



Healthcare Communications: Beyond Advertorials...

A Communications Guide

Overview

The state of the public healthcare system in Ukraine, one which hasn't changed significantly since Soviet times, is reaching a critical stage. Since 2004 healthcare expenditure has tripled but is still woefully behind European standards. The country has a new President and Government which says publicly that healthcare is one of its top priorities yet complete healthcare reform is now long overdue and access to quality medicine is still only available to a select few. Health awareness amongst the general population is one of the lowest in the region and the spread of many illnesses like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis are growing rapidly.

Against this backdrop, global pharmaceutical companies have an immense challenge to develop their businesses in Ukraine and forge effective alliances with Government, state authorities and the medical community. Built upon our solid experience in this field, this Grayling Communications Guide is designed to provide healthcare companies with the ideas, approaches, tools and components for delivering effective healthcare communications campaigns in Ukraine.

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Introduction

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Healthcare companies operating in Ukraine need high quality communications more than ever; healthcare is high on the government agenda, partly as a result of the 2009 influenza epidemic, but also due to the general poor condition of the public healthcare system.

The new Ukrainian Government has placed public health improvement and healthcare reform at the top of its priorities. Urgent measures have to be taken, as all attempts of the previous administrations to bring Ukrainian healthcare up to minimum European standards failed, and it remains outdated in terms of quality, equipment, infrastructure and financing. Unfair and inadequate budget allocation, non-transparent public procurement processes and onerous registration procedures all prevent quality medical drugs and equipment from reaching Ukrainian patients. This hinders global pharmaceutical companies from pursuing fair competitive practices and establishing collaborative and trustworthy relationships with the state healthcare authorities, both centrally and regionally. This has an immediate business impact, but more importantly, a negative impact on patient access to the most up-to-date medicine and, consequently, on the general public health.

These factors make strategic and effective communications critical for healthcare companies to develop their businesses, build their image and reputation and strengthen their market position in Ukraine. An integrated strategic communications approach will help them better understand the political and regulatory environment in which they operate, the medical community, associations and think-tanks, the media, and ultimately the general public.

Successfully communicating key health concepts to governments and the general public, and changing long-held habits, requires a strong, often diverse, engagement campaign grounded in a solid understanding of local beliefs and traditions – supported by solid scientific facts. Campaigns should be closely linked to the government's agenda and can be highly political: public health awareness varies enormously, but can be a long way behind Western European norms.

With an in-depth knowledge of key concepts and local attitudes, relevant and informed healthcare communications' campaigns can be successfully developed and managed in an increasingly-noisy sector. The key to success is to push innovation with regulation, and leverage two-way engagement with target audiences.

Outlined in this guide are the key components and tools to guide you through the challenges and complexities of developing a comprehensive and effective public affairs and public relations plan for your products and services, and in line with your business objectives.

Stephen Lock, Executive Editor, August 2010



Healthcare Communications – From a Medical Model to a Wellness Model

“Frankly, it’s hard for me to tell you where healthcare PR is going because I can’t see where healthcare organizations are going.”

PR professional, Ukraine

Healthcare is changing at unprecedented levels. The old model that featured a well-known family physician providing medical treatment has been replaced by a healthcare organization and system that promotes prevention and wellness. Changes in payment for services, clinical and operational practices, the management of healthcare processes and information and the very structure of healthcare organizations have combined to challenge even the most astute communications practitioner.

FIVE CRITICAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Healthcare is a unique industry because of the product – life, death and healing. To better understand the challenges and opportunities of current healthcare communications, it is helpful to take a brief look at its recent history to see just how significant the changes have been and how the roles and responsibilities of healthcare communications practitioners have evolved and grown.

1950s – 1960s – Medical Simplicity

These were good times for healthcare organizations (HCOs) and pharmaceutical companies. Many of them had no formal PR staff. In institutions that had a staff member responsible for PR, the role was fairly simplistic: producing brochures and supervising events. In the 1960s hospitals enjoyed a relatively unblemished reputation and there seemed little reason to launch proactive PR efforts to maintain and build public confidence.

The 1970s – Coming under Scrutiny

The 1970s marked the beginning of what would become a radical shift in public attitudes toward HCOs, as multiple forces converged to place them under more scrutiny than ever before. Healthcare executives began to experience the effects of media scrutiny. And when the economic downturn began, times changed. Reporters were beginning to ask questions about plans and budgets. Coping with the media’s investigative eye was only one of the challenges facing healthcare communications. Often its role was a reactive one, constraining practitioners to respond to media questions and to the organization’s needs. Communications expanded to include training on how to handle consumer criticism and internal communications.

The 1980s – Reacting to Public Influence

By the early 1980s even the most complacent healthcare CEOs saw the need to pay more attention to the publics that were influencing their organizations. Hospitals tried to increase their market share by getting into marketing new services such as women’s centers, alcoholism treatment programs and sports medicine clinics. Consumers began to take a more active role in making choices about their medical care. Patients responded positively to communications and advertising that encouraged them to become more informed and selective about their healthcare options.

