

Being real, being relevant,

BEING 🍏 HUMAN

THE HEALTHCARE ANGLE

OUR STAKEHOLDERS:

humans with a healthy interest

Communicating in the healthcare setting really shouldn't be that different from the rest of our normal, everyday lives. But right now, it is very different. The truth is that there's much more we could and should be doing.

In pharma, we're probably facing our most challenging environment ever. There are more patients and more types of treatment than ever before but seemingly not enough money in the healthcare budgets to get people the right treatment when they need it.

The industry is busily developing innovative, often personalised medicines, but we're under unprecedented scrutiny. So the need to communicate the value of these important advances has never been more urgent. The challenge is to do this in an accessible and relevant way to the many audiences who want and need to know.

But some of them don't want to talk to us because they don't trust what we have to say. In an industry that exists to help make people's lives better, we absolutely must address this. We're making progress, for sure, but we need to have more impact and move faster. Being Human can help.

COMMUNICATING

with a human purpose

We need to be clear about why we're deploying healthcare communications and what we expect them to achieve. Perhaps it's to establish the company's personality or its brand voice. Perhaps it's to raise important questions about the way diseases are currently treated. Perhaps it's to inform particular groups of people about new developments or give them relevant information. Maybe it's simply to enable us to build relationships with the people we want to talk to.

What it's not is just as important. It's not spin. It's not merely another form of advertising. It's not a literal act of pushing out the approved corporate lines. Just because we've tested messages and defined the audiences well, people won't obediently think and do what we would like them to.

Cause and effect is not usually direct and linear. In our pharma world we're driven by scientific, rational data, but that's nowhere near sophisticated enough to make sense of human behaviour and create meaningful connections with our audiences today.

Sounds fairly obvious? Perhaps, but in practice we fail to do it. It's as if as soon as we walk through the office door, we forget how we make choices in our home life. Which brands and companies do we choose to get to know, to be associated with and to buy from... or not? What influences us? Who influences us? Certainly not imperious corporate statements.



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COMMUNICATING

as human beings

That's why we need to communicate in a normal way, not a special, pharma way, in our own industry's terms and language. We know this. We say we do this. Yet in practice in our industry, we tend not to. At Virgo we think there are four key reasons for this:

1. The definition of ROI

The industry, mistakenly in our opinion, believes that maximum return on investment (ROI) comes from a laser precision focus on what we want to say. We talk about being customer-centric, but in the main we're not. Translating the attributes of our products and services into the things we assume will be most relevant to our customers is not actually being customer-focussed. As humans living our everyday lives, we don't respond well to that.

A huge and complex range of factors determines how we relate to brands. A key one is the relationship we feel we have with them. Brands invest in developing this all-important rapport. At a human, individual level, it's what we do. We appreciate, we reciprocate, we give without necessarily expecting anything back in return.

Here's the problem. Nowadays, many activities that our industry would have once been involved with aren't affordable or are seen as poor for ROI. Things like disease education initiatives, which naturally generated those crucial relationship- and rapport-building opportunities. However, we know that familiarity and trust are critical for success. Relationships and rapport are needed to create them. So we need to redefine ROI to prioritise them. Communicating purely to build trusted relationships is not a wasted opportunity to talk about your brand. It is the essential first step to earning your audience's permission even to mention your brand.

2. Regulations as a barrier

We're a heavily regulated industry (and rightly so). That means communicating isn't always as easy as for FMCG brands. But we need to be persistent and find a way. Not bending the rules nor acting inappropriately or recklessly. Far from it. Instead, we need to think as normal human beings and keep asking ourselves basic, human questions. Like, 'what do we think these people want to know right now?', 'how are they hoping we'll respond to their concerns?', 'what would most reasonable people say, think, or do if we act in this way?'

Instinctively we know the answers to these questions. So we need to be guided by them. Our individual views of organisations in times of crisis are formed by their response compared to our expectations. Organisations that behave in a human way (Virgin is a great example) gain our respect, trust, admiration and when necessary, forgiveness.

Some organisations fall short. Perhaps lawyers have advised them that saying nothing is least risky. Maybe so, legally, but humanly, it demolishes their credibility and trustworthiness. They're seen as unfeeling, uncaring, remote. The end result can be commercially disastrous.

Regulations aren't there to stop us having the right kind of conversations, at the right time, with the right people. But they can have a paralysing effect, which hampers relationship building. Seeing from a human perspective helps us find a clearer, better path through the constraints. We think that blaming an increasingly stringent regulatory environment is an excuse. And it's a dangerous excuse when it threatens our freedom to exchange the information that our customers truly value in the contexts that matter to them.



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3. Tunnel vision.

Often in our industry, we only look at parts of the patient journey, or system, or treatment pathway. We focus on the bits we think are relevant to our brands and will help us with our objectives.

Then there's our obsession with putting our audiences in familiar industry categories. Like 'healthcare professionals' and 'patients'. All of them are first and foremost human beings and respond just like the rest of us.

