

Maximizing your pharmacy brand

Are your daily contributions and value truly recognized throughout your organization, or are you still waiting to be discovered? Do your departmental leaders seek your input as they make decisions, and do you think you can influence them? Does the organization's senior leadership include pharmacy input in its decision-making? How are pharmacy and pharmacy services viewed by others in the organization?

A brand and its value. If your brand were a car, would it be a Porsche or a Volkswagen? In other words, would it be seen as exciting and high quality or just serviceable? The term "brand" originated from the need to permanently and distinctively mark possessions. Thus, a brand is a mark of ownership of something whose qualities or design makes it unique. Think of Nike, BMW, iPod, Kindle, Morton's steakhouse—brands we associate with high quality. We may choose such a brand for the status it will bring us. More important, we trust that products with wide brand recognition will be dependable, and we are often willing to pay more for them. We may be willing to purchase a new product solely on the basis of its brand name. As medication experts, pharmacists know that a generic medication delivers the same therapeutic effect as the branded product. In most commercial transactions, however, there are no such guarantees, and purchasing a specific brand helps ensure the quality we are seeking.

Where your brand comes from.

Whether or not you realize it, you already have a pharmacy brand. It is up to you to maximize your professional brand: how you are perceived by others. That perception is based on experiences working



with you. People are constantly observing your work and behavior and forming perceptions about your competence, credibility, authenticity, character, and commitment. For example, do others see you as collaborative or competitive? Always looking out for yourself, or for the good of the pharmacy, the organization, and the patients? Your pharmacy brand, your reputation, is integral to your long-term success and career happiness. Not only do you as an individual establish a brand for yourself, but your department has a brand throughout the organization and the profession that affects its ability to recruit and retain excellent employees.

Your brand represents the resources or competencies you have. Are they rare and valuable? Is your brand distinct from that of other pharmacists? Remember,

the value of your resources is specific to your department and organization at the current point in time, since health care is constantly changing. Ask yourself the following questions: In addition to keeping your knowledge up-to-date, are you staying on top of new developments, anticipating and resolving problems before they occur? Are you contributing to organizational efforts in a holistic or big-picture, strategic way?

What is key to your organization's success? Patient safety, clinical care, and regulatory and compliance challenges obviously are critical, but so is business and financial viability. As individual pharmacists we manage, through drug therapy, a significant part of any organization's budget. Are you helping your organization position itself, for example, in relation to health care reform, gene therapy, or robotics? How are you helping to redefine basic medication systems and services to keep pace with changes in health care?

You need to be seen as providing creative and innovative solutions that align with organizational goals and direction, not merely processing orders or going on rounds. Do you embrace and, if appropriate, lead change? Are you a

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requested project or team member, visible in the profession, or are you seen as an average pharmacist interchangeable with any other who can get the job done? Are you seen not only as a drug therapy expert but as an “owner” of the medication-use system, who ensures that drug products are readily available when needed for administration to patients? Is there constant distribution of products and information throughout your organization? Are there clearly defined roles for pharmacists to make their expertise available at all points of care? Do you underpromise and overdeliver, or do you talk a lot but achieve few actual results?

A major factor contributing to your brand is your social effectiveness, which generally has no relationship to your pharmaceutical competence. Social effectiveness is your ability to work effectively with everyone, no matter their position. Are you easy to work with, or do you irritate people? Are your coworkers happy to see that you are working today or glad that you have the day off? The functioning of organizations depends on good working relationships, not just professional roles. Relationships are based on mutual respect and trust. It is through your behavior and commitment to doing what is best for both the patients and your organization that you build good working relationships.

Defining and assessing your brand.

What would you like your ideal pharmacy brand to be? Mentors can be helpful by posing questions for you to think about and reviewing your assessments. What do you want your key clients to say about you when you are not in the room? Consider as your key clients not only the people you work with daily, such as physicians, nurses, other pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and patients, but also your pharmacy leaders and the organization's leadership. Ask yourself, “What do these key clients need from me?” Think about what makes you unique and about your core competencies, including your social effectiveness. If you want to have an impact on how your department and organization deliver care, be careful not to become pigeonholed as just a technical

pharmacy expert. Don't be afraid to create entirely new brand expectations for yourself as you grow and develop, which will keep you challenged and satisfied during your entire career.

