Brand Authenticity: Why Healthcare Marketers Need to Keep It Real

This whitepaper explores brand authenticity in a world of healthcare consumerization.

The topics covered are:

- ✓ Approaching patients as "healthcare consumers"
- ✓ The definition of a successful brand
- ✓ What "brand authenticity" means for marketers
- ✓ Closing the "authenticity gap"

Branding in healthcare...

Much has been said about the so-called "consumerization of healthcare" in the mainstream as well as the healthcare industry press. But just what does this mean?

When we think about consumerization, we think about a world filled with choices. And choices create the ability to have *more* and *better*.

In our consumer lives, choices are usually defined by brands, but up until recently, this concept of choice didn't really have the same importance in healthcare. For example, if you had a chat with a consumer brand manager, they'd talk about a myriad of characteristics that define their brand, which by comparison might seem a little alien to a healthcare brand manager – characteristics such as the brand persona, brand voice, the conversational style of the audience, and much more. By contrast, asking a healthcare brand manager "*What defines or characterizes your brand?*" may have them stop short after sharing a logo and colour palette.
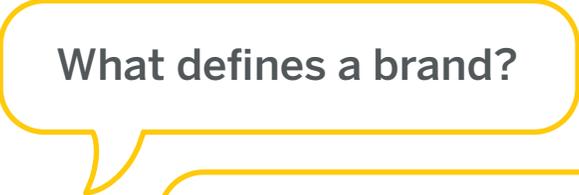
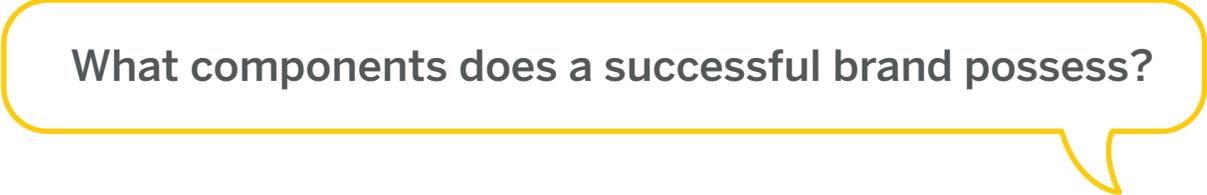Times have changed, and it's time to go deeper.

Let's talk about healthcare brands as *actual brands*.

Brand development 101

Our earlier example of branding as little more than a logo and a colour palette may have been oversimplified, but in terms of healthcare branding up to this point, it's not far from reality.

What defines a brand?

What components does a successful brand possess?

Good branding is the means by which we define and express the personality of a brand. You may have heard of the technique of defining a brand as if you were defining a person.

For example:

| IS THE BRAND ASSERTIVE? | IS IT WHIMSICAL? | IS IT INTENSE? | DOES IT EXPRESS ITSELF AS IF IT WERE HIGHLY EDUCATED AND ALOOF? | IS IT CONTEMPLATIVE? |

At the root level, thinking about a product as a brand personality gives you a platform for defining how the brand expresses itself in language, and its visual style. This is actually taking the logo and colour palette and expanding upon that theme. This is what humanizes the brand.

A carefully and thoroughly defined brand becomes your standard of measure for the decisions you have to make so the brand can come alive with your audiences. Consistency of tone, for example, is one of the valuable results of good branding. When you ask yourself or your teams, "Would the brand do this? Would it say that? Would it be here or there?", you'll be able to answer with confidence, and that will be reflected in your tactical output.

Classic examples – consumer and healthcare

Decades ago, Harley Davidson and Chevy trucks built their iconic – and deeply authentic – brands by understanding these principles in ways that modern healthcare brands would do well to emulate. What's more, they did it emotionally and succinctly in language that reflected their clear understanding of their customers.

It's said that Harley's agency created every communication with "*rebels with cash*" in mind. And Chevy trucks' brand filter was simply "*for salt of the earth Americans*".

How would your branding change if you were to view it through such a focused lens?