The 1990s – Healthcare Reforms

The 1990s were marked by transformations in the US healthcare system, which led to healthcare reform, but the same challenges continued unabated. From this point on, healthcare leaders realized that the very survival of their institutions depended on forging mutually beneficial relationships with numerous stakeholder groups and those leaders turned to their communications executives for counsel and direction.

The New Millennium – Prevention overtakes Cure

In the 21st Century healthcare communications changed irrevocably because of the transition from a medical model to a wellness model. Communications are now more two-way, aggressive and tuned to the needs of a variety of audiences. In the past, healthcare communications was considered something to “use” rather than a process through which an organization or company could meet many goals as well as build a loyal and satisfied customer base. There is now an increased emphasis on relationship-building and maintenance. The principles of reciprocity, equality, respect and trust take on new meaning in today’s healthcare communications.¹

¹ Material in all of the preceding paragraphs and the quote are sourced from the “Handbook of PR,” R.L. Heath and G.M. Vazquez

THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY FALLS FROM GREAT HEIGHTS

Up until the late 1990s, the pharmaceutical industry enjoyed positive perceptions and reputational ratings. This has fallen fast over the years, until it touched rock bottom in 2004. Though slightly higher today, the pharmaceutical industry, the managed care industry and the health insurance industry are still among the most unpopular of all industries.

Profits before Patients?

Several recent major national and global surveys of consumers and pharmaceutical industry stakeholders, including physicians, health insurers, researchers and policy makers, have found that the public believes the pharmaceutical industry has put profits before patients, abandoning its original vision of improving human health. As a result, the public disregards the benefits that pharmaceutical companies bring to healthcare. According to a global consulting firm, unless the industry takes decisive steps to understand and narrow the gap between its actions and public perception, its damaged reputation will continue to pose a threat to the long-term success of the industry.

Damaged Reputations hit Bottom Line

The same surveys found that, when deciding whether to use a given pharmaceutical product, consumers place more value on a pharmaceutical company's reputation than pharmaceutical executives believed.

Nearly eight of every 10 consumers (78 percent) said that when given a choice, they would consider a drug company's reputation when choosing which product to take.

In today's market, a healthcare communicator must walk a fine line between promoting profit and care when working with a pharmaceutical company.²

² Material above sourced from the "Handbook of PR" as above and a Harris Interactive survey, 2006



Compliance and Legal Considerations in Healthcare Communications – An Ethical Code of Conduct

In the communications industry, pharmaceuticals and healthcare have a special ranking not only in terms of the inherent subject matter, i.e. human health and welfare, but also in the special ethical and often legal considerations required in the implementation of a communications programme.

This has become particularly true in the last decade following a series of high-profile lawsuits in the United States covering a wide range of ethical breaches on issues concerning clinical trials, medical research, information disclosure, gifts to doctors, and so on. These lawsuits have added a new dynamic to the public ethics debate on healthcare and drug/treatment provision in the United States, but with effects felt globally as well.

In part, some of these lawsuits - and often the violations that gave rise to them – reflect the highly competitive nature of the healthcare industry. Resources of time (years) and expense (millions) are invested into the research and development process to produce one product. The business success, and shareholder price, of a healthcare company often hinges on the marketing and sales success of a particular drug or disease treatment at a given time. Sales and market share are critical to the recovery of costs, and generation of profits.

Thus, the sales pressures in the healthcare industry are intense and require regulation – both internally and externally. Just as pharmaceutical salesforce representatives must adhere to guidelines in their work marketing drugs and medical treatments, so do public affairs and public relations specialists when communicating with government officials responsible for healthcare policy and the public at large.

The underlying core principle in healthcare communications guidelines is an “ethical code of conduct” for the communication of drug and treatment efficacy in all aspects – clinical, economic and epidemiological.

Being professional isn't enough

While basic professional guidelines and ethical codes of the public relations industry prohibit paid-articles, false statements and slander, healthcare communications go several steps further in terms of providing a system of standards to support transparent and fact-based interaction with target audiences. These guidelines are more stringent than the standard professional guidelines for public relations activities, and are based on international conventions, national legislation and industry association agreements such as the following examples:

Guiding Government Pillars and Principles of Healthcare Communications

1. US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (general) and Office of Inspector General Program Guidance for Pharmaceutical Manufacturers (industry specific)
2. EU Corruption Directives and Directive 2001/83/EC on the community code relation to medicinal products for human use, as amended by Directive 2004/27/EC
3. World Health Organization guidance on healthcare ethics

Industry Self Regulating Principles

1. International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Association's (IFPMA) Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices
2. European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) Code of Practice on the Promotion of Medicines
3. Directive 2001/83/EC on the community code relation to medicinal products for human use, as amended by Directive 2004/27/EC

COMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION – The Situation in Ukraine

Basic principles of healthcare communications in Ukraine are defined by the legislation “*On Information*”³, where the specific aspects are regulated by the Law “*On Advertising*”⁴ – legislation, which covers all major aspects of information distribution about drugs, equipment and treatment to the population. Its principal part is Article 21 “*Advertisement of Medical Drugs, Medical Techniques, Prevention, Diagnostics, Treatment and Rehabilitation Methods*”. Other legislation like the law “*On Medical Drugs*” refers to the advertisement legislation in all related aspects.

