

PR Plays Big Role In PhRMA's Commitment To The Poor

CLIENT: Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America
PR AGENCY: Deveney Communications
TIMEFRAME: March 2003 - April 2003
BUDGET: \$71,000

With more than 1,400 potentially life-saving medications offered free or discounted by pharmaceutical companies through patient-assistance programs, medical help abounded in 2002 to the uninsured and under-insured. The only problem was how to inform those people most in need.

Enter the Washington, D.C.-based trade group **Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America** (PhRMA), which set out to fill what it saw as a gaping hole in the health-care sector by launching a Web site clearinghouse called **Helpingpatients.org**. Amid a backdrop of spiraling prescription drug costs and widespread criticism that money, not medicine, drives drug development and use, PhRMA hoped the initiative would help to change some negative perceptions.

"People are falling through the cracks when it comes to health care," says Ken Johnson, who recently was appointed senior vice president of communications at PhRMA. "Our goal was to raise awareness of the resources that are available through the 250 existing patient-assistance programs. We decided to do it because the number of uninsured people in America continues to rise [currently around 44 million]. The bottom line is, we want people to know we care. We're trying to see the problem through

the eyes of the patients. Clearly, all those programs were confusing, so we set up a program to help navigate the maze."

In early 2003, PhRMA enlisted the aid of New Orleans-based **Deveney Communications** to launch a two-month PR campaign to inform the media, local health-care practitioners and patient advocates about the initiative.

"What excited me most was that this was a truly altruistic program designed to help unnoticed and underserved people with tremendous needs," says founder John Deveney. "Patient-advocacy groups thought patient-assistance programs offered tremendous opportunities, but they also involved a great deal of work in finding out where they were, their requirements and which forms had to be filled out."

PhRMA selected 27 key states based on an association-determined criteria, while Deveney's crew conducted media audits by reviewing publications and coverage of topics related to prescription drugs and patient access. Initial research showed that Louisianans had the worst overall health statistics of any state in the nation (in addition to the highest poverty rate). Secondary research revealed that **Helpingpatients.org's** primary target groups — the uninsured, under-insured and underserved — were disproportionately high in their percentages of minorities and in the number of poorer geographic areas.

Research also showed that

having local practitioners pitch regional media would be more effective than having a Big Easy-based firm pitch to media outlets in Wyoming, New Jersey and other states. Deveney tapped each state's top patient-advocate groups and leaders who could provide a strong ethnic outreach. While the message was national in scope, most people get their news through local outlets, so it became important to position it as a story relevant for, say, Nebraska or Louisiana.

The key was translating it into a local message, hence the development of a PR network and garnering third parties. "We won over nationally by winning over the people in local communities," Deveney says. Another obstacle was a video news release (VNR), sent out before the launch, made it much more difficult to follow-up with announcements. "It was challenging to try and get some more energy going when a VNR had already gone out," he adds.

The fact that the service was

both free and confidential was important. "The more patient-advocate groups used the system, the more praise they had for it," Deveney says. "Leaders of health organizations, usually non-profit, became enthusiastic advocates."

With a budget of \$71,000, Deveney gave the consultants an hourly limit for the assignment, ranging from five to 13.5 hours per state, depending on priorities. Time was tracked through the use of proprietary software called **Time Tracker** that allowed PhRMA to shift resources according to need. Louisiana was selected as the state in which to introduce the Web site, and PhRMA President Alan Holmer flew in to announce the launch in April 2003.

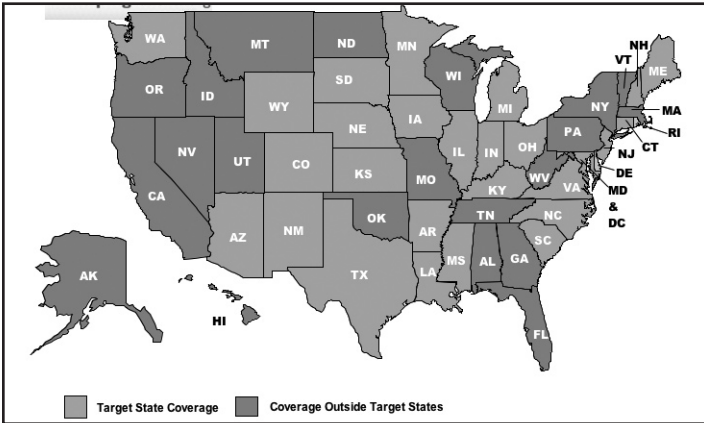
What was the benefit for PhRMA, which has since launched an online registry of clinical trials? "We recognize, as an industry, we have some image repair work to do," Johnson says, "but the very fact that we have these programs

CHANGING THE FACE OF BIG PHARMA

The biggest challenge to PhRMA's campaign was the bias the media had against the pharmaceutical industry, says John Deveney, head of Deveney Communications. While he saw PhRMA as a "hero," "villain" was the word the media more commonly used. So how can PR execs get across altruistic actions when the client has a lousy reputation? By offering solid accurate information.

