

HEALTHCARE

Pharmaceutical Branding Strategies

Thought leader perspectives on brand building, effective communication and future brand models

By Steven Seget

Drug companies say cheaper generics are not safe and that it takes a long time to develop new drugs or replace those that have gone off patent. However, media reports about unavailable generics, high costs of prescriptions, litigation, warnings about products they thought were safe and probes into marketing and manufacturing practices raise questions. Combine that with reports of double digit company profits and you end up with a distrusting audience who believes drug companies put profits before people.

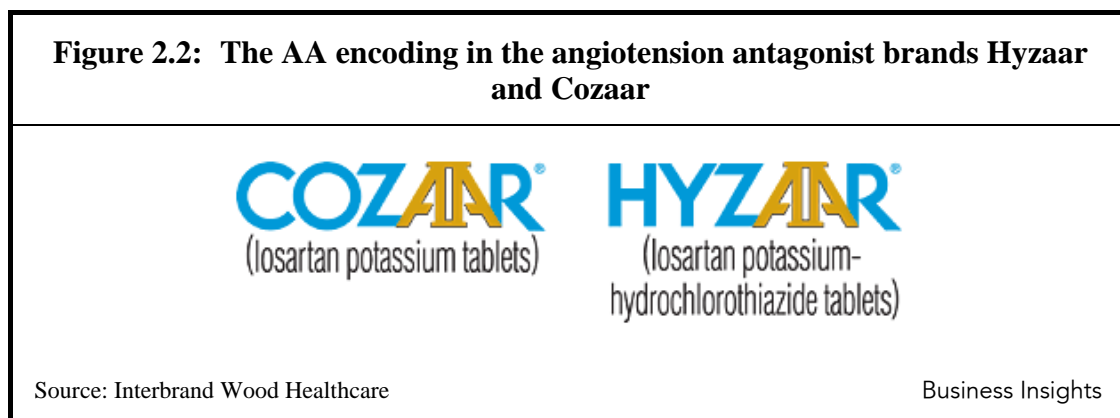
The ability to communicate effectively becomes even more critical, but the pharmaceutical industry has been slow to understand how to keep it simple. While companies have become a lot better at reaching out, there is still some confusion between marketing messages and media messages. It is not enough to simply develop messages you want to deliver; you have to put yourself in the shoes of your audience in order for those messages to truly mean anything. Otherwise, the messages are simply promotional and self serving. People do not care that company X has 50 years of experience. If company Y has 6 months experience but develops a drug that cures cancer, that is all people care about. Spokespeople must become better at humanizing the science and explaining what is it they do and how the information will transform patient lives.

Pharmaceutical companies are not the bad guys, they are the good guys. They live to solve problems and because of them, people are living longer and gaining quality of life that they might not have had in the past. However, listeners do not necessarily take what someone says at face value. They feel first and think about what they feel. To truly impact when communicating, spokespeople have to reach people in their gut and in their heart. Until you hit them where they really 'feel' they are not going to listen to you.

Impact of media communications on pharma brands

The public does not care about pharmaceutical 'brands'. They do not care whether you make money, or whether you stay in business or fold tomorrow. They care about the benefits and what your 'brand' means to them. *How would it help me? How would it*

for Merck’s anti-hypertensive portfolio and, in the follow-through of the ‘AA’ in the graphics of the wordmark, cemented it as a meaningful mnemonic for the prescribing audience.