Advertising on the whole in Ukraine is understood as ‘information about a person or a commodity disseminated in any form, in any way and using any means that is directed at creating or maintaining awareness of the advertisement consumers and their interest in such a person or a commodity’ (the law “*On Advertising*,” Article 1).

This law means that any messages that attract attention to the product or service could be construed as advertising and separate from any other information. However, the law “*On*

³ Reference to the Law text: <http://zakon1.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=2657-12>

⁴ Reference to the Law text: <http://zakon1.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=270%2F96-%E2%F0>

Advertising” does not apply to informative and analytical materials (domestic and foreign market overviews, scientific research and clinical trials) that do not have promotion as their main goal. Therefore, all press releases that are concentrated not on the product or service, but on the medical problem, medical research or clinical trials, fall under the laws “On Information”, as well as “On Printed Media” and “On TV and Broadcasting”

Prescription vs OTC

In addition to the distinction between media and advertising, it is also important to draw a distinction between prescription and OTC drugs. Healthcare communications for *prescription* and over-the-counter (*OTC*) drugs differ considerably:

- According to Article 21 of the law “On Advertisement,” information on *OTC drugs* can be included in publications and announcements by media, general interest and specialized media, materials on conferences and seminars, instructions and other publications by parties to drug turnover;
- At the same time, information on *prescription drugs* is allowed only in specialized media intended for medical and pharmacy workers and institutions, as well as in the materials of seminars, conferences and symposia dedicated to medical topics.

For OTC drugs all of the communications channels and means can be safely employed, and attention should be paid to the content of the message. At the same time, it is better to avoid, even with indirect communication, any outreach to minors, any points highlighting a particular case of patient improvement, and all the other areas banned by the law “On Advertising,” Paragraphs 5-8 of the Article 21.

With regard to prescription drugs, both the channels and audiences must be carefully selected. With OTC drugs, there is a benefit to communicating with, and outreach to, pharmacists. With prescription drugs, it is the doctor who makes the final decision on which drug to use. When the drug or product cannot be directly named, there is an opportunity to promote the company brand and to *cover the disease itself*.

Grey Areas in Healthcare Communications in Ukraine

- The internet – users can find hundreds of web sites with information and materials on prescription drugs that are designed for a general audience
- *Hospitals - they combine both general and specialized audiences*
- Doctors: are not prohibited from receiving branded gifts

The AH1N1 influenza epidemic in Ukraine in autumn 2009, and wide-spread attempts of self-medication, initiated a discussion on a general ban of the advertisement of medical drugs and equipment in all-types of media and on increasing the attention to healthcare communications. The discussion resulted in a draft law submitted on November 25, 2009, which is now being considered by the respective committees of the Verkhovna Rada. If accepted, it will change the rules around healthcare communications considerably.

Lobbying & Advocacy

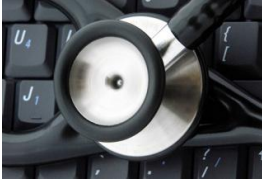
Unlike media and advertising, in Ukraine there is no clear set of laws providing guidance for healthcare lobbying and no specified legislated regulating how pharmaceutical companies can interact with the policy-makers, medical community and public – beyond, of course, fundamental laws on corruption, slander and libel. The attempts of the previous team to introduce lobbying legislation didn't go beyond the draft stage.

The government relations and public affairs realm is non-transparent on many levels, particularly when dealing with the budgetary decision-making process for drug and treatment reimbursement. Overall, the pharmaceutical industry in Ukraine can be characterized as "grey," where pharmaceutical distribution companies work outside of international compliance standards and market access noticeably restricted.

In the new ruling team, which came to power in 2010, has started an active fight against corruption supported by respective legislation changes. This fight, often a populist and "political" one, targeted healthcare as one of the most "difficult" sectors and resulted in several serious lawsuits and dismissals. This has made healthcare officials be more cautious in their contacts with pharmaceutical companies and in public activities.

International pharmaceutical companies from the US and the EU are still regulated in Ukraine by their home-country laws (FCPA, EU directives), but can still find effective and compliant communications channels through alliance-building with patient advocacy groups, industry associations, hosting conferences and roundtables, and strategic messaging to key health policy officials to create "win-win" scenarios.

Ukraine continues to suffer from a demographic and health crisis, particularly in the areas of cardio-vascular, oncology, and chronic disease. In general, health awareness amongst the population is low. Ukrainian policy-makers, to the highest-levels of the government and presidency, understand the importance of both health awareness and the need for modern healthcare, and they are increasingly seeking an audience with international pharmaceutical companies who can make a case for how their drugs and treatments can provide both clinical and economic benefits to the Ukrainian population as a whole.



Planning a Healthcare Communications Campaign

In planning a healthcare communications campaign, the two primary issues a pharmaceutical company needs to consider in foreign markets are:

[Access to the market itself](#) - the ability to navigate the regulatory maze in order to have drugs licensed, and in best-case scenarios, included on government reimbursement lists

[Access to consumers](#) - doctors and patients

While these two audiences are distinct, they are both critical to achieving overall communications success. A full-spectrum campaign involves both lobbying/advocacy efforts to inform, influence or manage risk within the regulatory environment of central and regional decision makers, and public relations efforts to raise awareness amongst the medical community and patients.

