

Empathy Selling

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In my earlier article, I had tried to show how a doctor's needs and motivation to prescribe changed in tandem with the evolution of the Indian pharma market scenario.

I had also tried to demonstrate that in the current context, the Emotional Need was dominant in the Need structure.

In this article, I would like to put forward a framework for enriching the process of communication to meet this need. Let us begin by looking at how the pharma selling process lends itself ideally to its execution.

The Pharma selling process

Pharma marketing employs the personal selling method which as we know, has the following attributes:

- Engages single doctor in separate individual dialogue
- Doctor involved in the marketing process because of interactive, collaborative activity
- Sales person helps doctor make prescribing decisions
- More loyalty because of direct engagement

In view of the one-to-one nature of the process, the representative plays a key role in building perceptions about his product and brand.

Brand-building is all about building Emotional Connections

Brand-building essentially involves creating an emotional connection between a product and the doctor. Now, if one considers that a pharma representative's main function is to manage brand perceptions efficiently, then what we are effectively saying is that the in the representative's communication to the doctor, the emphasis should be on his Emotional Needs.

The word 'emotion' has the same root as the verb "to motivate" and "to motor". They derive from the old French word *movere* (to move). Emotion then, is all about movement and therefore influences our motivation to make certain decisions, and direct our behaviour accordingly. In other words appealing to the doctors emotions is to motivate him to prescribe.

Emphases on Emotions in a transaction

According to a recent University of Washington study, decision-making is an overlap of rational and emotional parts of the brain. The old concept of the brain and decision-making divided the concept of thinking into very separate 'rational' and 'emotional' components, while the current view is these components are integrated and overlapping.

Therefore, communication emphases on right brain appeals, where the emotions and the unconscious mind reside, will result in a greater likelihood of a successful transaction.

Doctors often make prescribing decisions based on how a product makes them 'feel' about themselves and their world. The right side of the brain being less focused is susceptible to images and suggestions and therefore a communication strategy based on this understanding will have a greater chance of succeeding

Thus, understanding motives and emotions can help a representative break through a doctor's resistance to prescribe (see Table 2). It will also be seen that Emotional Needs vary from person to person and that these have a close correlation to their Psychographic profile (Table 3).

Table 2. Hierarchy of Motives

Emotional Need	Motives	Appeal to Personality
		Types*
Orientation	Stability and control	2 /5
	Freedom and change	3/ 4
	Self-esteem, confidence and identity	1/3/ 6
Expectation	More respect	1/ 6
Adaptation	Conformism	5/6
Survival	Safety	All

***Refer Table 3**

**Table 3. Psychographic Profiles
Doctor' Personality traits**

Ref. No.	
1.	Successful, sophisticated, active, leader-like and dominating
2.	Mature, satisfied and reflective
3.	Career and work-oriented
4.	Young energetic and rebellious
5.	Conservative, conventional and traditional
6.	Insecure, approval-seeking and submissive

Emotional needs give rise to motivations, and an understanding of these relationships, will help to target the communication strategy effectively. These needs are:

Orientation

Doctors orient themselves to what they know, such as familiar brands, people, authorities in the field, or themselves. In some cases, doctors prescribe a product based on its suggested ability to offer orientation, stability and control. These are needs which would be present in conservative, conventional and traditional as well as the mature, satisfied and the reflective doctor.

In other cases, doctors prescribe for the promise of disorientation, which suggests freedom, change and relief from pressure. For instance if a doctor of a rebellious or an upright disposition were to be pressured with excessive inducements to prescribe a particular company's brand, he might well turn to a rival brand just to spite them.

Often doctors will prescribe to attempt to orient themselves to their environment or experience, the attempt here is to more than prescribe – it is to buy self-esteem confidence and identity (see Table 2).

Expectation

Expectation is used by consumer marketers to plant the idea that using their product will give the buyer a better life. In other words if you drive this car, you will get more respect, or if you use this fairness cream, you will look like the gorgeous woman in the ad.

In the pharma context this need may be present in both doctors seeking respect, as well as, those wanting to move beyond respect to prestige, in other words, both doctors who are successful and dominating as well as the ones who are insecure and submissive. The strategy would be to invest the brand with prestige in the minds of these doctors.

Adaptation

Because doctors want to fit in and keep up with each other, they will often prescribe what is 'in' at the moment. It is human nature to believe that if so many other people own or use a product it must be good. For instance to instill confidence into the minds of buyers, the ad for Sharp electronics claims that their microwaves are used by 7 crore satisfied users around the world. These needs may be present in both Conservative as well as insecure doctors.

Survival

All of us have basic needs to survive. These include physical needs, spiritual needs, territorial needs and sexual needs. For instance the ad for the Fiat Siena claimed that it has safety features which ensure the safety of the buyers' family. The survival need being of a universal nature, would appeal to all types of doctors. In other words the safety aspect of a product is critical to a doctor's decision to prescribe and may be used positively to push one's product, and negatively to show a competitor's product in bad light.

The power of emotional value

Brand-building and CRM, ought to be the two key areas of strategic focus for pharma companies. Both these strategic areas call for richer communication strategies.

An understanding of the psychological underpinnings to this process would help enrich the communication and also bring about fruitful results.