List the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience you currently possess. What is the most valuable resource you bring to your organization and its patients? What do you enjoy doing, and what brings you satisfaction? If there were no barriers and you knew you could not fail, what would you like to be doing? What unmet needs could you fill? What characteristics beyond technical competence would a person need in order to do what you would like to do? If you are envisioning a new role, think about other successful people and what characteristics they have.

Your ideal brand might be a geriatric clinical pharmacist who is invited to speak at state and national professional meetings, asked to participate in departmental and organizational strategic-planning sessions, sought out to represent pharmacy on the multidisciplinary medication safety committee, asked to be a preceptor for pharmacy students' advanced pharmacy practice clerkships, and invited to publish your practice model. Another ideal pharmacy brand might be a future departmental director of pharmacy or clinical coordinator who is asked to lead the joint pharmacy-information technology team implementing the electronic medical record, is president of the state health-system pharmacists society, serves on the policy-recommending committee of a national organization, and is an invited speaker at professional organization meetings.

An alternative approach to considering your brand is to think through ways in which you do not want to be seen or things you never want your key clients to say about you. You would not, for example, want anyone saying “Who are our pharmacists?” or “They are only here on the day shift.” Your clients should not think that you are unaware of the pressures on the department or organization, that your practice is obsolete, or that you think only of obstacles rather than innovative ideas and possible solutions.

Once you have defined what you would like your brand to be, assess your current brand. How are you actually seen? Consider a couple of approaches. You could conduct face-to-face discussions with key people, such as your superior, a respected colleague, a subordinate, or others with whom you work directly (e.g., a physician, nurse, pharmacy student, resident), asking them to candidly describe how they view you, what they need from you, how they see your current value, and what they would like to see you doing in the future. Pay attention to the exact words they use, because this is how they think about you. Document these discussions so you can refer to them later. Be careful not to get defensive if what you hear is different from your concept of your brand, and do not defend your actions; your goal is to understand what your current brand is. Remember that organizations grow and change, so that what was needed in the past may no longer be valid. Be sure you ask enough questions to clearly understand what you are being told. Alternatively, you could develop a brief survey that asks a wider group of people to anonymously describe in three to five words or phrases what they need from you, what they see your current value to be, what they wish you would do less of, and what they would like to see you doing in the future.

Now, unless your current brand matches your ideal brand, perform a gap analysis to determine what you need to do to achieve your ideal brand. Mentors can help you with this analysis. From your analysis, establish goals with prioritized action steps and a reasonable timeline for achieving them.

Sustaining your brand through marketing. As you are working toward your ideal pharmacy brand, you will need to sustain your current brand and make it stand out through continual marketing. As a scientifically trained person, you may not feel comfortable with marketing—but if you don't do it, who will? Your marketing will not involve trying to manipulate, sell, or coerce, but only educating in order to get credit for what you do and create a preference for

your brand. Pharmacists must be seen as integral, not just supportive or tangential, to the future of the organization. You cannot afford to wait to be discovered or assume that people throughout your department or organization, other health care providers, and even administrators will understand what you do and recognize your untapped potential. Think of marketing as creating your future and ensuring that you successfully reach your potential.

Simply put, marketing is identifying what your key clients need and want and providing it to them. Marketing involves maintaining a positive working relationship with all your key clients. Try to think the way each of them thinks and imagine what their worlds are like. Look at health care from the perspective of patients and their families. Be aware of trends your department and organization are following.

Sustaining your brand involves creating opportunities to ensure that what you do is visible and is understood. Offer to have people shadow you to see what you do on a daily basis. Take them on a tour of the pharmacy. Visit them in their

areas, and keep in frequent touch to see what they are working on. Tell them brief stories about your impact on patient care. Employ all organizational avenues, such as newsletters and recognition programs, to keep your brand and pharmacists' value in front of people. Volunteer for public relations activities or community service projects to demonstrate what a health-system pharmacist does on behalf of the public. Merely taking the time to introduce yourself to each of your patients and explaining what you will be doing on their behalf is marketing. Imagine how it would be if every patient who came to your organization asked to speak to a pharmacist. For your superior, summarize at least quarterly what you have achieved that supports the organization's strategy, goals, and areas for improvement. Be sure to emphasize the opportunities you have had to support the organization's strategic and business efforts. Refer to the ASHP best practices for hospitals and health systems and how you have followed them.

Conclusion. A pharmacist's brand, or professional image, is vital to his or her

acceptance by other health professionals and by patients. Pharmacists should assess their own brand, work to change it if necessary, and market it to important audiences.

Suggested readings

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