Market Access

➤ *Do your homework and engage!*

Market access is not only about going through the clinical and technical approval processes to license a drug and assessing the market capacity of the population that needs it. An effective market access strategy will involve a communications plan to engage relevant government decision makers and influencers and a wide spectrum of stakeholders and interest groups that often goes beyond the state ministries and administrative agencies of healthcare.

It goes without saying that the first step in developing a market access strategic communications plan will require not only understanding the information and issues regarding the drug, treatment, and disease in question, but also understanding the disposition of your audiences and their interaction with each other in the decision-making environment. The strategic messaging of a solid communications program needs to have core key messaging, but the selection, tailoring and positioning of these messages may vary depending on the target audience. Therefore, it is necessary to have strong insights into the local healthcare environment.

➤ *Who are your stakeholders, and why are they important?*

A company's stakeholders define and shape the environment within which the organization exists. Legislation, regulation, policy and public opinion directly impact almost any company, but particularly pharmaceutical companies, which of course impact sales and ultimately share price.

Everything an organization does (and does not do) sends messages to its stakeholders and creates a perception about its priorities, how seriously it takes its responsibilities, its professionalism and its level of commitment. This perception then has an effect on how the organization - and its industry - is treated, be that in employee and customer loyalty, policy, regulatory or legislative terms.

A list of stakeholder audiences for healthcare communications typically includes:

- State policymakers and health administrators
- Medical community (experts, researchers and practicing doctors)
- Patients and patient advocacy groups (PAGs)
- Peer competitors (international and domestic), industry associations, multi-industry trade chambers and associations

Effective and managed outreach to these stakeholders helps manage an often complex and dynamic environment, and also helps set a foundation for alliance-building. Additionally, stakeholder outreach advocates and simultaneously builds trust through personal contact, helping a company manage its stakeholders' expectations and concerns, and it provides an early warning of any changes to the existing environment.

Stakeholder Audit

Fundamental to effective stakeholder outreach is an accurate and insightful understanding of how stakeholders view both the organization and the industry within which it functions. Identifying and auditing an organization's stakeholders enables the skilful, discreet identification of:

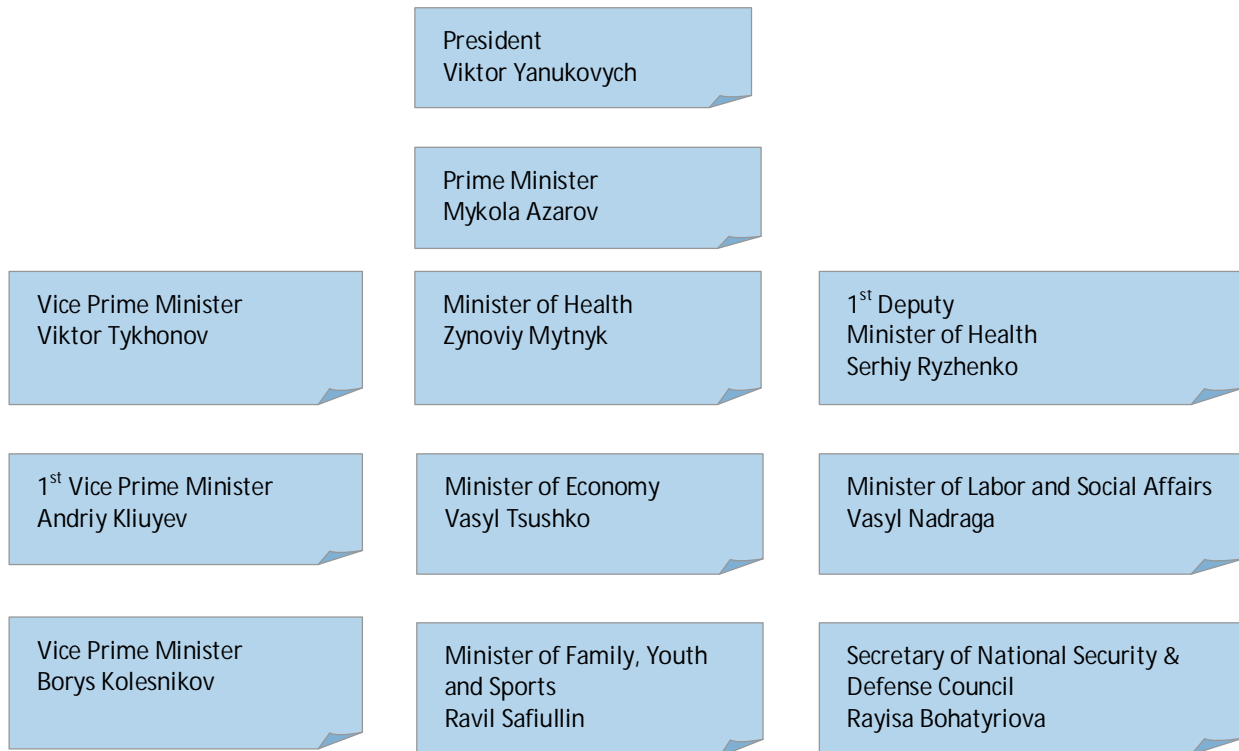
- Understanding
- Expectations
- Concerns
- Individual views and agendas
- (Potential) level of support

