

Campaign Title: "Flying Ragweed" and "Green Fields"

Brand: RAGWITEK® and GRASTEK® (Merck)

Company(s) Involved: Merck, Ipsos SMX and Ipsos Healthcare, McCann Humancare

Category: Innovation

Summary

We aspire to turn to research at all critical junctions of campaign development... but is this enough? Why not make the customer voice intertwined with and inseparable from creative evolution?

We yearn to have answers to all of our questions... but is that enough? Why not have our customers tell us what questions we should be asking?

We desire to have insights at our fingertips... And now we do.

The marketing challenge was to launch a successful DTC campaign that would break through the clutter of the OTC-dominated allergy market and activate consumers, while balancing regulatory requirements for advertising a pharmaceutical product with a black box warning. A longitudinal **Patient Community** was created to support the launches of GRASTEK® and RAGWITEK®, including the development of an integrated consumer campaign. The community proved to be the Social Glue that enabled sustained engagement and co-creation with appropriate customers, translating into deeper (faster and more cost-effective) insights. The research journey culminated in a campaign that outperformed most action standards in quantitative testing, and significantly increased awareness, traffic to the website and consumers' intent to act in markets where it was launched.

Marketing Challenge

"Happiness comes from within, but when you do not feel happy deep down because allergies have you under their control, it can be hard to face the day with a smile in your heart and on your face." – posted one member of our Patient Community. She is not alone in her struggle. Allergic Rhinitis affects 80 million people in the United States, and at least a third of this population is not getting the relief they want from their allergy treatments. GRASTEK® and RAGWITEK® are two new sublingual allergy immunotherapy tablets (SLIT-Ts) for grass and ragweed allergies, respectively. They work differently from most allergy medications, but despite their unique value proposition, SLIT-Ts face significant hurdles at launch. The market is dominated by OTC meds, which consumers value for their cost and convenience. The media spend for the allergy category is close to \$200 million, and consumers know and trust behemoth brands advertised on TV. Few consumers have regular conversations with their physician about allergies, and there is virtually no awareness of allergy immunotherapy as a treatment option. A successful campaign had to break through the clutter and effectively differentiate GRASTEK® or RAGWITEK® from therapies consumers are familiar with.

Methodology

To support the launches of GRASTEK® and RAGWITEK®, including the development of a DTC campaign, we established a Market Research Online Community three years before the first product was scheduled to launch. Robust membership (all screened to meet target qualification criteria) enabled the generation of qualitative and quantitative insights, and user-friendly social platform offered a wide spectrum of research methodologies (forums, blogs, live chats, contests) to drive member engagement.

The Community moved us beyond traditional market research inquiry, opening a door for a two-way dialogue and fueling co-creation with our customers. The longitudinal nature of the Community and the breadth of topics discussed by members allowed for the holistic understanding of the allergy sufferer; generated new, deeper insights, and enabled us to test many more iterations of campaign elements than the traditional research typically permits. But we did not stop there.

The Community ignited innovation within innovation, serving as a springboard platform for such studies as:

- Simulated Physician-patient dialogue that leveraged an online webcam platform to accurately replicate the physician-patient conversation about SLIT-Ts
- Caregivers Research where Community members participated in blogging exercises with their kids, exposing the extent of an emotional toll children's allergies take on parents
- Secret Shopper research (conducted post-launch) that sent members to have a discussion with their doctor about immunotherapy options and revealed physicians' perceptions of these therapies

Creative Execution

Research with Community members uncovered insights that transformed the lens through which we see the allergy patient and ultimately laid the foundation for the creative brief. The campaign took an unconventional approach of forgoing “lifestyle” imagery (there are no people in the ad) and instead focusing on educating consumers on product benefits. The RAGWITEK® TV spot opens up with a close-up, slow motion shot of a sprig of ragweed flying through the air and ending in a pill bottle, instantly capturing the attention of the viewer. The voice-over and the visuals deliver the “building blocks” to help the viewer understand the concept of immunotherapy (the voice-over states, “treat the allergy, not the symptoms” and on the screen the ragweed-filled pill bottle starts to spin and transforms into a tablet). Ragweed pollen forming into a swing, football and a bike provokes consumers to imagine that they can comfortably enjoy the outdoors with the RAGWITEK® treatment.

The GRASTEK® spot leverages the same approach, although the execution is specific to grass pollen (spring) allergies.

Business Results

In quantitative copy testing, the campaign outperformed most action standards, effectively breaking through the clutter, branding the product, communicating the value proposition, and positively impacting intent to act.

An integrated consumer campaign launched in February 2015. Despite the campaign's short flight, its impact was noteworthy:

- Significantly increased branded awareness
- Increased traffic to the branded website and increased "engaged website visitor" volume
- Increased intent to have a conversation with the doctor about allergies (vs control) and intent to ask for the product, as measured by tracking studies

Other business implications of having the Community are far reaching. Research insights generated in the Community enabled the SLIT-T franchise to:

- Optimize the branded messaging platform and the patient brochure
- Identify the winning name and logo for the customer relationship management program
- Pick the layout for the branded product website, and post-launch, identify areas that could improve website usability and user experience
- Optimize the language in patient materials for health literacy

And the implication of a small brand having access to such a rich and agile research tool...
PRICELESS!