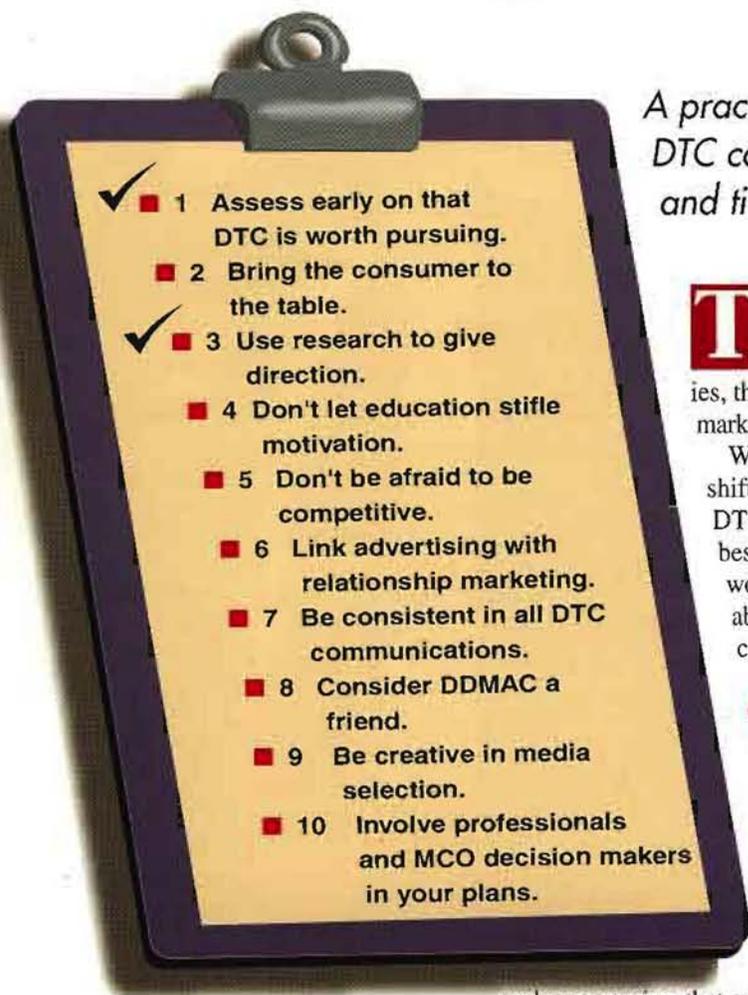


Mastering the Basics— 10 Steps to DTC



A practical guide to building effective DTC campaigns offers valuable information and time- and cost-saving measures.

The nonstop acceleration of Rx direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising has prompted marketers to rethink their core questions about DTC. Since the inception of DTC in the early eighties, through its period of slow but steady growth, the question most marketers had on their minds was, “Is DTC right for my brand?”

With marketplace successes now more common, the issues have shifted from “Should I use DTC?” to “How can I best incorporate DTC?” Common questions are, how to set the right budget, how best to involve MCO’s, and how to make DTC communications work harder. This article synthesizes and expands on the most valuable lessons from the past and offers a checklist of the elements that can maximize the impact of a DTC campaign.

To get DTC right, marketers should follow 10 principles:

❶ *Assess early on that DTC is worth pursuing.* Everyone, it seems, is doing DTC. But before investing too many costly agency hours, companies must first answer the critical question of whether DTC is right for a brand.

Does the brand meet key DTC criteria such as sufficient incidence, treatment of a chronic or underdiagnosed illness, an opportunity for true brand differentiation, or setting the stage for an Rx-to-OTC switch? Does the competitive situation demand DTC for a given brand? Or is the drug a new therapy,

such as a vaccine, that will alter current medical practice? Most importantly, is DTC right from an ROI perspective? A simple arithmetic model can indicate broadly whether a DTC program has the potential to deliver an acceptable ROI. The key steps are:

- Define the total universe of potential patients.
- Determine media exposure using a hypothetical media plan.
- Multiply the number of consumers exposed to your message by the percentage of consumers who will be called to action based on available or judgmental persuasion percentages.
- Multiply the number of consumers called to action by the percentage of consumers for whom physicians will prescribe the medication. That percentage is based on the condition,

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type of medication, competitive set, effectiveness of the professional program, and the marketer's position among managed care organizations.

■ Determine the value of each patient by multiplying the number prescribed a medication by the retail price for an average one year use of the medication. The result will yield gross sales.

■ Subtract operating and marketing expenses from the above amount to determine the potential DTC profit contribution. To assess long term ROI, the calculation must include additional years on a medication and all manufacturer costs.

④ *Bring the consumer to the table.*

Start with the consumer's needs. Gain key insights, identify a point of difference, and remember that the consumer has different needs and motivations than the professional. A brand's features, benefits, and advantages are frequently the starting point for marketing. Too often, the needs and attitudes of the consumer play a secondary role in strategic communications planning.