A stakeholder audit essentially holds up a mirror, revealing, or clarifying:

- How the company is perceived by the stakeholders who determine its operating environment
- The priorities, focus and motivation of individual stakeholders (allowing for a more tailored and effective relationship moving forward)
- Risks and issues, friends and foes

Ukrainian Stakeholders in Healthcare Communications

Current Top Tier Government – Understanding the Large “Pillars” in the Healthcare Communications Architecture



Working Level Government

While the individuals listed above are the senior decision makers and true “stakeholders”, the majority of contact in a communications program will be interfacing within the vertical structures of the above ministries and organizations. Relevant state bodies also include:

- National Council on Healthcare – Chair, President of Ukraine
- State Committee of Ukraine for Technical Regulation and Consumer Policy (consumer issues watchdog) – Oleh Povolotskiy
- DerzhLikInspektsyya (medical drugs and equipment watchdog) – Oleksiy Solovyov
- Rada Committee on Healthcare – Chair, Tetiana Bakhteyeva
- Rada Committee on Family, Youth Policy, Sports and Tourism – Chair, Pavlo Kostenko
- Rada Committee on Social Policy and Labour – Chair, Vasyl Khara
- Policy Think-Tanks such as the National Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Ukraine, Ukrainian Institute for Strategic Studies of the MoH and independent think-tanks like the International Centre for Perspective Studies

In Ukraine, it is particularly important to focus on one key state agency, State Inspection for the Medical Drugs Quality Control.

State Inspection for the Medical Drugs Quality Control (DerzhLikInspektsyya)

General information:

State Inspection for the Medical Drugs Quality Control is a central executive authority coordinated by the Cabinet of Ministers via the Minister of Health of Ukraine.

DerzhLikInspektsyya implements control and oversight of:

- Quality and Safety of Medical Drugs, including active substances, finished products, excipients, medical cosmetic drugs, medical techniques and equipment, etc.
- Import, export, storage, transporting, utilization and disposal
- Pharmaceutical activities
- Compliance with state standards, technical requirements for medical products
- Production, quality, efficacy, safety, circulation and usage of medical products

DerzhLikInspektsyya issues licenses for the manufacture, whole-sale and retail trade of drugs and medical equipment, It also issues permits for the import and export of medical products, including the import of unregistered drugs for their use in clinical trials. It has the right to prohibit the manufacture and sale of pharmaceuticals if an organization does not comply with the law.

Key figures:

Oleksiy Solovyov, Head

Andriy Zakharash, Deputy Director

Oleksandr Kropyvniy, Deputy Director

For more information via the official website - <http://www.diklz.gov.ua/> (in Ukrainian and in English)

Professional Medical, Scientific Associations and Advocacy Groups

1. Ukrainian Medical Society - <http://sfult.org/vult>
2. Association of Surgeons of Ukraine – <http://www.surgery.org.ua>
3. Association of Dentists of Ukraine – www.uda.com.ua
4. Ukrainian Association of Neurosurgeons
5. Association of Phthysiologists and Pulmonologists of Ukraine
6. Association of Cardiovascular Surgeons of Ukraine
7. Association of Psychiatrists of Ukraine
8. Ukrainian Association of Urologists
9. Association of Pediatricians of Ukraine
10. Association of Nurses of Ukraine
11. Association of Birth Attendants and Gynecologists of Ukraine
12. Association of Infectionists of Ukraine
13. Ukrainian Association of Dermatologists and Cosmetologists
14. Scientific Society of Hygienists of Ukraine
15. Academic and Research Society of Neurologists, Psychiatrists and Narcologists of Ukraine www.amnu.kiev.ua

Patient Advocacy Groups (PAGs)

There are general PAGs, such as the League of Patients' Rights, as well as specific disease-focused groups, including:

1. Ukrainian Council on Patients' Rights and Security – <http://www.medlaw.org.ua/>
2. Ukrainian Association of Patients' Rights Protection – www.pacient.com.ua
3. Coalition of HIV-servicing organizations – <http://www.hiv.org.ua/home>
4. Ukrainian Harm Reduction Association – <http://www.uhra.org.ua>
5. Benevolent Association on Assisting HIV-infected and AIDS patients "Svitlo Nadiyi"
6. NGO "Rak Pobedim" (cancer patients advocacy) – <http://rakpobedim.com.ua/index.php?page=67>
7. International Diabetic Association of Ukraine
8. Association of Invalids of Ukraine

Industry Peers and Associations

Business associations are key to advocacy efforts, as companies, particularly foreign ones, should not "lobby alone" in the Ukrainian government arena. Other organizations that can be partnered with include:

1. FarmUkrayina – Union of Pharmaceutical Distributors of Ukraine
2. Association of Pharmaceutical Producers of Ukraine
3. Association of Producers of Innovative Drugs
4. Pharmacy Professional Association of Ukraine
5. European Business Association, American Chamber of Commerce and other foreign business associations

Strategic Messaging

Creating The Right Message

Messaging for policy-makers requires a specific policy angle that can be distilled into the following key points, all relating to efficiency and best practice, and also all inter-related:

Economics - how can a drug or treatment *help* to reduce government spending, particularly on a chronic disease (i.e. expenditure on early prevention and treatment can save a huge amount later)?

