



Expanding the Effect of Sampling Programs



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Sampling programs are an essential means for reaching targeted practitioners, because these programs can serve as a key driver in building and defending a brand's marketshare and can cultivate brand familiarity and loyalty while supporting new patient starts. A multifaceted, return-on-investment (ROI) efficient—sampling program requires the use of both field reps and marketing initiatives such as direct mail, product vouchers, rebates/coupons, tele-reps, E-sampling, E-detailing, and loyalty debit cards. An effective sampling approach also demands that the practitioner universe be segmented by such criteria as called-on targets, decile ranking, and geography, without overlooking practitioners in temporarily vacant sales territories or “white space” regions without assigned sales coverage. If industry leaders do all this and more, why do many industry observers suggest half the samples dispensed are used for reasons other than the ones intended? Why have some surveys revealed 91% of practitioners are frustrated by inconsistent supplies?

Perhaps some sales reps provide more accessible practitioners with excessive samples, thus leading to prescription cannibalization and encouraging noncritical uses. Do practitioners in vacant sales territories need brand samples to treat their patients? Does a company run the risk of losing their loyalty if it doesn't accommodate them? Might some targeted physicians supply superfluous samples to some of their patients? When calibrating a sampling program, assess the extent of rep detail time, the stage of the product within its lifecycle, competitive activity, resources and budget level, and overall strategic objectives.

The following issues should be considered when optimizing brand-sampling initiatives:

Understand All Available Sampling Options. Does the program only use reps or does it consist of direct mail, as well?

Does it enhance E-detailing with a sample offer, include a voucher prong, or supply both? It makes sense to blend some or all of these options.

Integrate All Programs Into a Customer-Relationship Management System. Know approximately how much the program invests in providing samples to each practitioner from all sampling touches and then develop a moving ROI model to adjust tactics. Company leaders can't manage what they can't measure.

Consider Employing New Channels. New technology-based approaches, such as E-detailing, can ensure key high-decile practitioner targets always have the samples they need. These platforms allow pharmaceutical companies to manage the number of sample requests and ordering frequency for each physician.

Educate Sales Reps About All Sampling Activities. Reps must know about samples being provided to their practitioners from all channels.

Ask for Information From Practitioners. Samples present an opportunity to request profile information from physicians about their behaviors and channel preferences. Some practitioners favor receiving samples and product information from reps, whereas others prefer nonpersonal channels, such as direct mail or the Internet.

Be Innovative. Consider constructing a total marketing solution for selected practitioners by exclusively using nonpersonal selling and sampling programs. A virtual Web-centric approach can prove especially ROI-efficient in supporting vacant and white-space practitioners.

The pharmaceutical industry continually faces acute challenges. New leadership in many pharmaceutical companies will aggressively pursue options to adjust sales staffing and capture improved levels of financial return on their sampling investment. It is a marketshare battle out there. Why not have fun in creating a brand sampling program that works? ■

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