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The mindset experts

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Med Ad News spoke with Michael Kessler, M.D., president; and Mark Vitello, VP, program and business development, MD Mindset (mdmindset.com) to learn how a better understanding of doctors' needs can lead to more effective use of sales reps and resources.

Med Ad News: How can marketers get inside doctors' heads to better align selling strategies and tactics with the real-world needs of doctors?

Mark Vitello: Getting inside the doctor's head and understanding how the doctor conducts his or her business are two different things. Because getting inside their head is a much more personal thing. It's more in regards to the relationship, finding out what their attitudes are. Understanding how a doctor conducts the business of healthcare is very different, and it's not only the business of healthcare, and I don't want to focus on the word business, I want to focus on the process of how healthcare is conducted by a doctor.

Michael Kessler: One of the beautiful things about this is the one thing that doesn't change is the mindset of the doctor, because all doctors have been trained the same way. And they're trained to think, act, and communicate and solve patient problems in a very exact way. But certainly, there are multiple differences in those three or four areas as to specialty. We look at all doctors as being specialists. Primary care is a specialty. General practice, family practice, that type of thing, that is a specialty. For each individual type of specialty, for each individual type of doctor, there are certain variations that relate to the types of disease processes they see, the diagnostic and treatment modalities they use. The type of patients they're seeing, so forth and so on.

We have two facets of our company. One we call MD Mindset, which is all about the mindset of the doctors, but it's based on a network of doctors all across the country who have been trained by us to assess representatives in real detail calls. From that information that we get, not only from the assessments of the doctors of these calls — and by the way, these calls are assessed according to a standard criteria — so we get that information, we also get information from the doctors themselves in a panel, round-table constantly after they do these assessments. So, we take all of that information and put it together to prepare materials for the pharmaceutical/medical product/biotech fields.

Mark Vitello: Judging the reps and the way the messages are delivered to our panel of Metamorph doctors, but it's also looking at the skills they're utilizing, whether or not they're making an impact on the prescribing habits. So, it's really giving the representatives on the micro level and the companies on the macro level what happens at the flashpoint between the representatives and the doctors. Are the messages being delivered effectively? Are the messages received effectively? Do the representatives have the skills that would move the doctors to drug utilization? Do the messages have impact to move the doctors to drug utilization?

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Michael Kessler: [Reps are evaluated] based on doctor's perception as opposed to what's usually done, which is based on company's perception, as measured by the company or measured by the district manager. What those measurements are looking at is, is the representative fulfilling the needs of the selling model, fulfilling the needs of the messaging, so forth and so on. What we're adding to the mixture is, are the representatives doctor-focused. Are they able to convey these messages? Do they have the skills and knowledge that the doctors assess and at a bottom line say, yes, this person has the knowledge and skills to be able to change my clinical behaviors or my prescribing patterns.

Med Ad News: So this could influence the training of the sales reps.

Michael Kessler: Exactly.

Mark Vitello: Absolutely. That's one of the biggest impact points. But when companies are considering, say, changing territory alignments or new product introductions, our data can also be used to identify those who would be successful in dealing with those changes. When people who are working within the same environment with the same product, with the same territories, calling on the same doctors, they get into patterns of behavior that are very typical of those that are in that situation.

Michael Kessler: They're relationship oriented.

Mark Vitello: Right, they're relationship oriented. They've got very strong relationships with the doctors. They're not utilizing their skills as much. And skills are what is necessary when there are changes in territories or new product introductions. So, what our data shows is that individuals who are calling on brand new doctors and are successful are those who are more likely to succeed when there are changes in the territories or in the product mix.

Michael Kessler: In other words, when our doctors assess them, the relationship factor is taken out of the equation, because they're brand new, they've never seen these doctors before, so instead of relying on relationship, they have to rely on the basic skills and knowledge that they have.

So, one of the patterns that we find is representatives who have been identified by the companies as best in class or top performers may not necessarily be the top performers in these types of assessments, because the relationship component has been taken out of it.

So, what happens is, a lot of times, they may wind up in the upper third, but all of a sudden other people come to the top. And our research has show that these people are better able to switch territories, better able to introduce new products, because they're relying on their basic knowledge and skills that they have.

As a result of that, companies probably need to revisit the use of top performers as role models for mimicking their behavior to try to increase the performance of others within the company.

Med Ad News: Are there common mistakes companies make because they do not understand doctors' mindset?

Michael Kessler: The approach to the doctor needs to be more consultative and educational rather than strict product oriented. Of course, product is important and of course product should be part of the mix, but one of the issues now is the fact that representatives have very little time to gain mental access to these doctors. We hear stories of cardiologists who have 20 people coming in every day to see them, and only three get in. And who are the three who get in? The three who get in are those who are able to understand what that doctor needs and be able to give it to that doctor in the way the doctor wants, needs it, and expects it.

In essence, what it comes down to is companies and representatives going in and pushing their process on the doctor rather than engaging the doctor in the doctor's process. That's where we see the big misalignment.

[That's why only three get in.] That's what the pharmaceutical, biotech, and medical device companies are facing today, so they're talking about realignment within, among themselves, cutting the sales force, the new selling model, so forth and so on, when really all that needs to be done is a more doctor-focused positioning and aligning to that mindset of the doctor and involving the doctor in their process, as opposed to pushing the sales process on the doctor.

Mark Vitello: Many of the solutions that are being offered, whether it be at these seminars or from specific suppliers or vendors or industry partners, focus on changing the method by which the products are sold, are presented. It could be in the messaging, it could be in the promotional materials used. Or it could be in the ways that the representatives try to relate to the doctor. But what they're not doing is they're

not understanding that whole focus that we call the M.D. mindset. That whole focus that dictates how a doctor takes in information, applies information, and then utilizes the product. That is really where that alignment has to occur.

Michael Kessler: We're representative of a large network of doctors across this country who are not trying to tell the pharmaceutical/biotech/medical device world what to do. What we're trying to tell them is, these are our needs. This is the way that we think, and if you want to be successful with us, you need to understand that and align your selling process to our problem solving process. And once you do that, we'll get what we need and you'll get what you need.

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