

# 10 ways... to influence the market

**A practical guide by Lawrence Liberti and  
Patrick Dennin**

The role of every brand manager, regardless of industry, is to ensure their company's voice is heard over the background noise of the marketplace. Unlike other industries,

however, guaranteeing a positive reception for a new pharmaceutical product isn't just a case of spending the most on advertising or sponsorship. There are

strategies you must adopt in order to influence the market positively and make sure you realise the greatest possible return on your investment.

## 1. DETERMINE WHO IS YOUR ACTUAL CUSTOMER

Throughout the research and development phase, your team had a clear audience in mind - the patients who will hopefully benefit from your endeavours and innovation. The impetus was to create a better drug that will improve treatment and quality of life.

But suddenly, when the drug reaches commercialisation, the customer changes. Except to a very small degree, the marketing team doesn't sell to the patient. Neither is the clinician the primary customer, since they don't make the final decision when it comes to prescribing your drug. Undoubtedly they have an influence, but your primary customer is that large and diverse group including third-party payers, regulatory bodies and patient advocacy groups. It is these people who will fund your drug, and it is these people you must convince in your marketing.

Therefore, it makes sense to engage with the marketing department throughout research and development to ensure you have a coherent, compelling story of distinct therapeutic benefits that will convince payers and regulatory bodies, not just patients. Indeed, it may be better to think of a drug as providing 'value in use' rather than therapeutic advantage.

Rather than leave the decisions about which drugs to pursue entirely to the researchers, your organisation should share the decision between research, portfolio management, franchise strategy and marketing teams. This means that effectively marketing has two distinct functions: to push information outwards, and to be the voice of the true customer within the organisation.

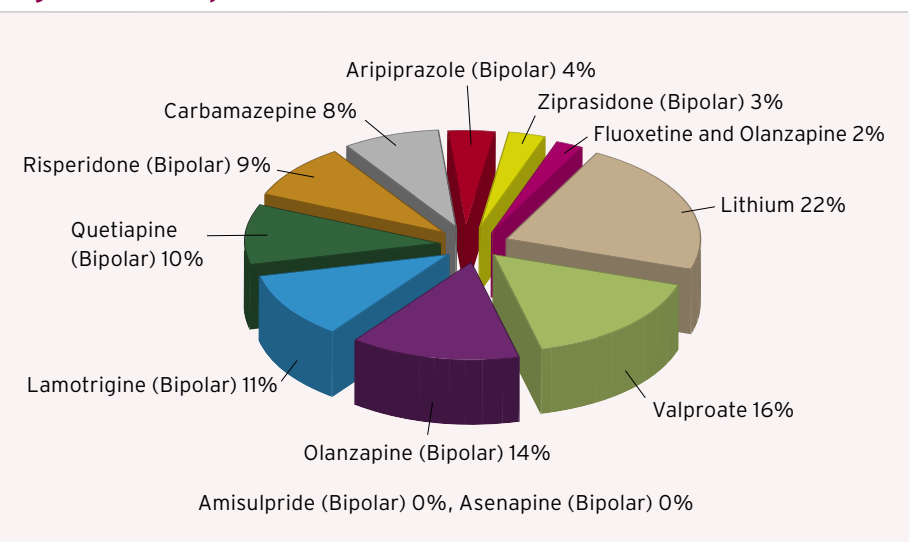
## 2. EDUCATE THE PATIENT

Clearly, the influence of each of the target audiences is in flux. Originally you only needed to convince the physicians. Today, as we have seen, it is the third-party payers and regulatory bodies who are your primary customers. But the role of the patient is changing, too. Arguably, we are witnessing a shift back toward the patient as, if not a primary customer, but a significant influence on prescribing patterns.

There's always been a 'hassle factor' in the clinics - patients having seen an advertising campaign, or read a news article and demanding the drug for their own treatment. This can put them into conflict with their doctor or payer, but except in a few high profile cases will not generally change the clinician's prescribing habits or influence the payer.

However, the increasingly diverse

Figure 1: SOV for product



marketplace is putting more perceived power into the hands of the patient. New channels of information, such as the Internet and direct-to-consumer advertising, bring expectations of receiving gold standard treatment. Patients are more literate, educated by better news reporting, ever more available information, and fuelled by patient self-help or knowledge-sharing groups. The 'hassle factor' can work, and your marketing strategy can only benefit by exploring these channels: better informing the patient so that they will act as your advocate in the clinic, and to some degree become your voice in the community.

## 3. EXPLORE THE AVAILABLE CHANNELS OF INFORMATION

An intelligent marketing campaign, then, should embrace all the available channels, not just the traditional scientific platforms. The patient group that finds information on your product website, in order to support their demands for gold standard treatment, can be a powerful voice. So can the doctors who network online to share case studies and best clinical practice, and to alert each other to new therapies.

