

Top Story

Elevating Creative Campaign Performance

ThinkGen's Perspectives on Concept Development and Testing in the Age of Omnichannel

By Noah M. Pines and Will Leopold, ThinkGen

Introduction: A New Set of Best Practices

Pharmaceutical marketing is undergoing a transformation to adapt to the evolving information needs and media habits of health care providers, consumers, and decision-makers. Today's watchword, omnichannel, means seamlessly engaging the customer at the right place, at the right time, with the right information to drive them from awareness and interest to successful trial and regular product usage.

One major challenge is cutting through the environmental clutter, capturing customers' attention, and engaging them in an authentic way. As part of this omnichannel evolution, nailing the creative elements of the campaign is critical – elements ranging from the visuals and videos to the logo and color palate.

A new set of marketing research techniques is emerging, superimposed onto the existing palate of methods, to support effective creative campaign development – many of which grew and evolved rapidly due to the constraints of the pandemic. As we will show, these techniques are already being applied effectively across a range of therapeutic areas to support breakthrough in a world where customers are endlessly distracted.

Start by Surfacing Authentic Customer Insights with Digital Ethnography

The customer journey has been widely adopted by pharma companies as the foundational basis of commercial development and as the launch pad for what will eventually become a successful campaign. Customer journeys integrate the events - transactional and operational - as well as emotional components that comprise the customer experience over time and are intended to reveal critical "leverage points" for unbranded and branded engagement.

In our experience, we have found digital ethnography to be an indispensable approach to infuse authentic insights into foundational customer understanding. Digital ethnography is an observational research technique to surface deeper, in-the-moment insights during the customer journey. Through structured exercises and tasks, participants are asked to journal their thoughts, observations, experiences, and emotions over a prolonged time interval. Data collection is typically implemented via the participant's smart phone, allowing for responses and tasks to be provided at any time of the day.

About the Authors

Noah M. Pines is the Founder & CEO of ThinkGen, a global marketing research and brand strategy consultancy dedicated to helping life science companies develop and commercialize life-improving treatments. With 30+ years of experience, Noah leads a team of all-star researchers at ThinkGen. He has authored over 50 publications on therapeutic topics and research methodologies, and has spearheaded the development of several proprietary methods. Noah was the 2020 Intellus Clement-Fordyce recipient and named to the PharmaVOICE List of 2019's 100 Most Inspiring People.



Will Leopold, Senior Vice President, has 15 years of experience designing and executing market research that guides pharmaceutical brand strategy across the product lifecycle. He is a thought partner to his clients and enjoys tackling complex business issues and developing novel methodologies. Will is the winner of the PMRC Award of the Year (2018) as well as the recipient of the PMRG Excellence in Health Literacy Award (2017).

To learn more about ThinkGen, please visit <http://think-gen.com>.

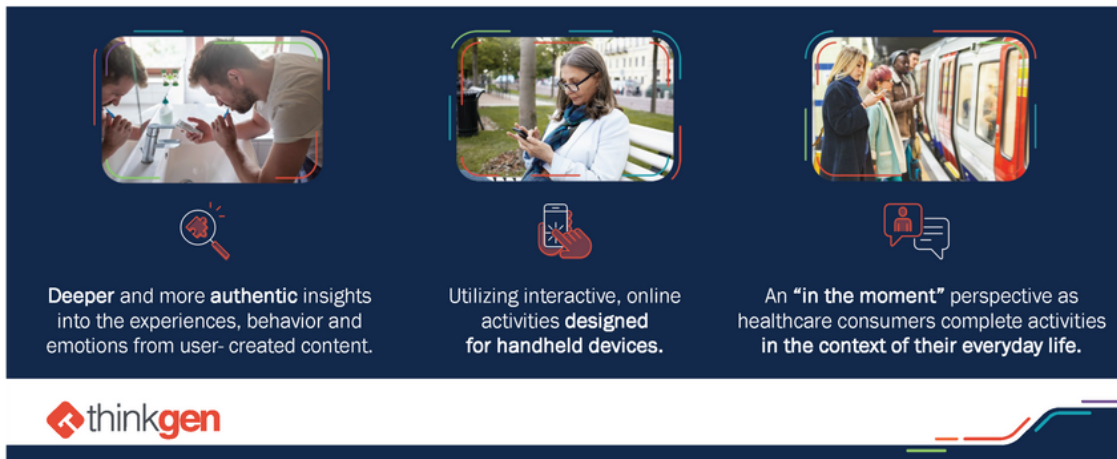
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Since participants are not being directly observed, like they are during in-depth interviews or focus groups, the data garnered in response to the exercises and tasks are more realistic, and often starkly raw and candid. Respondents in digital ethnography are asked to provide a range of different media in responding to the tasks, from written answers, to recorded audio, to photos, selfies, and videos. This enables a richer and more immersive set of insights, which can serve as a stronger foundation for the eventual development of a campaign.



