups are a good idea in the initial stages to gain some agreement on the concept most likely to be effective in driving the brand’s strategic direction. As a team, you’ll start to find strands of commonality and it should become apparent whether a concept is likely to deliver the campaign objectives.

During the focus groups, further marketing ideas or new concepts can often be generated to help develop the detail aid.

2. TESTING THE DETAIL AID
So, you understand the concept and feel confident that your campaign will be able to successfully communicate the required brand elements. That’s just the beginning. Making sure the detail aids and other relevant customer information you produce to support the campaign are effective, and will have the necessary impact on a customer’s perception and behaviour, is vital. Content, data layout, flow of information, relevance of copy, visuals, brand differentiation, the messages it delivers – all these need to be assessed with the customers, usually via mock ‘details’ with the target audience. If it’s not a relevant or clearly useful piece of marketing material, it’s simply not worth producing.

Detail aids are there to promote the product in such a way that a customer clearly understands the brand positioning and end benefits. And is confident enough to undertake the desired action – usually to increase brand prescribing. At the same time, it’s crucial to probe the overall clarity and validity of the key brand messages. Put bluntly, if they’re not credible, the campaign simply won’t create a compelling rationale to prescribe your brand.

It’s also an excellent opportunity to gain buy-in to the campaign from non-marketing departments such as medical, PR and sales, by inviting them to attend focus groups to witness customer reactions first hand. Which leads us onto the next crucial point – internal communications.

3. KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON YOUR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS
Communications are the cornerstone of any successful campaign and play such a vital role in the whole process. It takes ongoing close monitoring to ensure that all departments – marketing, sales, training, medical and other internal stakeholders – clearly understand key campaign messages. The whole company, particularly those in sales and marketing, needs to be absolutely clear on the messages and brand positioning. One of the most effective ways of achieving this is to have an integrated communication plan, designed to show clear routes of communication. It’s a way of communicating the campaign to all departments within an extended brand team – and in particular, rolling out the communication to the field force.

It’s vital that everyone works together from the same viewpoint. If the key brand strategy is not clearly communicated and the rationale for this is not given, the possibility exists of an individual feeling they ‘know better’ – or of them just not understanding. This may result in them delivering mixed messages to internal stakeholders as well as to potential customers. A set communication plan within the company can resolve this issue before it even becomes problematic.

Remember – campaigns can fail before they have even begun simply due to a company’s inability to effectively communicate or to listen to feedback from its front-line representatives.

4. BENCHMARKING TOOLS – MEASURING CAMPAIGN EFFECTIVENESS
The campaign is up and running, the detail aids have been produced and your representatives have been briefed. Now you have to measure the effectiveness of individual sales representatives and teams – which means a good benchmarking tool is essential.

The most effective benchmarking tool measures how your individual sales
professionals perform in front of real customers (such as GPs and hospital specialists). These customers can provide them with both verbal feedback and objective assessments on their skills, detail and impact against industry benchmarks. And with the right software support offering same day reporting on skills, knowledge and message delivery, feedback and analysis can be immediate.

The positive outcomes are obvious – recommendations can be given on specific areas for development and then worked on to improve individual performance, within the shortest period of time.

An excellent way of utilising an in-call benchmarking tool successfully is by applying it in conference settings when campaign messages can be practised and assessed between individuals and teams from different regions. Healthy competition raises standards and the immediate campaign feedback you’ll get allows you to assess training needs for your staff. How good is their product and therapy knowledge? Do they have all the necessary selling skills? Are they able to deliver the goods effectively? A benchmarking process is an excellent way of tracking and comparing campaign effectiveness over time.

5. TAKING BENCHMARKING TOOLS ONE STEP FURTHER

Benchmarking events can also be adapted to incorporate market research sessions with customers and representatives.

Direct feedback and information from your target market is essential if your campaign is to succeed – and this is an early opportunity to elicit this. Customers and field-based staff can be asked about their first impressions of the campaign, the materials used, the impact of the campaign and the delivery and applicability of the key messages. Responses can be communicated immediately whilst individuals and teams are still present.

At the same time, interventions such as objection handlers or the need to refocus on specific elements of the campaign can be developed and implemented quickly. It’s one more opportunity not only to measure campaign effectiveness, but also to look at the quality of the delivery and improve upon it where necessary.

