



Prescription Drug Ads Prompt Fewer Consumers to Take Action

Declining doctor contact rates evident, says the latest update from Ipsos PharmTrends

April 21, 2004, New York, NY— Although spending on direct-to-consumer advertising for prescription drugs has regained momentum due to competitive activity heated by recent drug launches (particularly in the erectile dysfunction and elevated cholesterol treatment categories), consumers are less inclined to take action as they have been in the past, according to new findings from Ipsos PharmTrends®, a syndicated tracking study of consumer behavior by Ipsos, the global marketing research firm.

In its most recent survey, Ipsos PharmTrends found a declining proportion of consumers took action following exposure to a prescription drug ad. Two in ten consumers (19%) said that direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising prompted them to call or visit their doctor to discuss the prescription drug seen advertised. This meter for evaluating the success of drug advertising has shown a gradual decline since hitting a peak, in the February 2002 survey, when 25% of consumers said they contacted their doctors to discuss a drug they had seen advertised.

“Without traditional branding elements such as packaging and shelving, prescription drug ads need to communicate often complex symptoms or messages that define the problem as well as benefits within a short period of time. All this needs to be said within FDA guidelines, yet in a way that is compelling enough to motivate the consumer to take action. The recent survey results confirm that drug marketers are not overcoming these obstacles,” said Fariba Zamaniyan, Vice President of Ipsos Health and spokesperson for PharmTrends.

“Consumers need information that is easy to understand,” said Ms. Zamaniyan. “In the case of prescription drugs, information pertaining to chronic diseases or lifestyle matters needs to be communicated clearly to the intended audience so that consumers can define the problem and the potential solution—which is often the drug being advertised.”

Not surprisingly, the primary audience for prescription drug manufacturers—sufferers of the conditions for which the drugs are intended—respond to DTC advertising at a greater rate than the average consumer. This is particularly the case for sufferers of symptomatic conditions where identifiable symptoms are experienced.

“Consumers who experience symptoms detailed in the drug ads they see are more likely to seek more information so that they can treat or prevent their tangible discomfort or concerns,” said Zamaniyan.

Whereas the average response rate is 19%, one third (33%) of chronic pain sufferers reported that they called or visited their doctor to discuss a prescription drug seen advertised. Additional conditions where call to action levels were higher than average include anxiety (28%), asthma (27%), depression (26%), arthritis (25%), recurrent constipation (28%), recurrent diarrhea (30%), eczema/dermatitis (26%), insomnia (33%), irritable bowel syndrome (27%), erectile dysfunction (27%), hormone replacement therapy (28%), migraine headaches (28%), and overactive bladder (29%). Asymptomatic conditions, such as elevated cholesterol, realize call to action levels that are similar to the average (19%).

With declining doctor contact rates, it's no surprise that overall consumer awareness levels of prescription drug advertisement are also soft relative to year ago. Fifty-six percent of consumers said they had seen advertising for prescription drugs in the 12 months prior to February 2004, down slightly from 60% during the same period last year.

Top Categories for Prescription Brand Drug Recall

Certain categories experience higher advertisement recall among consumers than others. The top-ranking categories for advertisement recall changed somewhat in this update. The Lung/Respiratory category moved to the third ranking, up from fifth a year ago. Growth in this category for buyer ad recall continues to be driven by spending levels by leading



asthma treatment brands, including Advair and Singulair. The rest of the previously top-ranked categories remained present in the top five: Allergy, Behavioral Disorders, Cardiovascular, and Gastrointestinal.

(Based on percentage of category buyers that recalled an ad for the prescription brand purchased within that category.)

Ailment Category	2002 % Of Prescription Brand Buyers with Ad Recall	2003 % Of Prescription Brand Buyers with Ad Recall	% Change in Number of Ad Aware Buying Households
Allergies	70%	65%	-16%
Behavioral Disorders	46%	43%	7%
Lung/Respiratory Conditions	36%	38%	14%
Cardiovascular	42%	37%	2%
Gastrointestinal	40%	36%	-3%

Top Ten Prescription Brand Drugs by Ad Recall

(Based on percentage of buyers that recalled seeing an ad for the prescription brand purchased.)

Year Ago Rank	Current Rank	Prescription Brand
1	1	Viagra
2	2	Nexium
15	3	Flonase
3	4	Imitrex
8	5	Fosamax
7	6	Celebrex
4	7	Lipitor
13	8	Singulair
9	9	Zoloft
18	10	Prevacid

Several branded prescription drugs show high levels of ad recall among their purchasers: Viagra continues to top the list where nearly all of Viagra buyers recalled seeing an ad for the erectile dysfunction drug in 2003 (92%). Prevacid, with an ad recall of 76% among its buyers, closes out the top ten list. Prevacid, along with Singulair and Flonase, showed the most significant movement upwards of any prescription drug (up from ranking of 18th, 13, and 15, respectively, a year ago).

“There’s still room for improvement in the creative executions applied to prescription drug ads,” said Zamaniyan. “Instead of perfecting creative executions that clearly communicate the health benefit of the drug being advertised, we’ve seen a surge in the number of unbranded, unindicated reminder ads. These executions, if not managed appropriately, may be causing more confusion rather than providing solutions. The target audience in turn is less inclined to seek more information. Going forward, marketers will be forced to execute campaigns that move the persuasion needle even further, to where brand linkage with the health state is developed and equity is achieved.”



Although consumer action is declining relative to prior periods, prescription drug ads continue to educate consumers on alternate therapy options for their respective conditions. Twenty percent of consumers surveyed believe prescription drug ads are educational. Thus, this medium of promotion is providing a service to consumers.

"The motivation of direct-to-consumer advertising for prescription drugs should continue to be the improvement of health outcomes and prevention of costly medical healthcare," said Ms. Zamaniyan.

"The past seven years of advertising for this product category has shown that consumers want advertising of prescription drugs because it is a source of information for both symptomatic and asymptomatic diseases. Consumers are empowered through education to have a say in the treatment regimens recommended by their physicians," added Zamaniyan. "To gain their trust and prompt action, the information must be communicated in a way that is easy to understand and clearly defines the problem and the potential solution—such as the drug being advertised. If that linkage cannot be made, then advertisers have wasted their time and money."

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Ipsos PharmTrends Methodology

Ipsos PharmTrends® syndicated tracking service captures both prescription fulfillment and over-the-counter purchasing data through a longitudinal and continuous consumer panel of 16,000 households that is representative of the U.S. census composition. Each month, panelists report their prescription and over-the-counter purchases for the treatment of a full spectrum of conditions (general and specific). The monthly tracking began in 1997.

To learn more about Ipsos PharmTrends® please visit our [Homepage](#).

InstaVue Survey Methodology

During the month of February 2004, Ipsos PharmTrends® interviewed a representative sample of over 25,000 adults 18+ years of age nationwide using InstaVue, an omnibus mail survey. The study was conducted and paid for by Ipsos PharmTrends.

About Ipsos-Insight

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