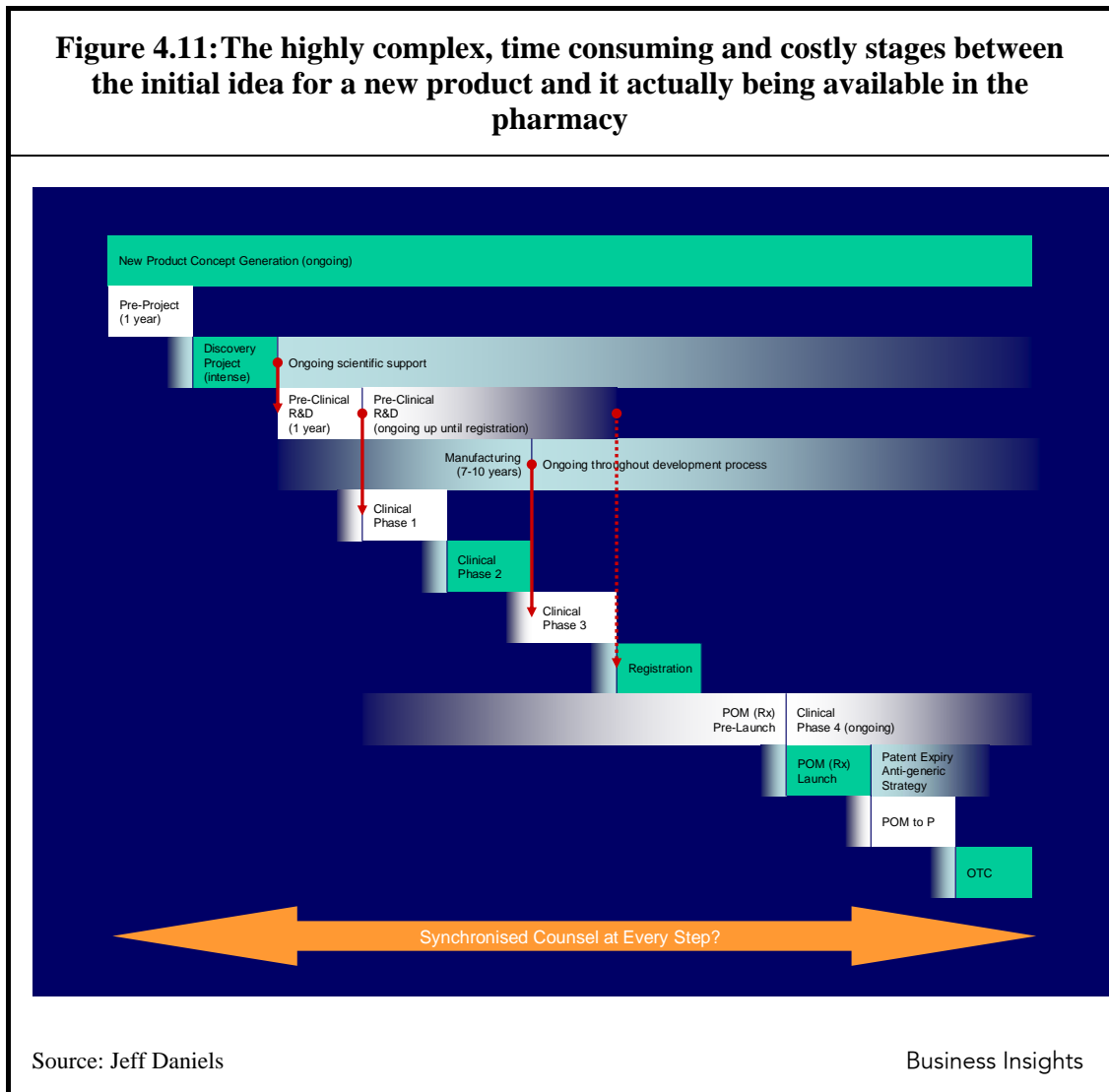


Another example of this approach is Namenda, an Alzheimer’s treatment. Leveraging terminology specific to a new class can play a key part in taking ownership of ‘white space’ – in the case of Namenda, an NMDA receptor agonist, encoding NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartate) within the name. Fuzeon, as a leading fusion inhibition therapy in HIV, also adopts a classic blocking strategy, by cornering the concept of Fusion inhibition in the prefix.

The position of being first in a new class is a privileged one, and thus one to be signaled in clear and distinctive terms. This extends beyond the development of a brand name, to leveraging supportive language, such as class nomenclature.

A new class will serve as a positioning tool to separate out the compound from other treatments in the same therapeutic category. In so doing, a company gives itself the opportunity of fighting the marketing battle on new terms, which affords the advantage of a platform for differentiation and a means by which to take ownership of ‘newness’ and of the story behind the science. Pharmaceutical companies that are proactively creating this nomenclature give themselves this edge, instead of having a classification handed to them.

mouth, that already starts to create the brand image that will ultimately reside in customers minds. Even if you do not do any specific branding related activities, the brand image will still be formed. So it is best to start early and purposefully.



Out of 10,000 ideas that begin in the laboratory, just 10 will ever reach the stage where they are tested on human beings. Out of these, one may finally reach market. The entire process represents one of the most significant investments any pharma company can make, both in terms of capital investment and manpower. One leading company – Sanofi-Aventis – recently published that the total average cost of each product that eventually reaches market is €800 million, while Novartis has put the figure at €1,000 million. Where the cost of planned brand development within this overall drug