

Think again! About What It Takes to Be "Mainstream"

Just the other day, an article appeared in the *New York Times* and was picked up by newspapers throughout the country. The headline: "Merck prescribes a dose of advertising for what ails it."

The article goes on to say that drug maker Merck has budgeted a whopping \$20 million to overcome the tarnished image it is suffering from - no doubt due to safety problems, the Vioxx recalls and the like. The advertising, which will appear on television, radio and in print, will attempt to counter a widespread perception that all the giant drug makers - Merck in particular - are more interested in profits than they are in people. The slogan that will be widely used is, "Merck, where patients come first."

While Merck will be spending \$20 million to confront its challenges, incidentally the first campaign of this kind in its 114-year history, reports show that the pharmaceutical industry spent over \$3.6 billion last year for direct-to-consumer advertising.

Years ago, you wouldn't have dreamed that a company would tout a drug, and then ask you to "tell your (medical) doctor" to prescribe it. But the times are different and society has changed.

I assure you that Merck is not running this campaign to show they are nice guys. Right or wrong, it's because they have a serious perception problem right now. Likewise, the pharmaceutical industry is not advertising like mad because they enjoy seeing their name in print or hearing it on television. It's because it is enabling them to sell their product.

Does this make you sit up and take heed? More than that, does it make you think again about what chiropractic should be doing to protect its turf, and better yet, increase its market share?

The simple fact is that marketing works. And chiropractic has done no real marketing in its 100-plus years of existence. (In a way, it's somewhat of an irony that Merck, after over 100 years, is trying to save its image, and chiropractic, after about the same amount of time, would like to gain an image it deserves.)

What is happening with Merck is testimony to what it takes to be and stay in the "mainstream." Public perception is all-important and marketing is key.

That's why the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress' Campaign for Chiropractic is so important. Chiropractic desperately needs a mass-media communications campaign in order to keep in the mainstream, and to increase utilization of the services of doctors of chiropractic.

Call it a "cost of doing business," if you like. We have a new generation of people out there who are interested in good health; they are hungry for information, and willing to accept new ideas. They deserve to know about chiropractic.

We have no choice but to create the identity and perception that is so vital to the future of our profession. I urge every doctor of chiropractic to be part of this important campaign by pledging

your support and dollars now.

Dwayne Bennett
Foot Levelers, Inc.

Editor's note: For further information on the Foundation for Chiropractic Progress and its Campaign for Chiropractic, please send an e-mail to gveno@foundation4cp.com.

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