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As reported in: *DTC Perspectives Magazine*

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DTC Perspectives

Recent Study Investigates Consumer Usage of Online Compliance Programs: Success Factors Revealed

September 2003

As use of the Internet expands, more and more consumers are going online for health related information. For pharmaceutical and allied companies, the question of whether consumers will seek health related information on the Web is no longer a question as more adults in the US consult the Internet for health information every-day than see their doctor¹. Rather, the issue is to understand the role that pharmaceutical companies can play in being,

in the words of Patrick Kelly from Pfizer (from his speech at the DTC National last March), providers of 'health information for consumers'. For pharmaceutical and allied companies, consumer use of their product Web sites is low. According to Media Metrix², the following four Web sites – WebMD, eDiets, AOL Health, and MSN Health – account for most Web traffic to health related Web sites. According to Forrester, two thirds of online consumers re-

port using the Internet to find health related information, yet only 16% report using drug-product sites in their search³. Clearly, there is an opportunity for drug manufacturers to play a more pivotal role in delivering useful health information to consumers.

Our recent research indicates that

72% of respondents had an interest in compliance programs; only 1% reported to have ever been enrolled in online compliance programs

compliance programs may be one opportunity for pharmaceutical companies to play this more pivotal role. We conducted an online survey in an attempt to help clarify reasons behind the 16% reported usage of pharmaceutical Web sites, but also included questions pertaining to compliance programs. The panel of consumers was developed and maintained by Usability Sciences, our strategic partner and a leader in Web site usability testing.

Our research yielded the following findings about compliance programs:

- Virtually none of the study participants had been enrolled in any form of compliance program – less than 1% indicated they had been in a program of this type, and very few seem to be getting their medical information from newsletters, newsgroups or emails.
- However, there is interest in compliance programs based

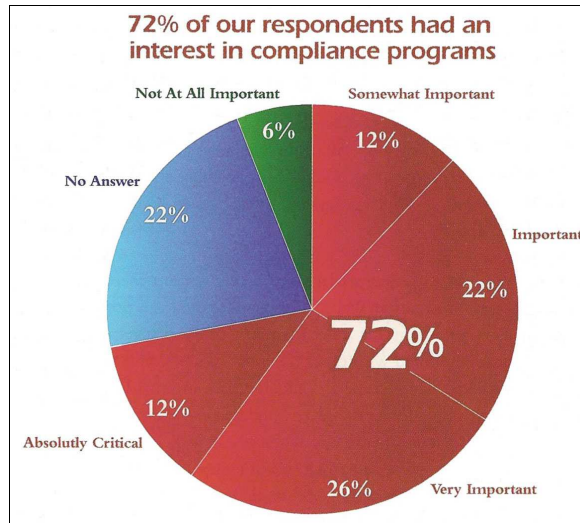
on other questions in our survey. For example, when asked to rate the importance of a number of offerings that could be on a drug product Web site, "programs that help you take the medicine correctly" received an average score of 3.3 (on a 5 point scale, with 1 being 'not at all important', 3 being 'important', and 5 being 'absolutely critical'). Additionally, most respondents believe that

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this type of program is at least somewhat important for pharmaceutical companies to offer, as shown in the following graph:

• While our respondents preferred a compliance program to be delivered via email (vs. other forms of communication such as telephone), they are somewhat hesitant to give personally identifiable information such as their email address. Surprisingly, they are more willing to provide name and medications they are taking than they are willing to provide seemingly generic information such as hobbies. They do indicate however, that they are willing to give



out much of this information if they are given the following guarantees:

- A commitment to not share their personal information with others.
- A guarantee that they will not receive unsolicited calls or emails.
- A guarantee that their information is stored in a secure environment.

