

Cutting through the Clutter – Message Optimization Research

By Lili Pasha, Director Research Services, Maritz Research Pharmaceutical Sector, Maritz Research and Kevin Lattery, Ph.D., Director, Marketing Sciences Group, Maritz Research

Marketers in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry face an ever growing challenge to develop clear, motivating and effective communication strategies that **differentiate** their products in crowded and competitive therapeutic areas. This challenge, combined with increasing pressure on marketers to demonstrate positive return on investment (ROI), have prompted market researchers to develop more rigorous and innovative techniques for evaluating promotional messages.

Marketing goals typically are diverse; they range from summarizing brand benefits and differentiating the product from competitors to evoking specific call to action. Messages will be different if the product has several “indications” or if the brand is targeting specific types of patients or physicians. All-in-all, we observe increasing complexity around the area of “messaging” and “message optimization” forcing us to think about ways to cut through the clutter.

As a first step, we recommend qualitative research or internal brainstorming sessions around marketing objectives and priorities to significantly narrow down the number of messages for quantitative testing/optimization research. This first step plays a significant role in cutting through the clutter and paves the way for effective message optimization research.

At Maritz Research, we approach message testing/optimization research, using quantitative methods, from two broad angles:

- The specific marketing goals of the message(s)
- The structure of the message – i.e., whether the message has multiple structured components

A crucial part of any message research involves identifying what we refer to as the key “success criteria” or measurement metrics typically driven by marketing goals. Some relate to the messages themselves, such as stopping power, relevance, credibility, uniqueness, etc., while others link the messages to the brand, such as, positive feeling toward brand, motivation to prescribe/use the brand, fit with brand positioning, best describes the brand, etc., Methodological recommendations must take the number of such “success criteria” into consideration.

While rating scales are one the most common ways to test multiple messages, they have major limitations. Ratings tend to be highly correlated with one another, often making it difficult to discriminate among alternatives. In addition, respondents use rating scales differently. Some are easy graders, while others are hard graders. Some respondents use all of the scale, and some respondents only part of the scale. Last, but not least, rating scale exercises can be tedious and less engaging, therefore, repeating these exercises multiple times can raise serious data integrity issues.

We can use a variety of trade-off methodologies such as Max Diff, Q-Sort, and Paired Comparisons which require respondent’s behavioral trade-offs of one message vs. another when evaluating messages. These trade-off methods may replace or supplement rating scales. If rating scales and trade-off exercises are used, we recommend using trade-off techniques on the more general attributes, such as overall appeal or motivation, while using rating scales for more specific attributes like uniqueness and believability. This coupling can extend the number of attributes tested while

maintaining the improved discrimination and predictive power that trade-off methods offer versus traditional rating scales.

Message testing often uses multiple measurements, such as credibility, uniqueness, and motivation. However, each message has different strengths and weaknesses. For example, one message may be very unique but not motivating or believable, while another may be motivating but not very unique. While Maritz Research believes measurements can be effective when left in their multidimensional state, we will sometimes create an overall Index if desired.

Messages with multiple components

Message with multiple components can take a variety of forms. They may have a mixture of textual and graphic components, or they may have several textual components such as efficacy, safety, MOA, dosing, etc. Maritz recommends testing messages with multiple components using conjoint analysis. Conjoint analysis was developed to determine what happens when one puts together specific sets of features, or in our case, components of messages: What happens when I combine this graphic with this text? And what happens if I change the text to...?

Respondents evaluate holistic messages with several components, just as they would likely be exposed to in real life. We then derive the value of each component, which tells you how those components can best be combined. Whenever we use conjoint analysis, we recommend experimental designs that can model interactions between components. For example, some graphics may do very well with some text, but not others.

Conjoint methodology may be combined with individual evaluation of each component separately. So in this hybrid method, we might have asked each respondent how appealing each of the textual messages were and how appealing each of the graphics were. This could have been done using rating scales, rankings, or with a Maximum Difference or

Paired Comparisons approach. The separate estimates can then be included in the conjoint analysis to see how the elements combine. The most common hybrid approach is to use rating scales for detailed diagnostics on secondary criteria (like uniqueness and credibility) of each attribute, and conjoint to measure the primary criteria.

Optimal Message Bundling

Sometimes we want to know more than what the single most optimal message would be. We want to know which set or bundle of messages form an optimal group with maximum reach within our audience.

For example, one may wish to choose three composite messages. Each composite message will have the same graphic but with different taglines. The reasoning may be that different taglines will appeal differently to different physician specialties. So the question becomes: Which set of three messages forms the most effective group, with one or more of the messages appealing to the broadest group of people?

In a situation such as the above, where we are trying to identify several messages (or message elements) that fit together in an optimal way, we might recommend adding a Total Unduplicated Reach and Frequency (TURF) analysis. TURF analysis is a product line extension model that originated in the area of media planning. The model provides estimates of how many customers will use each product line (reach), the volume (frequency) of usage for each product line, and usage overlap (duplication).

We can apply this methodology to message optimization, especially when one wants to select multiple messages. For example, choosing the top two messages may not be the best strategy if both messages appeal to the same group of people. However, TURF analysis allows you to select the two messages that appeal to *different* groups and *maximize the total reach* of the two messages. TURF analysis can add a lot of value to message optimization

research as it provides quantitative measures on the incremental value that the addition of each message will have to the optimal bundle.

In Conclusion

Some interesting client situations have spawned creative thinking around incorporating competitive assessment of messages into message optimization studies, time permitting. Similarly we have found ways to accommodate relatively large numbers of messages for testing purposes as well. Every client situation is unique – marketing objectives, priorities, budget and time constraints are all very different. Therefore at Maritz, we do not take a “one-size-fits-all” approach to message testing and optimization. Messaging research is both an art and science. We have found the best way to “cut through the clutter” is to take a sensible, practical approach combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques and working with our clients collaboratively to develop research programs that best meets their information needs and business objectives.

www.maritzresearch.com
(877) 4 MARITZ
info@maritz.com