Equity - does the introduction and expanded use of a drug, treatment or medical device improve the overall health of society and support equitable healthcare, particularly in regional areas?

Competition - should a drug/treatment/device be introduced on the basis of fair market competitions i.e. reducing one pharmaceutical company's monopoly control?

International Standards - best practices – what works best elsewhere, and how can best practices be tailored to be effective locally?

Message Platforms

Patient Advocacy Groups: patient advocacy groups often have existing pharmaceutical company support, but are important arenas for alliance-building as they provide a vehicle for objective, credible – and indeed passionate - advocacy to both the government and the media.

Roundtables: roundtable events provide a dynamic and focal point to bring together all stakeholder groups to discuss and publicly make decisions. Roundtables can be initiated by a pharmaceutical company in partnership with a medical institution, PAG or even a state healthcare agency. The key benefit of a roundtable is raising the visibility of a particular issue, and publicly showing a commitment to action. Roundtables can also present risks and variables beyond one's control, given the breadth of involved stakeholders. Preparation is key.

Ad-Hoc Working Groups and Expert Councils: working groups can often develop out of a roundtable event, and provide a more structured and sustainable vehicle for advocacy, often around a specific disease or illness. Working-groups set the right forum for policy makers and specialists to establish and support an on-going dialogue on healthcare issues.

Media Relations for Healthcare Companies

Every country has a unique media landscape and activities must be tailored to the specific nature of each market.

Historically in Ukraine, healthcare companies have not been active in media relations and in promoting industry news. Instead of PR, they prefer to deal directly with doctors and encourage them to promote drugs to their clients – which if, of course, does not correspond to ethical regulations applicable in Western Europe. Thus, due to the absence of established media relations between healthcare companies and journalists, the Ukrainian media's understanding and exposure to healthcare topics has been, and still is, limited.

The exception here is the specialized media which in Ukraine are represented, albeit in a limited capacity, by healthcare and pharmaceutical publications.

Healthcare editions (Zdorovya Ukrayiny, Liky Ukrayiny, Ukrayinskiy Medychniy Tchasopys etc.) are aimed at doctors of various specializations, so are great communication channels to position RX drugs. The target audience of pharmaceuticals media (Apteka, Zdorovo, Provizor etc.) consist of pharmacists and chemists, which make these editions ideal for both RX and OTC drugs promotion. Both are considered the main communication platforms in the current PR strategies of the current market players.

In most Ukrainian **business media** there are neither special sections devoted to healthcare nor specific editors covering the topic. Typically, a journalist covering general business will also write about healthcare and consequently will have very little understanding of industry specifics. In other cases, healthcare is covered by science or technology editors, who may understand the scientific side of the industry but have little understanding of its economic impact.

In Ukraine there is a large number of **trade media** covering both general and specific healthcare topics. Most journalists at these publications have a professional medical education and a deep understanding of the subject matter. They are interested in interviews with key opinion leaders (KOLs) and scientists, detailed descriptions of new therapies, equipment and approaches to treatment.

Journalists covering healthcare topics in **consumer media** rarely have a medical background and are normally interested in medical topics from a the most basic point of view – one that is understandable and interesting for the average reader. On a non-commercial basis they would cover general issues (such as HPV vaccinations, or the advantages of contact lens usage vs. glasses) without ever going into specific drugs or companies.

It should be noted that unfortunately many media outlets are still commercially-orientated and view coverage (in any form, but often appearing under (P) sign which means “paid article”) as a bonus offered in addition to some form of financial support (e.g. placement of

advertisement). This is counter-productive to a traditional PR approach and, ironically, may even lead to deterioration of a company's image in the eyes of consumers.

Media Audit

Given the outlined complexity of the Ukrainian media landscape the first and critical step in planning any media relations campaign should be a comprehensive media audit. The audit will be used to develop the optimum strategy and tactics, and to determine benchmarks for measuring campaign success.

There are two key topics that must be evaluated during the audit:

- Media's understanding of the problem - very often during an audit you will find that the media have absolutely no understanding of certain topics (e.g. lack of trained endovascular heart surgeons in Ukraine compared with other developed countries), and therefore, cannot appreciate the value of the news about the opening of that type of training centre. The first step then is to develop some basic facts and figures material to put the information into perspective for the journalists
- Media's attitude to certain issues – as opposed to Western media, some healthcare topics are considered taboo or inappropriate for the Ukrainian reader and on those grounds might be rejected by the editors. For example, many female lifestyle media will not cover topics related to cancer, as they believe it to be too unpleasant for readers. In general, Ukrainian lifestyle media prefer to cover only the "softer" healthcare topics: diets, colds, stress and not life critical diseases

Overall, it is vital to have a very clear understanding of these two points before launching any media relations campaign to ensure that the correct messages and tools are being deployed.