Surfacing Authentic Customer Insights with Digital Ethnography

Digital Ethnography identifies key milestones, mindsets, and actions that drive the clinical, behavioral, and emotional journey of patients. These insights serve as a strong foundation for campaign development.






Deeper and more **authentic** insights into the experiences, behavior and emotions from user- created content.

Utilizing interactive, online activities **designed** for handheld devices.

An “**in the moment**” perspective as healthcare consumers complete activities in the context of their everyday life.

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Examples of tasks that participants are asked to complete during a digital ethnography study range from describing their experiences in terms of diagnosis, symptoms, current treatments, and interactions with their HCP via written diaries and multimedia uploads that capture real-time emotional and attitudinal states corresponding to daily personal health tasks. Participants are also asked to perform tasks in a way that can be observed via the researcher, such as searching for medical information on the Internet.

Typically, after the digital ethnography exercises are completed, ThinkGen facilitators will conduct follow-up in-depth interviews to more deeply understand the customer’s experiences. In these interviews, our facilitators utilize specific responses from the digital ethnography exercises as springboards to facilitate discussion to better understand the journey and opportunities for customer engagement.

Swipe Left or Swipe Right: Capturing the “System One” Effect

As marketers well know, customers make instantaneous and unconscious choices as to whether they want to look at a visual - the visual could be an image, a logo, or other branding element.

In testing promotional elements as part of a 1:1 qualitative in-depth interview, we typically utilize a digital platform that enables the study participant to quickly indicate her interest in a concept by swiping left or swiping right on it. This Tinder-inspired timed exercise provides an indication of whether the concept is something they instinctively want to see, or not; and is intended to reflect what behavioral scientist Daniel Kahneman refers to as customers’ “System One” or intuitive processing. This methodology for determining the breakthrough effect can be applied to a range of static visual stimuli, ranging from promotional concepts to logos and different color palates.

Along the same vein, when testing videos – such as videos which describe the mechanism of action of a medication, or which explain a specific disease state – we will utilize a real-time sentiment gauge to measure the participant’s reaction to each moment of the video. This sentiment gauge can be implemented during both individual and group depth interviews. Respondents indicate whether their reaction is favorable, neutral, or unfavorable as they are watching. This allows the moderator to go back through the video and, almost

frame-by-frame, probe the in the moment reactions, and better understand which parts are activating, or which parts are confusing or problematic.

The Art Gallery: An Often Forsaken Yet Critical Step in the Concept Testing Process

At a high level, a comprehensive concept testing program will be made up of three key research steps. Depending on the brand team’s information needs and other market research initiatives, some of a concept testing program’s objectives and outcomes may fall under other research streams.

Three key research steps:

