

# FiercePharma

Pharma, stop trying to sell drugs like they're cars or shoes, agency vet urges

by Beth Snyder Bulik | May 3, 2017 8:43am



Pharma companies should stay away from consumer branding strategies and adopt healthcare-centered ones, according to one industry consultant.

Most people would agree that Oreos and arthritis meds probably shouldn't be sold the same way. However, according to branding consultant Vince Parry, many pharma companies are doing just that by using consumer branding strategies to sell drugs. That's a mistake, says the 30-year pharma ad agency vet.

The problem lies in the difference between consumer and healthcare products, he said. People buy things such as cars, clothing, electronic devices and even food as a way to distinguish and define themselves, while healthcare products are bought as necessities to treat illnesses that people do not wish to be defined by.

"People seek out remedies not as something they want to buy, but something that they have to buy. It's a necessary evil," Parry said. "They're not seeking a celebration of self, but a restoration of self. When you see commercials on TV where people are loving their laxatives or celebrating their new arthritis medicine by running around on the beach with a golden retriever, it rings false and untrue."

His solution? Pharma companies should continue to invest in advertising, but they need to also include healthcare branding strategies.

"An ad agency's job is to inform people about the product and trying to get it sold. Branding is about building identity, which superimposes patient values onto that brand, to create a flattering reflection of the person they want to be or want to be again," said Parry, who details his thinking in his new book "Identity Crisis: Health Care Branding's Hidden Problems and Proven Strategies to Solve Them."

His "Goldilocks" three-step process for branding pharma products goes as follows: First, discover what values the brand has and what consumers want to restore. Next, decide as a team what value is best superimposed on the brand. And then create visual and verbal cues like logos, typography, color patterns, photography style and other branding hallmarks that have been proven through behavioral psychology to evoke those emotional connections.

One of the examples he offered is Eli Lilly's erectile dysfunction drug Cialis, which he worked on in the past. Instead of being about sex, the brand is built around restoring intimacy to a relationship. Intimacy is the brand value Cialis embodies and projects.

"Consumer branding strategies are dazzling, but they're wrong (for pharma)," he said. "It works for Nike and that's great. It's a great model if you want to celebrate your life, but illness is not a celebration of life."

Parry has run his own brand consultancy, Parry Branding Group, for five years. His previous experience includes chief branding officer at inVentiv Health, founder and president at GSW, New York, and chief creative officer at Sudler & Hennessey.