Through the Internet, patients and doctors alike are sharing knowledge not only about the benefits of new drugs, but about adverse effects, too. 'Blogs' give their contributors complete, generally uncensored access to the experiences and opinions of their peers - experiences and opinions which, for good or bad, can have a huge influence on the market. You cannot affect these pools of shared information, but you need to build your marketing strategy intelligently to take account of them.

Effectively, you are able to exploit the same methods of 'viral marketing' that other industries use to great effect. It doesn't matter if you're selling drugs or

washing powder: you can effect great change by building up that information buzz throughout the target community.

## 4. FIND NEW FORUMS FOR YOUR MESSAGE

As an example, podcasting is capable of reaching a huge audience. The portable media player is now ubiquitous. It's certain almost all your patients will own one, let alone the physicians and academics and influencers throughout the hierarchy of your target audiences, and uptake of ever more sophisticated and bandwidth-hungry content is growing exponentially.

What's more, the podcast has an image that is exactly right for the innovative, forward-thinking, 'new frontiers' role that pharmaceutical companies like to build for themselves. New media is associated with the cutting edge of science and technology, a forum for building 'cool' brands. Just by the fact of you using it, this type of delivery will reinforce the image your organisation wants to portray - immediate connection with your audience from a company on the crest of innovation.

Already, we're seeing pharmaceutical institutions embracing channels like these. The European Respiratory Society and the American Society of Clinical Oncology were among the first to offer podcasts of their congresses. Virtual sessions were online a week after the event, feeding the vast audience of clinicians and other influencers too busy to attend. The scope for sponsorship is huge, let alone the forum for press releases, clinical trial results and marketing messages.

## 5. THINK LIKE A CLINICIAN

When it comes to influencing the clinician, your main problem isn't that this audience lacks information about your product. On the

contrary, they have too much information to deal with. Your voice may well be drowned out not just by the voices of your competitors, but by independent research, comparative studies, and the roar of scientific and market information directed at this sector.

For you, this is a problem. But for the clinician, it's worse still. Somehow they are expected to make intelligent prescribing decisions despite not having the time, tools or resources to turn that barrage of information into actionable knowledge.

Thinking like a clinician means understanding the methods by which clinicians filter out the background noise to isolate the data or message they can trust to steer their prescribing habits. You may not be able to shout above the noise, but you can certainly apply objective, scientific methods to understand how your messages are being received.

Clinicians turn to scientific journal articles and medical meeting content to analyse and assess the strengths and weaknesses of therapeutic options. They then use this learning to reach clinically-supported conclusions about the risk/benefit profile of each therapy. Clinically-supported decisions are what all good clinicians strive to practice. Knowing how positive and negative messaging affect the weight of evidence that they use to judge a therapy, you can emulate their processes and position your products accordingly.

## 6. LEVERAGE MESSAGE MAPPING TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

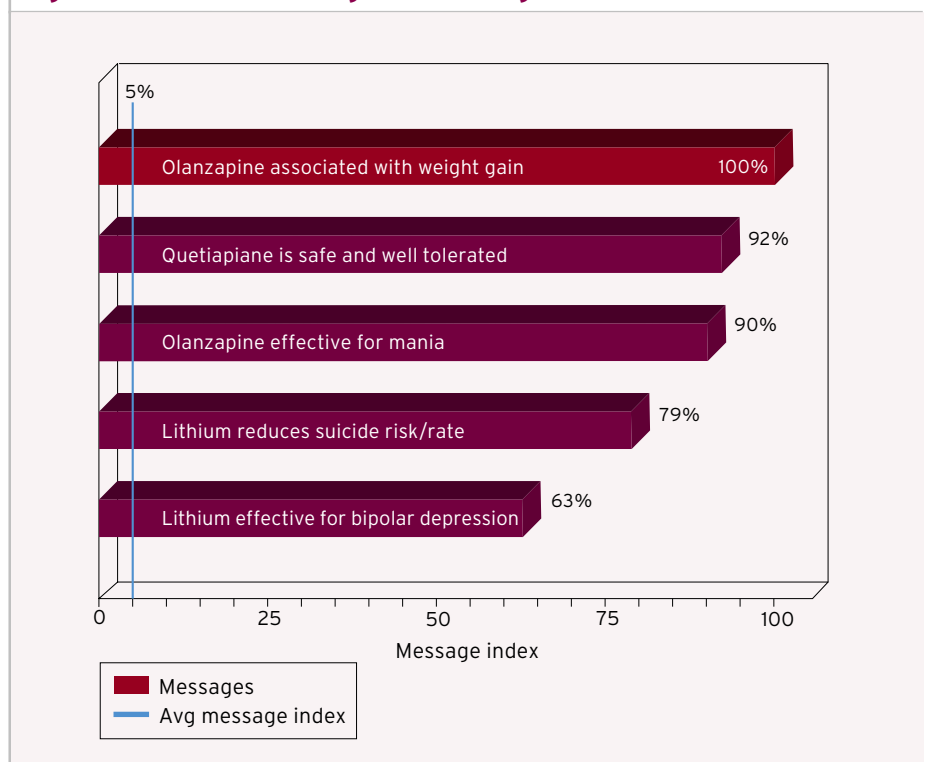
'Message mapping' is the term used to describe attempts to analyse the information that clinicians are exposed to, in order to evaluate critically the characteristics of its key clinical concepts and themes. By developing a systematic means of identifying key resources, messaging mapping can identify the publications most likely to shape professional opinions about particular drugs and therapies.

