



Leveraging The Science of Consumer Behavior for the Healthcare Marketplace

an interview with HealthPure's Erik Lohmeier

by B. Shipley

The healthcare industry has long borrowed from other industries to improve quality of care and patient experience. Examples include using aviation expertise to reduce medical errors, hospitality expertise to improve patient experience, and gaming expertise to entice patient adherence. HealthPure is helping the health industry borrow expertise yet again. This time, to unlock the potential for authentic patient engagement. I sat down with Erik Lohmeier, President of HealthPure, Inc. to learn more.

Erik, how did you get to be an expert in the science of consumer behavior?

I started my career in the advertising business as an Account Planner. At the time, this was a new role for the advertising industry. Until then, advertising had focused on mass media messaging across a limited number of newspapers and television channels to reach target consumer audiences. With the advent of cable and internet, the industry went from a handful of networks to many, mass fragmentation, a decline in newspaper and explosion of online news channels and user-generated content. New media became mainstream overnight and advertising agencies needed to reach people in new and more meaningful ways. They employed Account Planners to figure out how.

So, as an advertising guy you were charged with figuring out how to shift the paradigm to reach people where and how they were most likely tuned-in?

We had to understand the consumer and what made them tick more acutely than ever before. Account Planners essentially became behavioral psychology experts; we studied consumer habits, lifestyle and decision-making to create coherent consumer profiles used to effectively target and deliver precision messages that were personally relevant. For example, we used scientific methods such as cluster analysis based on characteristics of consumer motivations.

How did you apply this science?

We used the insights to craft messages to authentically connect to consumers at multiple levels – psychological, emotional – with relevant messaging. For the next twenty years I refined my skillset and developed expertise in consumer behavior, working with all sorts of companies, including those in healthcare.

What do you mean when you use the term “science of consumer behavior”? Can you unpack that for people that haven’t spent years figuring out what makes consumers make the choices they do?

There’s a great deal of subjectivity when it comes to communicating with consumers; there’s art and science. I believe science drives the art. The art is the way you message, the word choice you use. The tonality, and creative, clever and appealing phrasing. The science is what drives the relevance of the message for the consumer.

Think about your own experience of watching Super Bowl ads. At the end of the game, how many brands do you remember and buy because of the impression they made? The general consumer mindset is one that makes decisions based on emotion, and then rationally validates or invalidates the choice already made at an emotional level. Consumers basically talk themselves in or out of emotional decisions. What HealthPure does with the science is look at the marriage of emotional decisions and rational validation in terms of behavior, and in this instance, behavior that affects health.

What was your Aha! moment when you realized that the healthcare industry was missing the boat when it came to engaging patients as consumers?

The Aha! for me was observing the healthcare industry, which is bound to transactional moments with patients that aren’t viewed first and foremost as people. This transactional focus on episodes of cares and number of visits has a dehumanizing effect where people are factors of production in the healthcare machine. This is a fundamental and profound disconnect with consumer psychology.

The healthcare industry isn’t operating at the intersection of consumer behavior, with cognizance of emotional and rational decision making. Moving the needle on population health requires connecting these points of intersection with health data. In my personal interactions with the healthcare system it seemed that “patient engagement” was more about satisfying the healthcare system than understanding patients as people. From my perspective, what matters is treating patients as people, humanizing them and utilizing insights about their behavior to connect the dots to wellbeing.

The healthcare industry is missing the link between patient and consumer behavior?

Precisely.

What is HealthPure doing differently and how is it doing it?

We are making sense of consumer behavior for the healthcare marketplace, and paying attention to the intersection of emotional and rational decisions. The intersection is the sweet spot in which to most effectively bond with consumers and patients. Our mission is to dynamically relate to people and the decisions that affect their health.

Can you be a bit more specific?

At the end of the day, you can have the cleverest messaging in the world to try to influence healthy behavior, but if nobody cares about the message, it is meaningless. What we do is create caring via relevancy. Relevancy is driven by understanding the consumer patient mindset, circumstance, and timing. Relating in relevant terms is a combination of understanding the consumer patient's headspace to receive a message, the appropriate point in time to send the message, and how to validate the message as reasonable. HealthPure uses a cloud-based platform and algorithms to relate to the consumer patient in the right way with the right content at the right time. I know that sounds cliché.

However, understanding the point of connection enables us to be hyper-relevant at any given point in time. We are developing algorithms to combine the many data points of consumer life (how you move, how you interact, how you buy, how you digest information) with aggregated health data from EHRs and wearables, social footprints and location tracking to bring to view 365 days of consumer patient behavior. With these algorithms, and in accordance with the consumer patient's preferences, we can deliver insights and connect them with information and precision prompting that is useful, helpful, and specifically tailored and in sync with their lifestyle and care plan goals.

Who benefits from this approach?

This is the beauty of the science. Everybody in the healthcare eco-system benefits when patients are understood as people making emotional decisions that affect their health. Let's start with the consumer patient. We're making it easier for them to participate in their own success, helping them connect to information and community, and demystifying the behaviors that affect their health and wellbeing. Healthcare providers benefit from actively engaged patients, poised to participate in their own success. And, healthcare payers benefit from actively engaged consumers and patients that are encouraged through relevant messaging, content and community to make healthier choices that lower the total cost of care.

Thanks, Erik. Demystifying consumer behavior for the healthcare marketplace makes sense.

To learn more about the initiatives HealthPure is taking to make sense of healthcare, visit them at healthpure.com