

Top Story

ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization

A Quantitative Approach to Support Omnichannel and Brand Communication Strategies

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Introduction: Better Methods Are Needed

Pharmaceutical brand teams face the significant challenge of breaking through to key stakeholders, be it healthcare professionals or consumers, with communications that will influence changes to their habits and drive commercial success for the product. In an overcrowded and saturated medical marketplace, omnichannel marketing is increasingly being leveraged by companies to achieve a coordinated effect.

Brand teams are looking for clear guidance when developing a communications platform that maximizes behavioral impact. ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization, a consultative marketing research methodology developed by ThinkGen, provides the means to deliver that guidance.

The typical approach to communication testing is to conduct qualitative research followed by a quantitative study, where the quantitative component utilizes MaxDiff with Message TURF analysis to provide a hierarchy of effectiveness for independent, individual messages and bundles of those deemed high-value messages. Brand teams often assume that if an individual message is compelling, combining it with other compelling messages will magnify the impact.

However, using these techniques independently does not account for the real-world relationship and potential synergies among messages. Ultimately, messages need to coalesce into a cohesive, compelling story in the mind of the customer. In the age of omnichannel, a critical goal for a message platform is to instill and reinforce a singular, unified brand position.

ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization

ThinkSMARTSM ventures beyond the traditional individual-message testing methodology. It not only helps determine the optimal combination of messages or platform that will drive utilization (and consumer request), but more importantly it leverages synergies among messages.

The final output provides the team with insights necessary to construct the most compelling message platform, considering message synergies, to meet key performance metrics. Additionally, it delivers an optimized overall platform as well as optimized platforms with the specific number of messages to tailor to channel requirements.

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.



Nipa S. Clayton, Senior Vice President, a strategic advisor with 30 years in healthcare research, elevates insights for clients' business decisions. With extensive experience in qualitative and quantitative methodologies, Nipa brings informed strategic focus. Holding a BA in Psychology and Sociology, along with an MS in Applied Sociology from Clemson University, she's a seasoned leader in research excellence and account management.

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ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization Approach

Based on our experience, we at ThinkGen recognized that brand teams and their agencies need to look at message impact through several lenses to build a compelling communication framework. ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization applies a layered, four-step approach that enables a more thorough, real-world perspective of stakeholder receptivity to messages.

The following are descriptions of the key analytic components of ThinkSMARTSM and how they operate synergistically.

- **Individual Message Assessment** measures the strength of individual messages by producing relative scores for each message tested. This assessment provides both a message hierarchy and the difference in the magnitude of strength of each message on key metrics (motivation, credibility, etc.). This gives brand teams and their agencies insight on how to further refine individual messages.
- **Platform Trade-Off** is at the heart of the ThinkSMARTSM approach. It is an advanced modeling technique that identifies the optimal message platform (combination of messages), assessing the tradeoffs made between message elements and preferences, to determine the right message platform to motivate desired behavior changes. These combinations of messages are also analyzed to ensure their alignment to positioning / communication strategy goals and other critical metrics. Additionally, the modeling provides insight to the value gained as the story builds and allows the team, through a simulator, to test different platforms as more information becomes known (including potentially abandoning a message).
- **Build-Your-Own** exercises captures each respondent's preferred set of messages, their preferred platform size, and a directional view on their ideal story flow.
- **Channel Reach** analysis identifies the right mix of communication channels to reach the most customers with the fewest resources at key information-seeking stages.



Applying ThinkSMARTSM in Brand Communication Strategy Research Plan

More broadly, ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization is a single phase within a larger, strategic communication research program that integrates qualitative and quantitative research components. Such an engagement would incorporate:

1. Qualitative testing and refinement of messages designed to understand the “whys” behind each message. This phase provides stakeholder interpretations in their own words and the strengths/weaknesses of messages. It also helps to identify ways to improve a core set of messages to bring forward to the quantitative phase. Additionally, it helps guide the flow and overall fit with the brand’s intended positioning strategy.
2. ThinkSMARTSM Message Optimization to identify the optimal message platform(s) and garner insights on how messages work best together.
3. Execution Testing by utilizing the optimal platform, identified for key execution, and conducting research focused on maximizing impact for CVA, concept, and other branded communication collateral.

Conclusion

The unique combination of techniques comprising ThinkSMARTSM allows ThinkGen to develop a series of diagnostics and provide consultation to optimize messaging under a range of operational considerations; key outputs include:

- An optimized message platform recommendation and how it compares with other platforms of interest.
- An analysis of the diminishing returns of adding additional messages.
- Stated vs. Modeled message maps that illuminate the differences between messages that stakeholders say they want to hear and those that their choices indicate are meaningful to them.
- Individual scores reflective of the stated value or contribution of a given message.
- Guidance on how to match the message to the optimal delivery channel (number of messages and channel assessment).

Fundamentally, this methodology helps cultivate the critical inputs brand teams need to determine how to deploy a set of messages, within a target customer audience, using a range of coordinated media.