



# Message with a difference

Bruce Annabel, pharmacy business adviser and Adjunct Professor of Pharmacy Management, QUT. [bannabel@jr.com.au](mailto:bannabel@jr.com.au)

**‘Believe and act as if it were impossible to fail.’**

— Charles F Kettering (1876–1958)

In a crowded marketplace where virtually every pharmacy has become a discounter offering customers the same products, service, format and product/price promotions, there’s little point of difference.

Those innovative pharmacies who have evolved into customer health solution service providers are able to deliver a marketing message that communicates what they stand for and for which they gain a reputation.

So it is refreshing to see two of the larger national pharmacy groups shift their strategy emphasis to health solution services aimed at attracting customers by offering valuable health outcomes.

For those who want to have a sustainable and viable business model, the clear message is that there is no alternative but to implement the health solutions services model. The key, though, is implementation—not mere aspiration.

Throughout 2012 I have attempted

to describe the community pharmacy customer-centric health services business model and how any pharmacy owner and pharmacist can employ it to enjoy the professional and financial rewards once it has been implemented. The model, strategies and the ‘how-to’ ideas are based on my concepts and experiences with innovative pharmacies that are applicable to virtually any pharmacy

size, group and individual.

Once the health services model has been properly implemented, it needs to be supported by effectively communicating and marketing what you offer to your target market. This can’t be done by solely relying on the catalogues and product/price promotions, whose place is founded

upon traffic generation. These cannot effectively market the pharmacy’s point of difference, if one exists.

Most of the innovators I work with prefer to invest the majority of their marketing budget (1.5% of total sales) promoting their health solution services, specialists (pharmacist, nurse, sleep therapist, naturopath, etc), special range, information, and outcomes. These pharmacies are investing funds on selling the message on how they can improve their customers health.

## THE INNOVATORS COMMUNICATE THEIR POINT OF DIFFERENCE...BY EMPHASISING THE NON-PRICE REASONS TO CONSIDER THEIR PHARMACY...

The innovators communicate their point of difference to customers and potential customers in their local market area by emphasising the non-price reasons to consider their pharmacy over another. One innovative group of four pharmacies I consult relies on local area and ‘word-of-mouth’ marketing very effectively. As one of the partners said to me: ‘Our four pharmacies see 45,000 customers per month. At every visit we tell them something we want them to know. That’s 540,000 free communications per annum’.

This sends a clear message to any owner who aspires to join the successful and competitive innovators: first create the advertising budget ensuring funds are free to promote services locally; build web presence; target customer groups for whom you have created a specialist health solution service; and initiate a community outreach program.

Consider the following list of local area marketing ideas:

- **community health support groups;**
  - **general practices;**
  - **state and federal government community health services;**
  - **businesses (employees);**
  - **specific condition demographics, support groups, carers;**
  - **specialists such as paediatricians if the pharmacy has a baby service;**
  - **community newspaper;**
  - **schools and local events;**
  - **newsletters;**
  - **social media (with judgment);**
  - **QR codes: advertising services, product information, videos and tips;**
  - **mobile apps gateway to web site: special products and services;**
  - **in-pharmacy event days for diabetes, seniors, mothers, asthmatics, sleep.**
- The list goes on...**

The digital revolution has altered the way customers interact with retailers and, in turn, is impacting marketing. Figure One compares<sup>2</sup> where customers in the US increasingly spend their time with how advertising spend is allocated.

The implications for Australian retailers and community pharmacy can’t be ignored. For example Salmat<sup>3</sup> told us last year the 92% of Australian mothers are online every day and it is generally known people use the web as an information source because of its convenience.

Those pharmacies I have described all year who have innovated, understand this and are able to base their marketing on a message with a difference. ■

References available on request.

FIGURE ONE: **Customer time versus advertising dollars**