CHEVY FOR SALT OF THE EARTH AMERICANS HARLEY DAVIDSON REBELS WITH CASH
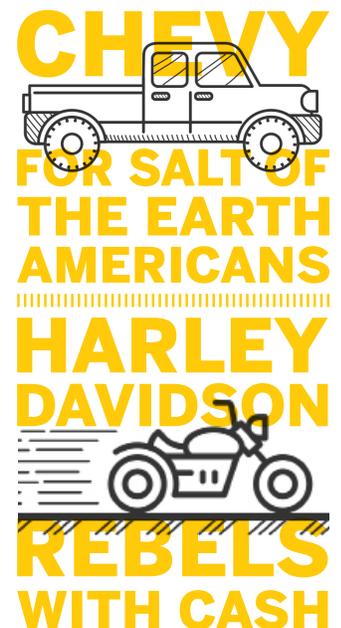
Turning to healthcare...

Let's take two visible, competing ED drugs, and reverse-engineer their brand approaches: Viagra and Cialis.

The Viagra approach is consistently assertive, overtly sensual for an otherwise conservative industry, and even though women have been prominently featured as the "presenters", the communications are positioned clearly from the male perspective. In the vein of "*rebels with cash*", or "*for salt of the earth Americans*", we could say that the Viagra brand "*empowers men on the prowl*". This isn't meant to be purely provocative: it's designed to be a compass point that guides everything from model selection, to copywriting, to camera angles.

Now consider Cialis. Here is a brand that shows couples in slow motion, enjoying lingering sunsets from the comfort of their separate bathtubs. Although the drug ultimately offers the same outcome as its more famous competitor, this brand "*enhances your relationship through sustained pleasure*".

The Viagra brand "empowers men on the prowl".
Image credit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsa9G3yeL3w

VS.

The Cialis brand "enhances your relationship through sustained pleasure".
Image credit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdLvESf3jCo

Same category, but two very different brands.

Platforms for conversations

Keep in mind that defining a brand only to this level overlooks a critical component: *two-way communication*. You want to consider how to extend your brand beyond just its presentation. Meaningful communication channels today aren't simply broadcast; they are no longer *one way* in nature. How can a brand be seen as authentic if it only talks about itself? An authentic brand seeks to converse, and that means it knows where to conduct those conversations, and invites its audience to do so on their terms.

Brand authenticity

Over the greater part of the last decade, the millennial generation has been studied to an incredible degree. And no one has studied their buying habits as much as the advertising industry.

One of the results of putting an entire generation's consumer habits under a magnifying glass is the notion of "brand authenticity". Previous generations were generally attracted to widely publicized brands. If a brand wanted more success, it simply purchased more media.

But along came millennials…

For an entire generation who grew up being inundated with media from all sides, including the media they held in their hands via their smartphones, meaning and trustworthiness became significant. They ask, "What will this brand do for me?" and perhaps more importantly, "What does this brand stand for?".

Of course, this new benchmark of authenticity doesn't apply exclusively to millennials; it has spread to all of us. Brands that clearly express genuine value offer customers the chance to convert, because they relate to the brand and its wider tribe. This is how great brands rise to the top.

The power of emotionally relevant promises

Thinking strictly of consumer brands, ask yourself:

HOW DO BRANDS IN THE SAME CATEGORY GO ABOUT DIFFERENTIATING THEMSELVES?

Although personality expression as described at the beginning of this article is certainly a huge component and one that accounts for literally billions of dollars in spending, the next level of brand development is **promises** or **claims**.

Healthcare marketers are unabashed experts at making solid *medical claims*. However, those claims often lack humanistic attributes. Accuracy in healthcare claims is the cost of entry, but if your customers cannot relate to those claims, they'll have a hard time engaging, much less adopting them through conversations.

A brand can be defined, not only in terms of a personality but in the manner it expresses a promise to its particular customer base or audience.

What does one product in a segment promise to do for its buyer that is specifically different from, or better than, other brands in the same category? And through what channels does it express that promise? Remember, your Key Opinion Leaders, your Salesforce and your Ad Boards are mediums; they need to be "on brand" as much as your detail aid, website or commercials.

It is here where healthcare brands are characteristically vague. And that lack of specificity or transparency in value has been deemed "inauthentic".

Brands that appear inauthentic, seemingly phony in their demonstration of human values, aren't simply shunned today; they are easily maligned via the proliferation of social media.