6. RAPID TRACKING OF THE CAMPAIGN

Still on the theme of continual campaign checking, tracking of representatives, head office staff and even customers should ideally take place a few weeks after the launch of the campaign. This early assessment means that any campaign tweaks or required interventions can be implemented before significant time and investment has been wasted.

To gain the maximum benefit from this type of research, it’s often best to have a series of questions via an anonymous questionnaire, which allow a direct comparison between how the representatives view their delivery of the campaign and how the customer perceives the campaign. This can then lead on to identifying areas where representatives may require additional help or support and provide an assessment of the success (or otherwise) of the campaign so far.

Again, it’s about picking up on any issues quickly and dealing with them immediately to ensure maximum campaign effectiveness. Tracking the campaign, both with customers and within your own company, has tremendous benefits including:

- Rapid measurement and feedback on the campaign
- The ability to check the clarity and consistency of the key messages
- The ability to gain a head office and field perspective
- The identification of potential issues and customer objections
- Identification of best practice that can be shared
- Feedback on amendments to the campaign.

All these benefits allow early interventions to be identified and implemented well before a traditional Detail Follow-Up (DFU) would report back.

7. STANDARD DFU RESEARCH WITH CUSTOMERS

As we’ve said, with the campaign progressing, it’s crucial to remain one step ahead via feedback and regular follow-up with customers.

DFUs are generally conducted a few months after the launch of a campaign on a sample of customers. This sample can be split to provide comparative analysis, for example, by regions, target and non-target customers or other relevant sub-divisions. Strategically, this is one of the most important market research projects as it’s often the only way in which companies assess both the success of the campaign and also the quality of the delivery by representatives.

The design, scope and structure of a DFU questionnaire varies from project to project depending on the needs of the brand. Essentially there are some standard elements to consider when tracking a campaign:

- Customer ability to retain the key messages and positioning
- Customer reaction to these elements
- The effect of the representative’s discussion on the customer’s intention to prescribe or recommend the brand.

Other factors that may be useful in addition to these standard elements include:

- Identification of influences on prescribing
- Current treatment options and reasons for choice
- Product differentiation
- Identification of potential issues and customer objections
- Assessment of representative ability
- Closing of the discussion and actions agreed.

8. ADDITIONAL DFU RESEARCH WITH INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to a standard DFU with customers, it is often invaluable to include representatives, regional business managers
and head office staff within the research. As with the rapid tracking, this gives a better picture of the overall selling process and facilitates more specific and wide-ranging recommendations to be made. However, these recommendations will be even more wide ranging as more research is conducted in greater detail. By utilising continuous tracking, the same factors measured in the initial research can be re-measured or new factors investigated.

Some of the more frequently used elements can include:
- Message drift assessment (including specific language used)
- Tracking of representative’s selling skills
- Motivation and belief in the brand and the company
- Testing representative understanding of sales and marketing direction; key sales messages; positioning; targeting; closing; pre-call objectives and objection handling
- Level of support from head office and field-based staff.

By including these stakeholders, you can also determine the reasons for that possible ‘them’ and ‘us’ situation that often occurs between sales and marketing, and resolve any issues.

It can also engender an environment whereby the whole company feels included in the campaign and its eventual success – this often continues well after the research has finished.

9. COACHING FOR THE MANAGERS

The campaign is up and running, regular research, tracking and benchmarking is being held. But let’s not forget the importance of those who actually drive the campaign from the top.

First line managers are the vital link between any campaign and the sales force. Ensuring they’re proficient coaches and understand the campaign fully to drive consistency, is key to the success of the campaign. You might want to consider day-long sessions to assess and develop the performance of first line sales managers (RBMs) and field training personnel, in order improve their skills.

Training sessions, or coaching masterclasses give you the opportunity to measure and manage performance, encourage best practice within teams and allow second line sales managers to benchmark their RBMs. They ensure that the correct strategy is communicated in a consistent manner and allow for historical reviews and future comparisons.

A typical masterclass should consist of three sections – observation, feedback and analysis, repeated with each manager.

Don't forget the importance of the first-line managers who are the vital link between any campaign and the sales force

It cannot be stressed enough that the tracking of any campaign on an ongoing basis is paramount to its success

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