

WHY BRANDS MATTER IN PHARMA

Brands are all around us and shape our decisions in ways we are not conscious of.

Having embraced the idea of brand building in the 2000s/2010s, there has been a steady decline in their creation in the pharma industry, frequently driven by the perception that they are not 'appropriate' for HCPs – or worse, seen as 'cheating' those who make prescribing decisions for patients.



In this article, Ed Corbett, Head of Consulting at Branding Science, argues that not only are brands for everyone, but they are also more important than ever in an increasingly noisy and competitive pharmaceutical environment.



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Decision-making is not rational

Humans are constantly making purchasing decisions, and we would like to think they are purely rational -

“I chose an iPhone because of its enhanced privacy features”. However, behavioural science shows that they are often anything but - “I chose an iPhone because it makes me look cool”.

Understanding and, importantly, accepting that this is how we all make decisions is at the core of creating great brands, whether it's for fast-moving consumer goods or pharmaceuticals.

What did you have for breakfast? Cereal? Which one? Why did you choose that one?



What phone do you own? Apple? Samsung? Why did you choose it?

How about coffee? Starbucks? McDonald's? Your local artisan barista?

The late Nobel Prize-winning Daniel Kahneman identified and popularised system 1 and system 2 thinking.

System 1 is fast, automatic and often subconscious. It relies on heuristics, emotions and immediate impressions, but is prone to bias and error. System 2 is slower, more deliberate and analytical. It involves logical reasoning and critical thinking, but takes more time and is much harder work, so consequently we tend not to do it quite so much. Both systems work together, but we tend to rely on system 1 for day-to-day living as, otherwise, life would be very hard work!

Try the following example -

say what colour the following words are written in:

GREEN

RED

YELLOW

Did you find yourself slowing down and having to think?

That's system 2 in action.

System 1 and system 2 thinking is an example and a small part of the field of behavioural science - an area that marketers have long used to help build brands and drive product purchase. By leveraging the science of behaviour (and it *is* a science), marketers create an emotional connection to a brand that transcends rational thought.



We all love **stories**

Storytelling has been a key part of human development for millennia and it has served an important purpose. Before we could write things down, it was the way in which vital knowledge, such as where water could be found and food caught, was passed down the generations in a way it could easily be remembered. This began around the campfire but evolved into legendary tales including The Iliad and Gilgamesh.

The tradition of storytelling is now integral to brand development because it resonates with people and helps them understand the role the brand can play in their lives. Think of Nike – their adverts don't talk about the technical elements of their shoes; instead, they tell stories about the people who use them and what they achieve. Red Bull takes a similar approach – a sugary, caffeine-rich drink is elevated to a lifestyle choice of high adventure and thrills.



Doctors are humans, too...

Brands influence our decisions all the time, so why does the pharma industry think that doctors are different and that, when they make treatment decisions, they are 100% evidence-based and completely rational? There are a couple of reasons behind this:



Doctors are taught to practice evidence-based medicine.



The narrative (or story!), internally, is that data, or better data, will sell the medicine on its own.



There is a feeling that brands and marketing are cheating or tricking doctors.

These objections to the creation of brands need to be challenged. **Here's why:**

- Doctors are taught to practice evidence-based medicine, but actual prescribing information shows they do anything but. If they did, the most efficacious, most tolerated and cost-effective product would be the only one that is used.
- Great data is a prerequisite for product use and brand creation, but doctors are busy and rely on system 1 thinking to make decisions. When most have only a couple of minutes in front of the patient and 99% of that time is spent talking, they lack the capacity to analyse multiple clinical trials across multiple products and make a purely rational decision about the treatment.
- The feeling that brand creation or even marketing is cheating doctors often comes from medical teams, who are doctors themselves. It is driven by the feeling that they themselves are not or cannot be influenced by 'sneaky' marketers, so it's not appropriate for other HCPs - the feeling that they are cleverer than marketers. Exploring why medics chose their car neatly shows that they are humans and are influenced by brands – and this is OK!

Brands improve patients' lives

The simplest argument for the creation of pharma brands is that they communicate complex information through a story that makes the most sense to HCPs and their patients, to improve their lives. This is magical. Building such a deep emotional connection between a doctor and a product means that more patients benefit from that product. This is good for everyone. Brands must have a promise associated with them and, if this promise is not fulfilled (be it through data, price, efficacy, etc.), then they will not be used – so companies need to have the requisite information as, without it, the brand is hollow.

So how can pharma build great brands?

The following **five steps** will help:

1.

Accept that doctors are humans and make non-rational decisions.

2.

Train marketers and broader cross-functional team members in how brands are created and the value that they bring.

3.

Focus on the development of real brand plans – those that identify how the brand is best communicated.

4.

Be proud of and talk about creating brands as the best way to communicate complex information to busy doctors.

5.

Ensure senior leadership challenges brand teams in the creation of brands.

While reading this article, you will have experienced emotional reactions – either positive or negative – to the stories it tells. This proves two things: you are human, and you have a connection to the brand of Branding Science. I hope that your reactions are positive and that you champion the creation of brands in pharma – this way, we can all help doctors and the patients they serve.

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