Our study also revealed a number of clues to help pharmaceutical companies construct relevant, useful compliance programs:

- Unbranded or disease focused sites may be the most effective way to drive initial program registra-

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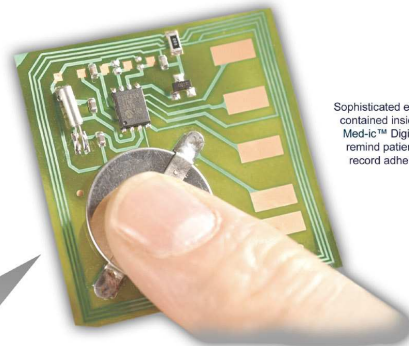
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tions. When we probed on perceived credibility levels of various types of Web sites that provide health information, we found that most types of sites we tested are perceived of as at least somewhat credible. However, 'Sites that focus on one specific disease or condition' received the highest credibility ratings. On the other hand, 'pharmaceutical company Web sites that focus on one specific medicine or drug' were not perceived as highly – they received a score in the range between 'somewhat credible' and 'credible' – indicating there exists some question of the reliability or bias of information provided on drug sites. The implication of this finding is that where the compliance program

is offered may have an affect on its success – and our recommendation is that pharmaceutical companies strongly consider the use of un-branded/minimally branded disease focused sites as a leading way to garner program registrations.

- Our respondents provided importance ratings for a number of items that could be offered on a drug Website – a logical conclusion being that these items would enhance the value of a compliance program. At the top of the list were expected responses such as information on how to use the drug, risk/side effect information, and clarification of which conditions the medication does and does not treat. They also indicate a need to

have more detailed information about the disease or condition itself, and that they prefer this information to be on the drug site as opposed to it being provided through links. Finally, 'results of clinical/FDA trials' is a surprisingly high need, indicating directionally that consumers are interested in reviewing these studies.

The research also shed light on the importance of consumer focused design as a critical success factor for a compliance program. When asked about why they favored certain sites, the responses were predominantly focused on 'ease of use' and 'quality of content'. We have found that usability testing is an invaluable tool in

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helping craft a truly consumer focused design. The implications for compliance programs are many. For example, many seemingly simple registration processes run into challenges when put through formal usability testing. What was designed to be a simple process often times includes too many required fields, confusing field names, and data entry formats that don't mimic how consumers type information. All of these glitches can be uncovered through usability testing. Additionally, usability testing can reveal whether or not your program content is useful, relevant, and easy to access.

One other finding of note – when asked where consumers find health related information, WebMD was by far the most popular unaided response – garnering more than 90% of the first responses. This finding, combined with other tracking studies, points to the fact that WebMD has become a dominant force in providing health information. However, our respondents also indicated that they use

search engines frequently when researching health concerns. Consistently we see pharmaceutical companies missing this simple opportunity

“Virtually none of the study participants had been enrolled in any form of compliance program.”

to drive targeted traffic to their drug sites, where they can then deliver on the needs articulated in our study.

There are many other implications from this research, and we continue to cross-tab the data. Initial cuts reveal that women answered some questions about needs and credibility very differently than men, and the 50+ crowd provided some surprising responses as well. Nevertheless, the aggregate data provides clues to the many different options for information that pharmaceutical companies can use to enhance the relevance and utility of a compliance program, especially when a component of that program is delivered through electronic channels. Of course, effective compliance programs are more than just simple reminder based programs. Our research hopefully provides some clues to help

stimulate your thinking about information components you may implement if thinking about launching a compliance program. We believe that compliance programs could be one way that pharmaceutical companies can play a more pivotal, ongoing role in providing useful information for consumers looking for health information.

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1. Harvard Public Health NOW. February 8, 2002.
2. Fall 2002.
3. Boehm, E.W., Brown, E.G., Molvar, K., & Cheatham, A.R. (July 2001). The Forrester Report, Pharma's DTC Reorganization.

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About Information Mediary Corporation (IMC)



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Information Mediary Corporation is dedicated to the convergence of medicine, logistics, high-technology, pharmacology, wireless, e-business and anthroponomy.

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