The best consumer advertising places consumers front and center. What are their emotional and rational issues surrounding a condition and the available remedies? How might a new product answer a deeply felt, but unaddressed, consumer need? How might a late entry into a crowded category be branded to uniquely motivate the consumer and reposition the competition as inadequate?

The better marketers understand the consumer's heart and mind, the more likely those marketers will choose the features, benefits, and advantages that will motivate a patient request for a prescription brand. Gaining such understanding requires asking the right questions early on, which means . . .

⑤ *Use research to give direction, not just to tell where something went wrong.*

The right up-front research against all DTC targets—consumer and professional—is essential. And although focus groups are fast and inexpensive, they are not the ideal choice. Marketers should conduct qualitative research with greater predictive value, such as in-depth, in-home observational studies with consumers.

Quantitative consumer studies, such as

attitude and usage research, will inform strategic planning. Copy tests for comprehension, persuasion, and recall will help ensure that the best advertising reaches consumers.

Finally, research and sales forecasting companies, such as Bases Worldwide and Yankelovich Partners, offer excellent pre-market assessment measures of DTC programs. Without the latter tests, marketers may justifiably be reluctant to invest the significant dollars required for a DTC effort.

① *Don't let education stifle motivation.*

Consumers have told us in survey after survey that they want information about prescription drugs. But the degree of education should be appropriate to the medium. Let television provide motivation for additional education. A relatively long and overstuffed 60-second commercial can leave consumers confused, frightened, and uninterested in learning more about the advertised condition and its treatment.

Consider print, a Web site, and, especially, customized relationship-marketing communications to deliver the information that potential targets and/or existing patients want. Use consumer research (see above) to learn exactly what information those groups desire.

② *Don't be afraid to be competitive.*

Being competitive does not necessarily mean a direct hit against other Rx brands. Marketers can make comparisons with less effective OTC brands and even certain lifestyle adjustments. In fact, DTC can fulfill its public service role by conveying that although lifestyle changes are necessary to improve a health condition, they may be insufficient on their own. An Rx remedy can be a life-improving—or life-saving—adjunct therapy. Exercise extreme caution if making a direct comparison with another Rx or OTC brand. Only great comparative clinicals will make the grade.

③ *Link advertising with relationship marketing.* If relationship marketing were not already in the marketing arsenal, marketers would have invented it for DTC. Recently called DTP, for "direct-to-patient," relationship marketing entails a targeted, customized, and ongoing dialogue between marketers and patients or potential patients. It enables the dissemi-

nation of appropriate messages for initial conversion and for compliance with the right audiences. Relationship marketing can provide a data base not only for a single product but for other corporate brands that benefit the target consumer. Marketers can often employ mass media short-term to cast the net for a sustained direct-

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response-driven data-base marketing effort.

⑦ *Be consistent in all DTC communications.* Because DTC campaigns are often multifaceted, commonality of message and design across all vehicles is essential. The more consistent the DTC components, the greater the campaign impact and the opportunity to build long-term brand equity.

⑧ *Consider DDMAC a friend.* FDA does not require submission of DTC communications, but life can be miserable if DDMAC asks a company to pull a campaign once it has been fielded. Early discussion with DDMAC will leave all parties happier—and more productive. Marketers should understand and follow FDA DTC regulations. That should be obvious, but errors indicate otherwise. When in doubt, remember that one phone conversation with DDMAC can preempt a thousand hours of revisions.

⑨ *Be creative in media selection.* The nature of prescription drugs and their targets should inspire imaginative media planning. Many conditions have demographic and lifestyle correlates that lend themselves to specific media. Well-selected television programming, especially on cable, and special-interest magazines can effectively build targeted brand impressions. Radio, still underused for DTC, can be a strong medium.

that the sufferer may be unable to manage alone—for example, Alzheimer's disease—should target caregivers exclusively. For conditions that benefit from family support, such as high cholesterol, caregivers should be a secondary target.

⑩ *Involve professionals and managed care decision makers in your plans for DTC, don't just inform them.* Marketers must tell professionals and formulary decision makers at managed care organizations about a DTC effort before it is fielded so they are not taken by surprise. Equally important, those professionals should be involved in the DTC development process. Talk with them to learn about their perspectives on patient needs and their views of the value of your medication in patients' lives. That kind of input can be invaluable.

It is also worth remembering that many professionals remain hostile to DTC. Greater professional involvement with DTC programs should allow them to appreciate the value of a better

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informed, more proactive patient.

Pharmaceutical marketers are becoming more sophisticated about DTC through observation, experience, and the hiring of staff and agencies experienced in consumer communications. But in the rush to jump into the DTC fray, it is easy to forget some fundamentals. Checking off the list above cannot guarantee DTC success, but it will increase the chances a DTC campaign will contribute to brand growth. ■

For all media, flighting—time gaps between scheduled media runs—can parallel seasonal patient conditions, increasing impact while yielding cost efficiencies. The Internet is increasingly important to consumers as a source for medical information. It is also a vehicle for efficiently delivering FDA-mandated prescribing information. Strategically focused and aggressive public relations can deliver a DTC message in a news and public interest context.

When considering DTC media, don't forget caregivers. Treatments for illnesses