One way to visualise the extent to which positive or negative information influences a clinician's opinion of a particular therapy is to aggregate a 'product credibility index' value for this information. You may find that for some therapies the extent of negative information is almost as large as the positive aspects of the drug.

A 'share of voice' analysis (Figure 1) can show the extent to which there is a discourse in the literature about a particular drug and even in which uses there is more interest.

Understanding how competitors have developed their drugs will give the clinical department an edge in designing their clinical studies to best characterise the

**Figure 2: Normalised messages with the highest index**



new drug. Through message mapping, your organisation can see analyses of the indications being investigated by its competitors, and can identify respected investigators to help design and implement the clinical program.

## 7. BUILD UP A PROFILE OF YOUR DRUG

Message mapping can also help to plan your marketing strategy. It can help to develop a profile of the strengths and weaknesses, from the clinician's point of view, not only of your new drug, but also of its competitors.

Identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of a drug is a key aspect of developing a profile of knowledge about it. Categorising strengths and weaknesses about target drugs as described in the scientific literature can provide a unique way to profile a product.

Individual key concepts or messages influence our understanding of the benefits and weaknesses of particular therapies. A 'message credibility index' (Figure 2) can assess key messages, ranking them for their strength and frequency. By aggregating the messages (positive and negative) for a product, you can calculate a 'product credibility index'. By plotting the change in product credibility over time (Figure 3) you'll learn about trends that can occur based on information in the published literature.

## 8. PREPARE THE MARKET

Every pharmaceutical company primes the market for its drug from the moment

it releases the first information about that drug. Long before the product reaches the shelves, you need to have a market that is ready to receive it, and eager to begin prescription.

To achieve this, your strategy should not just rely on clinical results and scientific data. You need to employ the market influence of objective, independent scientists and clinicians. The more credible and respected the advocate, the more impact your early messages will have.

In other words, your early strategy needs to expand away merely from brand management to embrace medical affairs and medical science liaison functions within your organisation, generating clinical data and laying the groundwork for your product in terms of customer education. In not so many words, the internal functions and external advocates act as front-line training teams, not just building awareness of your product but 'visualising' it into the day-to-day working practices of healthcare practitioners.

## 9. DEVELOP KEY OPINION LEADERS

Every company is different in the way it identifies and engages with thought leaders. The methods you use should cover the entire spectrum of available advocates, from academics and scientific experts to clinical investigators and the clinicians themselves. Among opinion leaders, the advocates to target are not necessarily those who speak and read most - being prolific is not necessarily a measure of whether they're

being heard. To determine this, you need to analyse carefully the citations that show that a person actually has influence on the therapy area in question.

Exactly as with message mapping, you can apply objective, scientific measurement to opinion leaders, ranking them precisely in terms of their influence and voice. How prestigious was the paper? How much impact did they have? How much did they contribute? At the same time, careful analysis of these publications and sources can show when an opinion leader is also being paid by one of your competitors, ensuring you don't approach them.

