

European Medical Congresses: Intensive Creative Therapy

Like most exhibitions, physicians attend medical congresses to learn about new pharmaceuticals, equipment and treatments. But what if you couldn't put the product brand name on your stand? Government medical regulations inspire pharmaceutical companies and stand design firms to work together to develop innovative communication solutions.

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Medical congresses are one of the key opportunities for physicians and healthcare professionals to learn about new products, treatments, and medical equipment. However, for the pharmaceutical companies who invest a considerable portion of their marketing budgets to exhibit, these congresses can be one of the most complex and confusing places to communicate pharmaceutical brand and product messages. This complexity and confusion arises from the fact that each country may have their own unique governmental medical regulations that determine what and how branding messages can be displayed at a congress.

Unlike many industrial exhibitions that constantly repeat at the same venue for years, pan-European medical congresses will change country locations year-to-year. This means exhibitors must restart the planning process each year by analyzing the host country's medical/regulatory guidelines as well as any particular rules issued by the individual congresses. To add to the challenge, these governmental regulations are in constant flux and need to be pin-pointed on a case-by-case basis for each country, company, disease, and product. Last year's strategy and stand design may have to be totally rethought based on the rules issued by this year's host country. For a pharmaceutical company that exhibits at several pan-European conferences every year

with numerous products and a variety of approved uses, including those still in the clinical research process, this can be a demanding process; no matter the size of the organization.

When in Rome, do as the Roman do

For example, if the pharmaceutical product is approved in the congresses' host country, usually planning will be straightforward. However, many countries do not allow the use of brand names at congresses if the product is not approved in that host country. If the product is not approved, some countries will still allow the use of the generic name but some do not. And if you cannot use the product name (anywhere in the stand or otherwise) at the congress, you also cannot indicate anywhere in the stand how your product treats a disease.

«A Pharmaceutical company used the universal language of art as a communication strategy for a migraine therapy.»

In order to navigate these issues, one common approach throughout the industry is the need to rely upon local market expertise which can often be provided by local marketing offices and local distribution partners. In addition, it is important to work with a stand design firm experienced in the nuances of marketing in a global medical marketplace. Regardless of the size of the company, as one marketer noted, pharmaceutical companies need to look for strong partners that not only provide creative design and communication solutions, but are able to work with local country regulatory bodies on any product or disease category as an extended part of their staff. This ongoing partnership can identify many obstacles in advance and develop reso-

lutions to ensure successful brand communication as the company attends conference across Europe and the rest of the world.

Empathetic Gallery

As an example, in Italy, as in many countries, there are regulatory guidelines surrounding the usage of brand names, clinical data, and patient testimonials. To overcome these challenges, including an unbranded stand, the pharmaceutical company used the universal language of art as a communication strategy for a migraine therapy. Impact Unlimited developed a communication concept that invited artists who were also migraine sufferers to develop artwork that portrayed their debilitating experience of migraine headaches. Managing the art contest, 12 works were chosen out of over 200 submissions. The powerful work was then presented in a gallery setting in the stand and was able to empathetically communicate the reality and impact of migraines directly to physicians. Physicians from many countries became engaged in the stand and began to ask questions that created a scientific dialogue about the product and disease. Overall, the artwork and design elements helped the medical community understand the true impact of this disease as well as initiate conversations about brand messages. This very successful program has traveled to congresses around the world over the last few years.

Music to Their Ears

Back in Italy, another company had to be creative while working with a product for the treatment of erectile dysfunction. There were many challenges at the time including those which were already in place by the Italian Health Ministry. The Ministry only allowed companies to use corporate branding and at the time could not even allow presentation of disease state. Obviously this presented a



Artists who suffer from Migraines help tell their story to physician audiences at pharmaceutical congress.

problem when attendees would fly in from many countries where the brand was approved, but find that at this congress, disease, brand information and brand identity would be missing from the stand.

As the design firm responsible for determining a way to communicate the product information, Impact Unlimited developed the «Rock Hard Café» («Rock Hard» is the actual accepted medical term for successful treatment of erectile dysfunction). The entire exhibit was designed like a hard rock bar and grill with cappuccino service and snacks. A café logo was designed with a guitar pointing northeast at a 45 degree. Rock music played in the café and music CDs with love songs were distributed with the CD case designed with the Rock Hard Café logo, subtly conveying the end result through usage of the product. When all the components came together, the stand experience conveyed the messages necessary for reaching the medical professionals in attendance and inspiring a

productive conversation with stand staff, all under the corporate branding.

In an Ideal World...

At this time, the only truly global regulation, from Europe, to the States, to Asia, is the requirement for a product insert (PI) or summary of product characteristics (SmPC) to be available for all attendees and is often required to be attached to all branded materials an attendee may remove from a stand. However, there is no standard as to how this information must be available; whether it is attached to the stand or just made available upon request.

The solution, in an ideal world, would be to have one governing body for all meetings in the pharmaceutical and medical world regardless of registration and approval status. Currently, there are a few organizations lobbying for a streamlined approach to medical congresses. One such organization is the International Pharmaceutical Congress Advisory

Association (IPCAA), based in Basel, Switzerland, whose mission is «to ensure the most beneficial outcome for all parties involved in medical congresses, through the development of common and consistent congress policies and through recognized partnerships with medical societies.» For more information on the organizations objectives one can visit <http://www.ipcaa.org/index.asp>. There are more than 30 member companies currently enrolled in this organization hoping to create a universal standard for the entire medical congress environment. Until then, it seems the industry is left to deal with a different regulatory process for every congress in each country.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line requires each pharmaceutical company and stand design to conduct a risk assessment based upon every country's regulations, product issues and sensitivities. For instance, size can work against large pharmaceutical companies that may face more intense scrutiny from any number of regulatory bodies simply due to the fact that they usually have a greater presence throughout Europe. In addition, working with a stand design partner that understands pharmaceutical congresses will help companies find creative ways to maximize brand awareness within regulatory guidelines by developing a successful strategy that can maximize benefit and minimize regulatory issues. In unbranded medical communications, the right creative strategy will let the physician put the BRAND in BRAND experience. Impact Unlimited creates event and stand solutions for leading global pharmaceutical companies worldwide. ●

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