

Kaletra's Brand Strategy: Beyond Product Attributes

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Kaletra is a wonderful example of a brand strategy initiative that succeeded because the marketing team focused on the emotional benefits delivered by the brand.

When Abbott Laboratories introduced Kaletra, physicians and patients quickly recognized it as the strongest cocktail drug for HIV/AIDS patients. Abbott and its healthcare ad agency positioned the brand based on Kaletra's significant product attributes of strength, durability and endurance. Kaletra became the #1 drug in the protease inhibitor market rather quickly. Then, gradually, it began to lose sales. When it dropped to #3 in the market, Abbott decided to take a step back, look at the brand and consider a repositioning or a re-launch. They hired The Right Brain People to figure out why the sales of Kaletra had dropped and how to reverse the trend.

We started by conducting Right Brain Interviews with patients and prescribing physicians. The brand team at Abbott wanted us to uncover the

emotional underpinnings to Kaletra's three main attributes: strength, durability and endurance. As we began the project, we discovered that although our client believed that there was a difference between the durability and endurance attributes, the respondents did not perceive a difference. Furthermore, we were not discovering significant emotional ties to any of the three product attributes, so we ended up taking a much more open ended approach in the respondent interviews. By doing so, we discovered that Kaletra gave patients a feeling of greater control over their impulses and over their lives. Hence, control was the key emotional benefit for the patients.

When patients' viral loads (a measure of how sick they are) were spiking, they would end up feeling out of control of their work lives, their social lives and their sex lives. They felt like they were not themselves any more. They experienced a threat to their self-identities, because they felt like they had been knocked out of the game of life. They felt that they could not have normal relationships with other people. What they really wanted was to get back in control again and recapture their self-identities. They wanted their viral load to be undetectable.

The word 'undetectable' is powerful because it has multiple meanings. On the surface, it means that the viral load is so low that it no longer reflects the presence of an active HIV/Aids virus. On a deeper level, it means that patients are not even aware of being sick. They do not feel sick. They do not feel like their friends and co-workers can detect that they are sick. The emotional benefit for these patients, then, was being in control again and recapturing their self-identities by getting their lives back.

During the interviews with the physicians, we discovered that when Kaletra first came out, they prescribed it as a first line drug because of its strength. However, after patients had been on Kaletra for awhile and their viral loads increased, there was no second line drug for the physicians to prescribe that was stronger than Kaletra. So, physicians began to drop Kaletra as a first line drug because without having a second line option, they felt that they were failing their patients.

We also discovered that these physicians felt very emotionally connected to their patients. Choosing to treat HIV/AIDS patients represented a time commitment because patients require long-term care and frequent office visits. And, in order to build expertise and knowledge, these doctors must

dedicate a significant part of their practices to HIV/AIDS patients. The physicians who made the choice to treat these patients fit a unique demographic profile: heavily skewed toward female, minority and immigrant. They empathized with the plight of these patients because they saw in them some of the same characteristics they felt in themselves, feeling rejected for being outcasts.

The emotional connection we discovered between the physicians and patients was critical because it made it all the more important to the physicians to be able to help their patients. But, if they began treatment with the strongest drug available, then they felt that they had nothing to fall back upon if one of their patients became sicker and sicker. Hence, the physicians' emotional needs led them to use Kaletra as a drug of last resort. Ironically, Abbott was reinforcing this tendency with the advertising that focused purely on strength and endurance. To reverse the downward trend, the new advertising would have to resonate with the physicians as well as with the patients.

As a result of the Right Brain interviews with the patients and physicians, we recommended that Abbott stop focusing on strength, endurance and

durability which are all left brain product attributes and instead focus on helping patients gain control of their lives.

Armed with this powerful insight about how patients and physicians connect emotionally to the Kaletra brand, we conducted an off-site work session with Kaletra's brand strategy team to develop a brand promise. This team included employees from a number of different departments at Abbott as well as their advertising agency. The team worked in groups on several assignments designed to draw upon creative and intuitive faculties. These exercises are used to allow the participants to think, create and problem solve in a way that they do not do on a daily basis as they juggle their responsibilities and the demands of meetings, emails and phone calls.

In all the exercises, the participants were asked to base their ideas on the Right Brain Findings, their knowledge of the market and their intuitive grasp of what motivates patients and physicians.

The two most prolific exercises for this project were the room exercise and the future story. In the room exercise, we asked the participants to create a room that embodies the essence of the Kaletra brand. The description had to

include the furniture, music, colors, paintings and design of the room as well as any people inside the room and any action taking place. This exercise is incredibly powerful because from a process standpoint, participants are doing something that they do not ever do. The Kaletra brand strategy team had to create something out of nothing using only their imagination and their creativity. The only constraint was that they had to explain how what they created was based on the Right Brain Findings. Then they had to show how their ideas tied into the Kaletra brand.

This exercise forced the team to go beyond the product attributes into how the brand makes people feel and the intangible qualities of the brand. Participants had to get beyond the literal characteristics of the product and explore the connotative meaning of the brand, the messages that it conveys and the metaphors and symbols that it suggests. Once people started generating suggestions, the dam broke and ideas started flooding out. In the Kaletra brand strategy session, the excitement in the room was palpable.

The next exercise the team worked on is called the future story. The team broke into groups and wrote a 5-year out story about what the Kaletra brand will look like, what it will be doing, what it will have accomplished – all in 5

years. They had to visualize what the brand would be doing and they had to imagine the story would appear in WSJ or Fortune. The story also had to include what the brand team did to get there. This exercise is very powerful. It takes people out of their rational mindset and inspires them to dream, envision, imagine, invent, create and outline what they can do to make all of it happen.

In a February 2005 article for *Pharmaceutical Executive* Skip Thurnauer writes, “The group crafted a new brand promise for Kaletra, one that incorporated the knowledge gleaned from the patient and physician interviews”. When an HIV/AIDS patient uses Kaletra, he feels like he has his life back again. The disease is undetectable at multiple levels: to the lab tests, to the doctor, to other people and to himself. The essence of the Kaletra brand was finally understood: Kaletra is in the business of helping patients regain control of their lives. Abbott’s commitment to a comprehensive Right Brain brand strategy was the key to Kaletra’s new found success. Within six months of introducing the new campaign, the brand had regained its # 1 position in the marketplace.