An example of some media quotes following an audit are:

- "Target audience loyalty directly depends on socially-significant projects. Consumers should feel that a particular company takes care of them, not just off-loads drugs onto them."
- "Pharmaceuticals seem like a closed sector in the context of external communications. It feels like Ukrainian companies are not interested in PR and that foreign companies worry about their reputation too much and are afraid of providing detailed information."

There are two main types of healthcare communications campaigns:

Corporate PR Campaigns

The main objectives of a corporate communications campaign are to increase brand awareness, inform target audiences of local business activities and to promote the main corporate values and principles.

Key success factors for a corporate media relations campaign are:

- **Local figures and market information** - Business media will look first of all at the economic component of the business and require relevant information. As a rule, international companies do not provide any local sales figures so it is very important to do an internal audit and come prepared with a set of relevant and interesting figures (market data, number of procedures country by country, economic impact of certain conditions, etc.) to ensure that the media has what it needs to develop interesting story angles.
- **Media education** - Any major company planning an active communications campaign in Ukraine has to be prepared to invest significant resources into media education. This process might involve media briefings and informal meetings that will not result in coverage, inviting journalists on press trips and to conferences, giving them access to high-level specialists, providing accurate information and correcting any misinformation. This can be a lengthy process, but the companies which invest most in the media will benefit from a loyal and professional media pool covering relevant topics with interest and understanding.
- **Market expertise** - Ukrainian media are generally less interested in one company in particular and more in market trends and tendencies. Companies that are ready to share market data and explain market trends and dynamics to the media, particularly in the complicated healthcare market, will always be valued by the media and quoted as speakers.

Product launches, training centre openings and other “firsts” are also seen as strong along with relevant news breaks if used properly.

Key success factors:

1. **Put the event into perspective** - For a company, the launch of a new product can be an important milestone, for external audiences, particularly media, who are overwhelmed by news, it will have little significance unless put into an exciting perspective, local or global. Another good example is providing comparative statistics

that will allow the media to understand the importance and value of the company's activities.

2. **Thought leader participation** - Company executives are often limited by corporate guidelines as to what they can discuss. The same applies to government officials who, while being a good tool to attract the media, are also limited in what they can talk about. Inviting independent doctors and scientists with a strong and unconventional point of view is one of the best ways to show the media the innovative value of the product and also provide some exciting ideas and opinions about the relevant disease areas that go beyond corporate key messages and will help the journalists to develop interesting stories.
3. **Personal media involvement** – Curiosity is a part of their profession, so whenever possible it is always highly recommended to provide journalists with an opportunity to get first-hand experience with new equipment or products. It is, of course, not ethical or advisable to undergo a medical examination but some basic procedures can be demonstrated and are always very welcomed positively by media.

Awareness Campaigns

While the impetus behind most healthcare awareness campaigns is the promotion of a specific drug or therapy, the key to success is not to focus on the specifics but on the health issue or disease area as a whole.

1. **Talk about health problems not drugs** - The media are more interested in talking to companies and their experts when they discuss disease areas and approaches to treatments in general. All materials, reference sites and speakers should talk about facts, research and general treatments.
2. **Make it simple and interesting** – Most awareness campaigns are targeted at non-specialist media so interesting and understandable background reference material is a must. The journalists will have no time or desire to read through medical descriptions, so one page fact sheets concentrating on one simple area relating to the disease, which can be easily transformed into an article are more likely to result in coverage.
3. **Use third parties** - During awareness campaigns it is crucial to develop a loyal and well prepared pool of third party advocates, particularly doctors, who will be seen as campaign faces and spokespeople and who can be positioned to the media as experts on relevant topics.

Key Media Relations Tools

- **Press releases** are still an effective tool to keep the company on the media radar and get coverage on global newsbreaks such as financial results, product updates, etc. Coverage

based on press releases will normally appear in online news wires and trade media, almost never in business media.

- Many media prefer to receive information in the format of an **interview**. Two types of speakers are considered most interesting for interviews in the healthcare sector: business executives and high profile doctors.

During an interview with business executives the focus should be purely on company strategy, financial results, possible acquisitions and general business plans. Almost no questions will be asked about products, therapies or any other specific medical topics.

If interviews are organized with KOLs, medical topics are much more likely to be discussed. The key to success during these interviews is to brief both the media and the speaker properly. Otherwise there is the risk that the discussion will diverge too far from the company's main agenda.

- **Case studies** are not actively used yet by healthcare companies in media relations and the media still need to be convinced about their content value.

Patients' stories can be interesting for consumer and popular health media but have to be really unique and inspiring.

Business cases with healthcare institutions are yet to be explored by the media as they can provide them with good insight into the economic processes behind the operations of these institutions.

- Ukrainian media traditionally responds well to **press trips** and would be expected to produce an article following a trip. The most interesting options for press trips are: R&D labs, innovative product launches and visits to state-of-the-art factories. It is very important to give media access to speakers beyond the marketing and product managers, such as actual researchers and other thought leaders.
- **Informal media introductions** are a good tool to give media a soft introduction to the topic without pressuring them too much into producing actual coverage. Such informal meetings also provide a good basis for understanding the media mood and attitudes to certain sensitive topics, since journalists are much more likely to volunteer information and market gossip during these informal discussions.
- **Major media events** should be organized only when a company has important local news to announce, such as annual results, a major production or training facility opening or local acquisitions. In other cases, other tactics as outlined above, will provide more value.