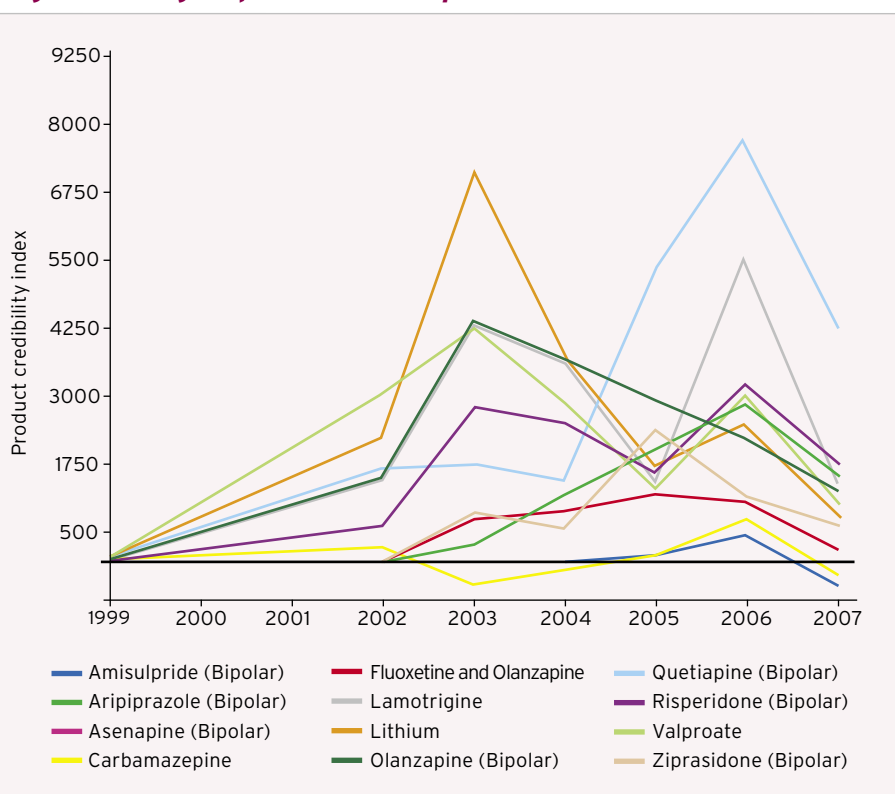
An 'advocate mapping' system should also enable you to apply weightings to the list of available opinion leaders, so that you can choose the advocate right for your organization based on their H-index and the publications (first author, last author), patents (first inventor, last inventor), or clinical trials (principal investigator) they're linked to, not just the overall number of citations. The result is a 'scorecard' system that gives you the best fit advocates at a glance.

## 10. REALISE THAT CLINICIANS ARE ALSO ADVOCATES

Doctors influence doctors. This means that even on the front-line of patient care, there are unpaid, unrecognised potential advocates for your drug. Your organisation needs to gauge not just how a clinician influences their peers, but how likely an individual clinician is to be influenced by changes in healthcare policy. For example, if a hospital or private care trust adopts a negative stance on a drug, or swaps to another, what is the likelihood that a clinician will cease prescribing it?

Clearly, if a clinician is not easily influenced by such a swing in hospital policy, he's of great value to your organisation. Such strong-minded individuals are most likely

**Figure 3: Change in product credibility over time**



to be important influencers and to provide stability in the sale of future products. They don't wait for their peers to adopt a new drug before following suit. They do their own research, make their own decisions, are likely to be early adopters - and most of all, are likely to influence those around them.

Indeed, these clinicians can be among your strongest supporters in the marketplace, and should be part of an intelligent marketing strategy. Instead of building up segmentation data based on prescribing volume, it makes more sense to build a profile that includes the clinician's zest for scientific data, desire to know more about added values such as patient support, and the kinds of commissions and panels they sit on, to ensure that the right kinds of

product messages are directed their way. When your representative visits this kind of clinician, they need to keep in mind that they're not trying to sell a product. They're nurturing and developing a brand advocate and, through them, influencing the entire market.

## Authors

**Lawrence Liberti** is VP, General Manager, Thomson Pharmaceutical Services and **Patrick Dennin** is Director and Product Manager for THOMSON PHARMA KOLexperts.

They can be contacted at: [lawrence.liberti@thomsonreuters.com](mailto:lawrence.liberti@thomsonreuters.com) (+1 215 328 4574) and [patrick.dennin@thomsonreuters.com](mailto:patrick.dennin@thomsonreuters.com) (+1 610 450 4732), respectively.



### THOMSON MESSAGE MAPPING SYSTEM<sup>SM</sup>

Measures the potential impact of published scientific information on the clinical practices of healthcare professionals by ranking it in a way that reflects their selection and reading processes.

[scientific.thomsonreuters.com/products/tmms](http://scientific.thomsonreuters.com/products/tmms)

### THOMSON PHARMA<sup>®</sup> KOLexperts

There are more experts than you know. *Thomson Pharma KOLexperts* can help you to identify, verify, develop and understand the thought leaders, symposium speakers and product advocates that can support your research and strengthen your market position.

[scientific.thomsonreuters.com/products/kolexperts](http://scientific.thomsonreuters.com/products/kolexperts)

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE  
FOR SMARTER PUBLICATIONS

To request more information about our products and solutions, go to: [scientific.thomsonreuters.com/forms/pcad](http://scientific.thomsonreuters.com/forms/pcad)