

# MedAdNews

THE MAGAZINE OF PHARMACEUTICAL BUSINESS AND MARKETING • MEDADNEWS.COM • JULY 2008

Med Ad News e-MARKETING

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## Consumers trust pharma-sponsored communities

**T**he much-touted lack of faith that consumers are assumed to have for online pharmaceutical-sponsored health resources may be greatly exaggerated. Based on the results of a survey assessing consumers' opinions toward seeking and discussing health information via online tools such as forums and networking communities conducted by InfoMedics Inc., a majority of consumers may be unconcerned about the source or sponsor of a health-information tool as long as that tool is helpful.

According to InfoMedics analysts, the survey's results demonstrate that the pharmaceutical industry would be well advised to approach branching into Web 2.0 marketing by focusing on responding to consumers' needs and concerns. More than nine out of 10, or 91%, of respondents use the Internet as a source of health information. Of these, 23% search on the Web frequently for health information, while 40% sometimes look online and 28% seek health information on the Web rarely.

In breaking down survey responses into more specific preferences, InfoMedics analysts found that more than wanting to just socialize online about health issues, consumers desire reliable advice from online health communi-

ties. For example, 47% of survey respondents were most interested in tips for managing their health conditions, while 40% valued information about treatments that other people with the same condition had tried.

Contrary to concerns that consumers perceive pharmaceutical and pharmaceutical-sponsored information negatively, 60% of respondents expressed that they did not care who sponsored a health-information tool as long as it was helpful to themselves and other patients. At the same time, 21% of respondents felt that an online community sponsored by a pharmaceutical company would not serve their needs because pharmaceutical companies focus on drug development and business and not patient care, and 18% expressed negative feelings about pharmaceutical companies in general.

Of all survey respondents, 72% expressed interest in online health communities and discussing their health and treatment with others. Of these, 14% were interested in using the social element of an online health community to help with their treatment plans, while 23% were interested in support and feedback from other patients, and 35% were open to the idea of networking with other patients, but preferred to keep the majority of their health dis-

cussions with their physicians or caregivers.

InfoMedics analysts say that the number of respondents who preferred to discuss their health primarily with their physicians indicates patients' trust in their physicians' guidance and opinions. This result also alludes to the fact that healthcare concerns can be highly personal in nature; healthcare has long been characterized by privacy, from patient-physician interactions to regulatory and research and development practices.

"We've seen that physicians are increasingly strapped for time, and they along with other healthcare providers and pharmaceutical companies are searching for effective and convenient outlets to provide health, drug, and treatment information and personalized care that patients need and want," says Gene Guselli, CEO, InfoMedics (infomedics.com). "InfoMedics' survey found potential for Web 2.0 applications to offer patients a platform to learn about the individual medical conditions and treatment of concern to them without requiring patients to leave their comfort zones of anonymity or discussing their health with people other than their physicians."

By proceeding conservatively into Web 2.0 with an understanding of what patients need, InfoMedics analysts believe that pharmaceutical marketers can reach and help patients, supporting them in their personal treatment and health journeys.

The company's survey produced several other findings of interest to pharmaceutical marketers. Respondents' reliance on physician input, for example, increased in proportion to their ages; only 15% of respondents between 18 years old and 24 years old preferred to keep most health discussions with their physicians, while 32% between 25 and 34, 37% between 35 and 44, and 46% between 45 and 54 felt the same way.

Also, women were significantly more likely to favor networking to discuss health issues. More than seven out of 10, or 73%, of women valued the ability to network with others to discuss their health, compared with 27% of men.

### CONSUMERS SEEK HELPFUL HEALTH TOOLS ONLINE

**60% of respondents do not care who sponsored a health-information tool as long as it was helpful to themselves and other patients.**

**Of the 91% of respondents who use the Internet as a source of health information:**

- 23% check the Web frequently for health information
- 40% sometimes look online for health information
- 28% seek health information online rarely

**Of the 72% of respondents who are interested in online health communities and discussing their health and treatment with others:**

- 14% are interested in using the social element of an online health community to help with their treatment plans
- 23% are interested in support and feedback from other patients
- 35% are open to the idea of networking with other patients, but preferred to keep the majority of their health discussions with their physicians or caregivers

Source: InfoMedics Inc. (infomedics.com)