New Media for Healthcare Communications

Communicating healthcare issues needs both push and pull and for both purposes online communication is becoming an increasingly important playground. Social media has increasing influence on its audience, because it reflects a number of important trends in the media landscape:

- People's trust for sources is shifting towards peers and away from big media
- People feel an increasing need to filter and fine-tune the news feed they are reading
- People need the means to express themselves, rather than passively consume information

The Internet is becoming both the most important source of 'second opinion' (after doctor's visits) and the most important initial source of information on health issues (before turning to a doctor). It should also be noted that other highly-regarded sources of information on healthcare issues include friends and people who have suffered a particular condition, while social media facilitates contact with other people and makes it relatively easy to find people with particular interests or problems.

➤ Empowering online groups

Social media tools have proven to be very efficient as a means of coordinating collective action. In particular, online communities and blogs have been instrumental in raising the profile of grassroots charity and fundraising efforts for children with cancer. Diseases that affect younger age groups (who are generally more active online) normally have dedicated online clubs and forums that are not only important discussion boards on purely medical topics, but also hubs for the exchange of information on issues related to healthcare provision and policy. Dealing with these online groups can be as important as dealing with actual patient advocacy organizations in terms of raising the profile of a disease.

➤ Engaging with your audience

Healthcare issues often require complicated communications with a consumer, rather than feeding them simple packaged messages. New media offer companies a chance to maintain meaningful conversations with their target audiences and other stakeholders, without having to rely on how much the journalist or media understands what was said by the speaker or trying to package the real message into a one sentence tagline. Blogs and groups dedicated to a particular drug or condition can help to deal with topics and issues that are too complicated for media pitching.

➤ On the negative side...

Unfortunately, the combination of empowered peer opinion and waning respect and trust for scientific data encourages medical 'superstition' and a self-medication approach.

➤ Legal and ethical aspects

While blogs, social networks and forums remain a vaguely defined area in many countries in legal terms; companies must take all necessary precautions in the choice of language and tools when dealing with social media, just as they do in their work with traditional media in both editorial and advertising activities. Even more precautions should be taken on the ethical level: clients must be discouraged from using false 'average users' or 'independent experts' online. Such attempts are usually either (a) very quickly seen through by the community or (b) yield no result (because they haven't been actually noted by anyone.)

When To “White Paper”

An independent, research based policy white paper provides a credible, objective and independent health policy recommendation paper on the topic of effective, ethical, and efficient treatment (and/or prevention) of a particular illness or disease.

A white paper can be based on original field research, which would be time consuming (approximately one year) and expensive, or could pull together and localize existing information such as international research, clinical trials results, best practices in other markets, and other relevant materials and package it in a local context. The latter is often the more common and less expensive method for providing a white paper.

A white paper is suitable in a healthcare communications campaign for a drug or treatment that is relatively new to the market, although there needs to be sufficient evidence and peer-reviewed research to effectively undertake a white paper project. However, the intent of the paper is not to duplicate the efforts of a clinical pharmaceutical standards recommendation, but rather to provide a more policy-based context that goes beyond clinical evidence to offer local economic, policy and/or ethical arguments to implement best practices (including testing and diagnosis procedures). Patient rights and access are also a fundamental theme.

To be credible and effective, and therefore gain an audience that listens, **a white paper must be objective and independent, and well funded – in accordance with compliance standards – by an unrestricted grant.** Essentially, this means that the sponsoring company cannot predetermine the results of the research – nor would it necessarily have any certainty of the findings. However, a company can ethically decide whether or not the research behind a white paper can be released. At the same time, funding source(s) for the white paper project will need to be transparent regardless of outcome.

Should a white paper present supportive evidence for a project’s needs, and should the contracting company be confident in the white paper’s findings with the company’s name identified as a research grant provider, the paper needs to be strategically presented and positioned with the policy and medical community. Here, advance “buy-in” is critical. This requires advance outreach work to both relevant medical experts in the field outside of the research institute that published the white paper, and advance outreach work to working-level contacts in the target government audiences to help put the white paper in the right context. This outreach would normally be done in cooperation the white paper’s authors, and in advance of a roundtable-type discussion event based on the white paper and a press release.

Conclusion

Nowadays in Ukraine, the government, politicians, patient advocacy groups, the industry, the media and the public all have a strong interest in healthcare issues. Skilled communications professionals play an essential role in ensuring that healthcare companies fully engage with these groups and approach them with articulate, clear and effective messages, and help policy-makers to recognize that global pharmaceutical companies can make a valuable and essential contribution to improving the nation's health and healthcare system.

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Declaration of interest:

Grayling provides government relations, public relations and online communications to clients, including many from the pharmaceutical or healthcare sector, active in Ukraine. In the 12 months prior to the publication of this think piece, the Ukrainian unit of Grayling worked for the following companies in the healthcare sector in Ukraine: Schering-Plough (Merck) and Sanofi-Aventis. In other markets Grayling may have, or currently does, work with these or other pharmaceutical or healthcare firms in other countries

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