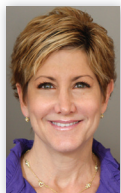


Five Healthcare Trends for 2011

Who'll Win, Who'll Lose and What You Can Do to Take the Initiative



Marcie Klein
Senior Vice President
Pollock Communications

Whether you're in the business of selling drugs, food, medical care or insurance, you're about to be buffeted by more winds of change. Here's a look at five trends to watch in the coming year.

1. The Health Care Reform Act will face new challenges, but its popularity will grow as consumers reap its key benefits.

Some of the act's signature measures—ending exclusions for pre-existing conditions, abolishing co-pays for preventative care and requiring post-college policy extensions—take effect immediately. Later, consumers will see the law's biggest benefit kick in: access to affordable insurance outside of employment.

Losers: Companies that stay on the sidelines in an attempt to avoid investing in provisions of the new law that may be repealed or overturned by Congress or the courts.

Winners: Companies that trumpet their participation in the aspects that provide the most tangible and valued benefits to consumers.

Action Item: Use your website and other communications tools to educate customers, patients, policy holders and/or employees how they'll be affected by the new law.

2. Wellness will become the new "green."

Recently, companies have rushed to promote their environmental credentials; the next push will be to promote wellness credentials.

Losers: Providers and insurers that cling to concepts of "managed care," a phrase that captures everything consumers dislike about American health care.

Winners: Companies that define themselves as providers of products and services for "healthy living." The biggest winners will be providers of wellness programs that offer choice and easy cus-

tomization, thus making compliance more attainable.

Action Item: You don't have to be a big national healthcare company to participate in the "healthy living" trend. Add nutritional and exercise benefits in the workplace or underwrite wellness and fitness activities at local schools or community organizations. You'll promote healthy living among your employees and their families, and generate positive PR for you.

3. A new nutritional bogeyman will emerge ... and maybe a new super food.

We've seen what happened with carbs, trans fats and high fructose corn syrup. Now we're seeing it with soda, salt and cheese, any of which could be the next big bogeyman. Similarly, research may uncover a food or ingredient to eclipse blueberries and pomegranates as the new elixir of life.

Losers: Companies that mistake a fad for a trend and prematurely change a trusted brand's ingredients or marketing, thus confusing or losing loyal customers.

Winners: Companies that innovate products and formulations in ways that conform to established science and public policy, such as the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Action Item: Proactively guide the discussion about your brands and be sure to ground your communications with credible science to show how your brands make it easier for consumers to have a balanced, healthy diet.

4. The "Cookie Wars" will escalate and the battlefield will be our schools.

Public policy on health and wellness, particularly in schools, will be hotly debated. The nutrition police will try to impose ever-stricter policies regarding fat and sugar on all food served in schools. Libertarians will say these issues should be decided at local levels and by families.

Losers: Beverage and snack food vendors who attempt to make false nutrition

claims and promote their high-caloric and high-fat products in misleading ways. Also, companies that promote "spinach solutions": good-for-you foods that kids just won't eat.

Winners: Companies that can talk to parents and children in responsible ways about how their brands promote healthy lifestyles. This must be done with strong thought leadership that doesn't hide vested interests.

Action Item: Use social media to reach consumers directly, conveying authentic and valuable information about your brands in lively and engaging ways. And don't just use Twitter and Facebook to dispense information. Social media can be a great tool for market research, allowing you to get valuable feedback and ideas for better products and more credible marketing campaigns.

5. Pharma and food will compete for health innovations, but all health claims will be met with increasing government scrutiny and consumer skepticism.

Growing interest in natural remedies and functional foods will drive pharmaceutical and food companies to compete in areas such as digestive, cognitive and sexual health, and, of course, weight loss.

Losers: Any company with a health claim that can't be backed by good science, because they'll be attacked by government regulators, vilified by health experts and abandoned by consumers.

Winners: Companies that view everything from a proactive health and wellness perspective and package their communications in a holistic way.

Action Item: Find partnership opportunities and use collaborative marketing, packaging and communications campaigns to show how wellness can be achieved with a combination of prescription, OTC and nutritional products. **HBA**

Marcie Klein is senior vice president at Pollock Communications, a health & wellness and food & nutrition science public relations agency. She can be reached at mklein@pollock-pr.com