For sure, there are important ethical, professional and practical considerations we must take into account. But our narrow definitions stop us from seeing the whole picture.

Here's an example. We want to understand how we get valuable information to oncologists using digital channels. If we narrow our investigation only to how those oncologists who use digital resources do so in their professional setting, we're missing a huge part of the picture. We have to take into account their online personas in their entirety, not just in one place or between certain times.

4. Lack of genuine insight.

We think we understand. We undertake swathes of market research. We ask patients about their disease or condition, what it's like to live with it and how they feel about it. We ask them about their treatment and what they think of that. We ask them what they think of certain types of information and how they'll respond. With doctors, we ask how they manage diseases and conditions. We ask how they think it might change in the future. Then we use the answers to define and justify the approach we take.

There's a problem though. We're operating under false pretences. The very answers people give in research can be misleading, because they're only human. They answer to please, in a rush, without thinking or because they instinctively know the 'right' answer. And the human brain is spectacularly bad at accurately predicting our future behaviour.

Then there's intentional or unintentional bias. Sometimes we use and design research to prove our ideas are right. Or we make it so specific that it can only generate the answers we already think we know.

We need genuine insight to understand true motivations, conscious and unconscious. That's the only way we can help people – patients, doctors, policy makers – to consider new choices that can lead to better health for them or others. It's about finding reliable ways to fathom human behaviour – pinpointing what we actually do and need, not just what we say we do and need.

The good news is that there are ways to do this. We need to be brave enough to stop doing things that have always been done because that's the safe option. It doesn't work any more. Einstein had this covered: "The definition of insanity is doing something over and over again and expecting a different result."



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COMMUNICATING

with a human interest

We are a healthcare PR company with long and deep experience. So we've always understood the need to find common ground between what our clients want to communicate and what customers and the media are interested to know. Crucially, they're not the same thing. The media, like every other audience, is almost exclusively interested in the human angle. Our job is to act as brokers, finding ways to bring those agendas together. But today more than ever, regulations, legal issues, ROI pressures, corporate assumptions and industry defaults take over and override the audience's agenda.

No wonder communication is getting harder. We've been approaching it all the wrong way. By making it all about us: our objectives, our products, our messages, our world-view and our constraints, we've lost touch with the human beings we seek to engage with. They've become passive, depersonalised 'targets' not people who live, work and interact in the real world, subject to opinions, influences and behaviours that are innately human. This is the trend we want to reverse by re-humanising what and how we communicate. By Being Human.

THE ACTION POINTS

Being Human: in practice

We need to shift our focus from the delivery of the message to the impact it has. To think deeply about how our brand messages are received. It's the outcome, not the input that matters.

In our pharma world we're driven by scientific, rational data. But that's not enough for a real, relevant human connection with our stakeholders. The power is with the people in a selfie-centric world. So we need to look at a bigger picture. To earn the right, first, to be heard and believed. Then to set a chain reaction in motion, where we can communicate brand messages in a meaningful, inspiring, interactive way. We need to consider ROI based on the right part of this chain reaction.

We need to be bold. In a tough, tightly regulated market it's hard to find freedom to exchange the information and context that our customers truly value. Challenge the constraint. Think creatively. Find a way to make it work.

“Brands that deliver on an authentic story and an inspiring experience on average deliver 8% higher revenue and 9% higher growth in market value over five years.”

[Building Payer Brands for the New Healthcare Consumer]



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THE CHECKLIST

five healthcare brand basics for being human

1. Listen, listen, listen! Think of communication as a way of creating engagement. It's not about what we want to say, it's about what our audience wants to hear.
2. Make every conversation with customers as real and human as it can be. Exchange rather than broadcast information. Seek insight. Embrace surprising revelations. Be transparent in all your communications.
3. Invest in relationship building. It's critical to your brand's success. Develop trust through mutually beneficial, long-term and sustainable relationships. Strive for a deep and genuine understanding of stakeholders' needs.
4. Build opportunities to interact with your customers with their needs in mind and they will come. Embrace all that digital and social media offer. Physical and direct interaction is still important too.
5. Behavioural insight matters. We have to understand our target audiences. From patients to healthcare professionals, we need to know what really makes them tick as individuals. Don't rely on assumptions and stereotypes.

THE OPPORTUNITY

We're Only Human: this is just the start

We believe that Being Human is the way forward for our communication, and yours. It's time to change the question. It's not 'how is this relevant to our brand?' any more. Now it's 'how is this relevant to our healthcare customers?' We intend to keep asking the question. Because we all need to know every day what keeps our brands and products relevant.

What do you think? What could it mean for you? How can we make it work for your business, your brand, your products? Are you thinking what we're thinking... or something different?

This is the start of a conversation, an exciting and evolving one. It will thrive on challenge and new perspectives. We're here to listen, to share and to keep it real and relevant to you. Starting as we mean to go on. So join the Being Human conversation: talk to us, email us, argue with us, enter into it at twitter.com/virgohealth or www.virgohealth.com



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