"People are reasonable when you give them good information," Deveney says. "It was clear that the media recognized the value and benefits this Web site offered. Everything written about **Helpingpatients.org** focused on what an outstanding program this was; how it would benefit people; and how, for the first time ever, there was an easy, 24-hour access system to tap into existing programs." Deveney also offered the media stories of how the Web site affected individual lives, "so journalists were interested and more willing to do stories."

'There was skepticism on the part of local journalists that there was nothing local or new about this, but we were able to neutralize this through rigorous media efforts,' says PhRMA's Ken Johnson.



PhRMA's PR campaign targeted 27 states based on health-care funding, legislation, media and the perspective on health care.

attests to the altruistic nature of the industry."

Of course, Big Pharma needs all the brownie points it can get in light of the Vioxx debacle (*PR News*, Nov. 17, 2004). "PhRMA's mission was simply to provide access to quality health care," Deveney says. "But time and again, we hit walls or stumbling blocks, especially with the media, which has a

more cynical view. There's tremendous bias against large pharmaceutical companies, and PhRMA was not treated objectively. We needed to make sure the media would get it, instead of focusing on the millions of dollars this or that company makes in profit."

Adds Johnson, "There was skepticism on the part of local journalists that there was nothing

local or new about this, but we were able to neutralize this through rigorous media efforts." As for results, Deveney Communications placed 726 print, TV, radio and online stories in the likes of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, the *Arizona Daily Star*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Denver Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, WebMD and Yahoo! Health,

accomplishing 100% of its objectives. "Just the fact that there were 35,000 applications downloaded in first 95 days speaks volumes about how great the need is," Deveney says. "We got coverage in all 27 specific states, and we got picked up in 14 additional states as well as Europe, Mexico and Canada because the story proved to be such good news."

Other results included Louisiana's top 14 organizations attending the Baton Rouge launch reception and/or the

New Orleans press conference the next day, connecting with the **LSU Health Services Center** — a leading state advocate for health care — and providing additional media-trained spokespeople to target other groups.

The initiative proved so successful that one year later, PhRMA created a follow-up campaign that was more focused on media relations and involved more events, receptions and press conferences. Another follow-up is planned for this year. "PhRMA was not interested in blowing its horn, but more in focusing on the value and significance of the online clearinghouse," Deveney says. **PRN**

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Get out of the big city. See America. Save money. Grow your nest egg. While the high rollers may be on the right and left coasts of the country, the highest concentrations of personal savings are in the nation's smaller-to mid-size markets.

Madison, Wisc., for example — more or less a college town — is the top market for people who have an IRA/Keough account, and it's the second-biggest market for people who have CDs/savings certificates. Omaha, Neb./Council Bluffs, Iowa is another region where people save more than they spend, apparently.

(Perhaps, it makes perfect sense that Nebraska is one of the states with a strong savings rate, what with favorite son Warren Buffett constantly preaching the virtues of sound investment.)

Des Moines, Iowa, also is in the Top 10 markets when it comes to people who own IRAs/Keough accounts or CDs/savings certificates. Boston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Washington, D.C. are some of the larger areas that have a lot of IRA, CDs, etc. **PRN**

TARGET: HAVE IRA/KEOUGH ACCOUNT

Top Markets	Adult Population	Target Surveyed	Top Newspaper	Adult Readership	Target Readership
Madison, WI	397,000	198,000	State Journal	239,700	129,700
Washington, DC	3,544,000	1,767,000	Washington Post	2,227,800	1,272,600
Des Moines, IA	411,000	191,000	Des Moines Register	273,800	147,300
Denver, CO	1,897,000	870,000	Denver Post	647,600	390,600
Seattle-Tacoma, WA	2,772,000	1,254,000	Seattle Times	795,600	441,200
Boston, MA	3,969,000	1,762,000	Boston Globe	1,461,900	731,100
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN	2,244,000	999,000	Star Tribune	1,052,900	575,600
Omaha, NE/Council Bluffs, IA	512,000	228,000	Omaha World-Herald	328,200	161,000
Baltimore, MD	1,959,000	857,000	Baltimore Sun	981,800	442,100
San Jose, CA	1,328,000	580,000	Mercury News	697,000	336,200

TARGET: HAVE CDs/SAVINGS CERTIFICATES

Top Markets	Adult Population	Target Surveyed	Top Newspaper	Adult Readership	Target Readership
Washington, DC	3,544,000	1,198,000	Washington Post	2,227,800	917,300
Madison, WI	397,000	133,000	State Journal	239,700	85,200
Peoria, IL	260,000	85,000	Journal Star	162,800	58,800
St. Louis, MO	1,929,000	596,000	Post Dispatch	908,500	271,800
Boston, MA	3,969,000	1,210,000	Boston Globe	1,461,900	456,500
Kansas City, MO/KS	1,315,000	402,000	Kansas City Star	707,900	250,000
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN	2,244,000	689,000	Star Tribune	1,052,900	316,600
Cleveland, OH	1,605,000	484,000	Plain Dealer	939,100	329,400
Des Moines, IA	411,000	124,000	Des Moines Register	273,800	91,300
Omaha, NE/Council Bluffs, IA	512,000	151,000	Omaha World-Herald	328,200	105,800

Source: Delahaye Survey Research 2005