Step 1: The Art Gallery

Step 2: Refine the Contenders

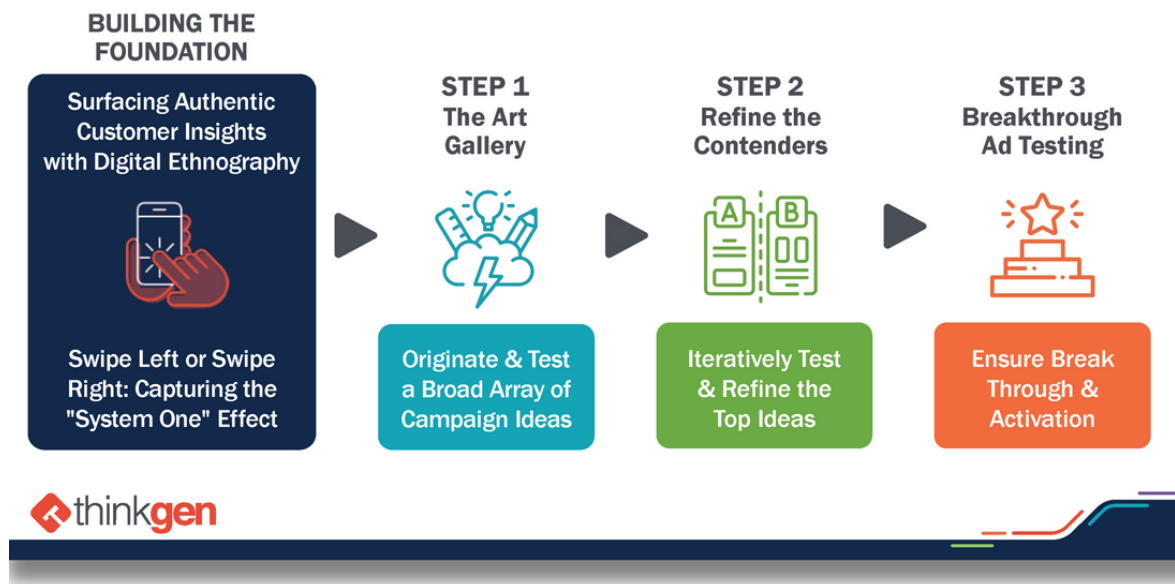
Step 3: Breakthrough Ad Testing

Since the creation of an effective campaign requires a great deal of work on the part of the creative team in channeling the feedback from customers, it is best to anticipate several rounds of marketing research, each one intended to enhance understanding of the customer’s “visual neighborhood” – the genre of imagery that resonates and appeals to them – while at the same time refining and narrowing the potential spectrum of promotional concept candidates. It is important to agree upon the potential scope of adjustments to be made at each step with enough time allotted between sessions to permit the digestion and incorporation of marketing research feedback into the creative process.

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ThinkGen's Iterative Approach to Concept Testing



One of the reasons why campaigns fail is that while the team may possess a deep understanding of the knowledge, behavior, and attitudes of their target customer, they neglect to glean insight into customers' "visual neighborhood." In other words, the team doesn't understand the visual imagery repertoire, genre, and style that is meaningful to that specific audience. There is often a gap of understanding between who the customer is as an HCP or health care consumer, and who they are as human beings.

An effective way to initiate the process of crafting pharmaceutical advertising is to start broad—to test a wide variety of alternative promotional concepts (prototype advertisements) with the target customer audience(s) through primary marketing research. During this component of the research, the HCP is asked to browse a gallery of images and rapidly identify the winners from the standpoint of their effective support and communication of the brand promise. These ad prototypes often are displayed in an Instagram or Pinterest-like feed so that HCP can scroll through the various pictures in an unrestricted manner. Using this art gallery approach will determine which concepts achieve: (1) eye catching breakthrough that grabs their attention; (2) alignment in communicating the brand promise; and (3) a reflection of an accurate visual, emotional, and intuitive "neighborhood" of the customer.

On the last point, it is important to grasp whether the audience gravitates to concepts that involve realism, or if they are comfortable with metaphor and abstraction. Are HCPs looking to see actual patients, or themselves depicted? Should the campaign be serious, or can it be light or humorous? Should the tone/feel be industrial vs. naturalistic, etc.?

It is also critical to observe how the respondent seems programmed to view the visual stimuli and how well the concept resonates as a provider and a human being. For example, certain specialists tend to scrutinize visual imagery in an extremely precise and technical manner. If images of an MRI are shown, results of a particular laboratory test, or even the how the patient looks, HCPs may involuntarily attempt to render a “diagnosis.” Thus, there are subliminal cues within therapeutic areas that may mean nothing to the untrained eye but may speak volumes to a specialist.

