



Ipsos Health Division

Health

Synopsis: United Breaks Guitars – The Rise of the Prosumer

United Breaks Guitars – The Rise of the Prosumer

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When Dave Carroll was given the run around by United Airlines after they broke his guitar, he decided to give the airline an ultimatum of compensation or embarrassment. As United continued to deny any liability, Dave posted his new video, United Breaks Guitars on YouTube. Over five and a half million people have watched this clip. This has been one of the most successful viral videos in 2009 – United cannot avoid Dave any more.

Consumers, and this includes patients, have always discussed with each other what they are passionate about. However, the digital age has changed the magnitude of the platform available to them; they can reach out to millions of people unlike ever before. The consumer world has had to adapt significantly to take these new individuals into account...the prosumer.

But what has been the impact of the phenomenon on the healthcare world? Patients, after all, are consumers.

To understand this further we conducted some primary qualitative research in the UK and Italy amongst patients, screened using the same criteria used to define a prosumer¹. What we found cast aside many of the preconceptions we had prior to undertaking this research...

These patients are not all under 35 year olds tweeting all day. The first patient we met was Iris. When she walked into the interviewing room we asked ourselves, how could this lovely 65 year old lady possibly be the 'pro-patient' which we had been searching for?

By the time we had finished learning about Iris' online cake business, and how she searches online for information about diabetes, collates this and sends it out to other sufferers, via her newsletter, website and online blog, we knew we had found a prosumer...or pro-patient.

So how do physicians (and nurses) go about managing the needs of this knowledgeable and highly influential patient group? Do they pose any challenges in their health management?

To explore this in an as 'true to life' manner as possible, and with the appropriate permission, we showed video clips of our 'pro-patients' to a number of specialist physicians and nurses in both the UK and Italy. They confirmed that although in the minority, the key challenge when faced with this patient cohort was not about providing more sources of information e.g. disease

education booklets, but more about providing tools to help direct these patients to credible information sources - for example, 'safe internet usage guides'; the 'do's and don'ts' when searching for information on the internet and/or from other patients.

Additionally, these highly experienced physicians and nurses were all-too-ready to admit to feelings of intimidation, and a requirement for help from Pharma, concerning how to better communicate and tailor their consultation when faced with a pro-patient.

"My age group of doctors have always come across a passive group of patients, not much information, and we have always taken this paternalistic approach, "do this and this". So we do get intimidated with these new types of patients. Sometimes it can be refreshing, but too many informed patients can be intimidating"

While this is currently a small cohort of patients, it is a growing group, as an aging population, improved rates of diagnosis and wider access to online tools and forums increase their number. They are changing the relationship between physicians and patients; the discussion they have is more informed, but sometimes misinformed, and this has an impact on acceptance of a therapy or compliance.

Our recommendations from the paper focused on how the pharmaceutical industry can help physicians with the management of these patients, focusing on the intangibles, like how to deal with a misinformed patient, or how to have more of a peer-to-peer discussion with one. We also believe that these patients change the way we do research with this population, pro-patients are like patient KOLs; they have a different hunger for information than the ordinary patient.

Ignore pro-patients at your peril, but don't fear them – their interest in their health can be channelled in a positive way. Just don't make the same mistakes that United Airlines did.

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About Ipsos Health Division

Ipsos Health Division specialise in understanding the motivations, interactions and influence of stakeholders forming the multi-customer focus which increasingly drives business models in the pharmaceutical industry.