

Healthcare Marketing to Millennials: Six Key Insights

Introduction

Whilst many in the Healthcare world have been focussed on the aging population and their effect on hard pressed health providers, or wondered how the “have it all” Baby Boomers will react to diminishing personal health – the Millennials have crept up on us. Surprisingly Millennials, born between the early 80’s and the end of the century will soon surpass those Baby Boomers in actual numbers. This younger generation defines itself by the technology advances made by their parents. They see “Technology use” as what makes their generation unique and use their personal digital devices everywhere from the bathroom to the bedroom, in the street and in the office. What’s more they rate a brand or service on its use of technology more than on the brand itself, tending to be introduced to their brand or service via linking, pinning or tweeting information on social media.

So, what do pharmaceutical companies need to bear in mind when marketing to Millennials? Here are six insights that can help your brand gain traction with this generation.

Insight # 1 – Provide Millennials with a higher purpose beyond the brand

Millennials have grown up with a bombardment of information; spoil for choice they have learned to actively filter where they choose to focus their attention and on which device (parents know this only too well). Marketers and their advertising only have a few seconds before Millennials become their biggest fan or pull the plug. So what does this mean for marketers?

Millennials genuinely want to be inspired by brands, so brands need to give something back that will deliver on a higher purpose. Pfizer launched their US campaign – “Because they share”, which encourages young people to take selfies and post them online after receiving their vaccine shot against meningococcal disease B. By tapping into the idea of sharing, which ironically is what puts this group at increased risk of this disease, the product is being promoted, but also empowering patients to educate their peers on the importance of vaccination.

Insight # 2 – Sell lifestyles

Not only are Millennials looking for a higher purpose, they are also seeking out experiences – considering this just as vital as establishing a career. The increased ability to travel more easily and cheaply means Millennials have a new sense of freedom and do not want their health concerns to hold them back. There is significant opportunity for healthcare companies who can promote lifestyle services, whilst encouraging proactive engagement of patients in their own healthcare. The NHS in the UK have recently made a move in this direction by collaborating with Pharmacy2U to offer a home delivery prescription service. Hardly a unique idea, but one that will make a significant difference for many patients, and in particular, the Millennials, brought up on ASOS and Amazon.

Insight # 3 – Help them find ways to manage the pressure

Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett has coined the phrase – “the age of instability”; and it is the Millennials who express they are feeling more pressure than ever of ‘emerging adulthood’. Whilst they don’t worry about retirement or the frailty of old age, they are anxious ‘in the moment’. They are concerned about making the right decisions about their social status, career, an affordable home, starting a family etc. To decide, Millennials are happy to spend hours searching online, to get it right.

Clearly none of us wish pharmaceutical marketers to exploit this anxiety but rather help create smart tools to support decision making: fast access to the right content and in an engaging, digestible format. An example to follow would be MyFitnessPal, which is the most popular health and fitness app in the world; the app’s database of more than six million foods makes it easy to track your diet, no matter what you eat. Whether you’re trying to lose weight or put on muscle, the app helps determine the best things to eat to meet your goals.

This is the kind of support Millennials value and will ultimately pay back to those seeming to understand their needs.

Insight # 4 – Support a more diverse doctor-patient relationship

The modern doctor-patient relationship is complex and not defined easily, but there is no doubt that patients are contributing to the conversation more than ever. A side effect of this newfound confidence is to question how satisfied we are with this relationship and Millennials will further this trend. Physicians are already prey to subjective online star ratings such as on iWantGreatCare.org, and with the integration of more objective measures such as quality metrics, seeking the wisdom of the crowd will become the norm to seek trusted relationships.

Trust, however, is simultaneously going to compete with modern lifestyle demands; for common complaints and short term illness Millennials will see greater value in the convenience of remote and on demand telehealth. Opportunities exist to continue supporting doctors with this evolving patient conversation and helping the Millennial healthcare professionals find a modus operandi with the Millennial patients.

Insight # 5 – Tap into the social power of online patient advocates

While the baby boomers are sceptical as to whether online information is 'true' and 'trustworthy', Millennials cite the anonymity and personal stories as key factors that render social media a credible source of information for them. The result: patient bloggers who share their personal story and experiences online have large followings and significant influence over which brands are, and are not 'for you' – and in the context of healthcare – which diseases need our help.

Take Stephen Sutton for example: diagnosed with colorectal cancer at the age of 15, Stephen set up his own website and blog, where he posted his 'bucket list' of things to do in his final months. His blog created unprecedented awareness of colorectal cancer and within 1.5 years, over £4 million had been donated to a charity funding research into this disease.

Healthcare companies should not only be listening closely and embracing these brave individuals, but also actively measuring and reacting to the market changes they are presaging.

Insight # 6 – Integrate patients (and doctors) in your brand development process

Despite their increased anxiety, many Millennials will trump this with a strong sense of aspiration and a need to do better than their peers; resulting in a strong momentum to improve and innovate. But how can this best be capitalised upon by healthcare companies? Merck have taken a leap forwards by running a longitudinal patient community alongside the brand development of their new allergy products through to launch. This has enabled an ongoing engagement and innovation process allowing a fertile discussion forum for uncovering insights and generative solution building.

With their reliance on technology, their openness to social media, their suspicion of unfettered capitalism and the older generation, the Millennials can appear a challenging audience. But by understanding them, engaging them and co-creating with them marketers will find a willing and resourceful customer base.

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