These questions can best be addressed by executing a series of web-enabled tele-depth interviews with customers. Based on the feedback collected from this initial round of testing, the brand team selects the winning concepts to advance into a second phase of testing. Ahead of additional testing, the creative department will further develop the winning concepts by actioning these initial insights.

The Next Step Is To Refine the Winners

The next step in the process should involve a more in-depth evaluation of a narrower set of campaign prototypes, based upon standardized criteria used to gauge the effectiveness of pharmaceutical advertising. With higher fidelity concepts in hand, the team can focus their efforts on refining concepts to enhance breakthrough, attention-grabbing, alignment with brand promise, and landing the intended emotional tonality.

From the standpoint of data collection, this round of research involves 1:1 depth interviews with target customers using either a digital platform or in-person/facility-based format. This drill-down round is designed

to reduce the spectrum of advertisements from seven or eight to two or three that can then be migrated into final-round quantitative testing. Typical components of a qualitative concept refinement interview:

- The “flash test”: This component tests the imagery of the concepts only - through a flash test—no headlines, taglines or body messages are included. The purpose is to identify the concept that connects most quickly to the brand essence in a single second. This component can be implemented via the Tinder-style “swipe left/swipe right” as noted above.
- Attention-getting capacity: After studying the concepts in more detail, HCPs are then shown more developed versions of the concepts (concepts which include headlines, taglines, and body copy) and instructed to rank them based upon attention-getting capacity. The objective here is to ascertain which ad best captivates them given additional review time (again, prior to being exposed to any previous information about the product); the moderator then will probe into why each ad grabbed their attention.
- One of the projective tools often used at this stage in HCP concept testing are emotion wheels. There are a variety of different emotion wheels to choose from, but at a high level, they work to help HCPs to: 1) Identify Key Feelings & Emotions, and 2) Measure the Intensity of those Emotions. One way to use an emotion wheel is the “before & after” approach. The wheel is used to gauge emotional baseline perspectives of treating a condition with currently available products (before). The wheel is again administered following concept exposure to measure the emotional change from baseline (after).

Break Through the Clutter: Quantitative In-Context Testing

Based on the qualitative testing, a small cadre of advertising concepts has been selected, two or three that are not only aligned with the positioning but that also perform best on the key dimensions of advertising effectiveness. Now the team may elect to conduct a quantitative examination of the advertisement's effectiveness with a larger sample of the target HCP specialty/specialties in question.

As pharmaceutical companies are transitioning towards omnichannel, it is critical to test the effectiveness of the campaign realistically across the multiple potential channels where the campaign might appear. Quantitative in-context testing exposes HCPs to brand concepts in a variety of simulated real-world channels. Using a digital research platform, both full and abbreviated forms of the advertisement are placed in authentic contexts ranging from a:

- Online medical journal
- Online website
- Mobile App
- Banner advertisement
- Online search

The questionnaire is designed to gauge each campaign's "stopping power," alignment with the brand promise, its credibility, motivational impact, and impression durability.

Conclusion: Keeping Things in Perspective

As much as this article has laid out the rationale and methodology for productively involving HCPs and consumers in the process of testing advertising prototypes, it is important to keep the following key facts in mind: in the real world, neither HCPs nor consumers carefully study the pictorial aspects of the promotional materials nearly as in-depth as they do in research. Therefore, the process by which such materials are tested is inherently artificial. While HCPs and health care consumers often are extremely intelligent and often highly creative and/or intuitive, most are not themselves good marketers and know very little about marketing.

Research participants also don't have a stake in the success or failure of the medication being assessed. Therefore, it is always important to balance the input of participants as one aspect of the process of decision-making surrounding the development of an ad along with professional experience and good marketing judgment.

An effective ad is one that is instantly appealing and that visually embodies the promise of the brand over time. Beyond planning and promotional development groundwork, crafting an ad that successfully infuses the right message into the brain of the customer at the right time is the offspring of an effective partnership between creative and analytic minds. It is essential to ensure that the ad will work across the various contexts where it might appear given today's world of omnichannel marketing.