In the risk-averse world of healthcare marketing, that is a danger to be avoided at all costs.

> **If you avoid authenticity by refraining from offering customers a chance at honest dialogue, you risk becoming irrelevant.**

Closing the authenticity gap

If your brand is not authentic, if it is not clearly expressing a human value or solution in a way that its intended audience can receive, process and connect with, a gap forms.

What's more, this gap is elastic. No matter how diligently a brand personality is created, in our "always on" Internet world, healthcare consumers – both HCPs and patients – *evolve that brand*. In other words, the conversation about a brand becomes a part of the brand's expression.

What in the world is a brand manager to do in our regulated environment?

THE
AUTHENTICITY
GAP

Driving authenticity: 4 key approaches

1 Tone

In the old days of advertising, creating a brand's "look and feel" was where all the calories were burned. Whoever was the most unique and had the greatest reach and frequency tended to win.

Today, brands that are built to resonate with a particular cultural audience in a two-way engagement are the ones best prepared for success. A significant aspect of this resonance is the value your brand offers. Strive to be as clear as possible regarding your healthcare brand's value proposition.

One recent example of relating to the cultural tone of your audience is the award-winning work for **Linzess**. The primary insight regarding patients that are highly frustrated with patronizing advice that doesn't take their discomfort seriously is carried through with great effect with jerky stop-motion animation and a simple, almost childlike presentation.

In this way, look and feel has now given way to transparency via tone, language, personality, expression and speaking style.

And as previously stated, this goes beyond a one-way broadcast; the manner in which your brand interacts and responds is a part of this expression.

Image credit: www.ispot.tv/ad/ATdX/linzess-i-know-already

Channel

2

In order to be perceived as authentic, you need to be where your audiences are. Additionally, for some brands, you may need to offer two-way participation in those venues. Where appropriate, "going there and standing on a soapbox" will only get you so far.

A channel isn't necessarily a broadcast channel. Consider this effort by the **National Bone Marrow Registry**. Where do you go to increase registrations for people who want to be heroes? Why, New York Comic Con, of course.

Determine if mingling with your audiences will yield more engagement. Choose your media channels carefully.

Image credit: http://www.mmm-online.com/mmm-awards/best-philanthropic-campaign-of-2016/article/526911/

Consistency

3

Consistency in what you create and deploy goes a long way toward upping your authenticity score. Additionally, consistency across channels does the same. Speaking one way in one channel and another way in another channel is a surefire way to be viewed as pandering and inauthentic. Ignore this at your peril!

However, investing in different channels is done because different channels tend to have different audiences. Careful monitoring and timely responses are key in our multichannel, social world.

Content Marketing

4

One of the hallmarks of content marketing or "inbound marketing" is the idea of delivering value. After understanding the most sensitive pain points for your audiences and their most important goals, what advice, tips, directions, savings, connections, etc. can you provide in an attempt to demonstrate that your brand has the very best interests of its audience in mind? Most importantly, think of how you can provide them in a way that reinforces our brand promise. Adopting this mindset across channels is not only a way to do primary research and build a consumer base, it is a way to build real brand authenticity.

BRIGHTWORKS

In summary

- Developing a brand in the consumer sense involves expressing a personality and a promise of value.

- Healthcare brands have an opportunity to behave like consumer brands.

- Consumers expect to interact with the brands they choose rather than simply receive messages. This interaction is a test of the brand's authenticity. This heralds a change for healthcare brands.

- Branding in healthcare may stop short of making emotionally relatable claims, but there are ways these brands can still engage healthcare consumers.

- The tone (or voice) of the brand and the channels it participates in must be chosen based upon the audience it seeks to engage.

- Consistency of presentation and engagement across channels and experiences is critical to maintaining authenticity.

- Adopting a content marketing mindset (giving away value to earn trust) is another key approach to generating an authentic brand presence.

How is your digital agency reinforcing – or advancing – your brand?
Contact neil@brightworks.ca

Contact Brightworks' **Neil Follett** today and experience how he will start the process with you of deepening your brand's authenticity. Brightworks can help increase brand relevance for both HCP and patient audiences with an eye towards brand growth.