

IN PRACTICE
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Training Challenges in Global Pharmaceutical Marketing

by Dorothy Erlanger

The author presented on this topic at the ASTD International Conference & Expo in Washington, DC at the end of May. She summarizes her key points, including issues raised in discussions during the workshop.

Development of Top Tier Marketers

Pharmaceutical companies today must be able to develop and maintain worldwide top quality marketing efforts across diverse market environments. In order to do so, we must develop consistently excellent personnel who are able to optimize marketing efforts in their own market, adapt to rapid changes in the market, and grow into management of broader franchises or operations. Twenty years ago, global marketing development was not a big issue; today it is essential.

Tagamet was one of the first drugs to use global branding and it became the single best selling drug worldwide at the time. Since then, the intensity and sophistication of competition has skyrocketed. Today, global branding and consistency in core marketing programs are the rule, not the exception. Only those companies that develop and sustain excellence in marketing across markets and regions will be prepared to maximize products' sales and profit potential.

In addition to the internal imperative for developing marketing excellence, companies who are not willing to invest in development will lose their best people to others who are making that investment.

Key Steps in Development

A step-wise approach to development can help to minimize the challenges:

1. Establish exactly what is required for global marketing excellence—define in concrete and specific terms, not broad-brush statements. What are you targeting in skill and behavior outcomes?



Process Framework

Set your goals. Do I want to make this a premier marketing operation worldwide or do I want to create a program regionally?

Set up a global advisory committee. Invite a mixture of people, including regional operational representatives, human resource representatives, and practical marketing people. Your advisory team should represent those who are going to "touch" the program and those who will be "touched" by it. Work with the advisory team a minimum of 1-2 years.

Gap analysis. Determine the most important areas to focus on.

Establish your core curriculum. This is the training everyone will need; do this really well!

Establish specialty elements. If there are specialty areas that certain regions/countries already do well, let them handle that part of the program and they will help sell it.

Durability. The program needs ongoing buy-in; buy-in needs to be greater for programs with greater durability, meaning the program will be useful for a long period of time and need little change.

Training results. Consistently measure and track the results.

Business Performance. Ultimately, the program must improve overall business performance.

2. Gap analysis—what skills and programs do we already have that are working well that may be used globally? How does that compare/match up with priority needs? What do we need to focus on?
3. Gain management buy-in—we must have global drive coming from senior operational level management in order to succeed.
4. Develop core global programs.
5. Implement the program and track the results.
6. Provide follow-on reinforcement and be willing to make adjustments to parts of the development program that are not working.

Implementation Challenges

From my work with multinational pharmaceutical companies, I've identified some major challenges typically faced when implementing a global training program:

- Consensus on what is needed—concentrate on gaining consensus of the core materials
- Us vs. them—home market dominance/focus must be balanced with cross-regional needs
- Flexible vs. fixed—how flexible should the program be; which elements should be concrete and which should be adjustable?
- Global drive for implementation—buy-in from senior operational level management, such as division president or vice president, is the key to success in implementation
- Competing priorities—be conscious of and proactively manage issues related to people and time commitments at all stages of development and implementation
- Staying ahead of the curve—in order for the program to stay relevant, the training must anticipate and stay ahead of needs as markets/products change

Communication. When session attendees divided into groups to discuss specific challenges they have faced, one group focused on communications. Suggestions for solving communication challenges included being flexible and aiming less for development meetings than using alternate forms of communication such as email, voice mail and cell phones. Another piece of advice: make sure all trainers understand the importance of using Standard English and avoiding slang. The group also discussed the importance of the company's investment in global marketing programs to develop marketing professionals who can relate and communicate in different continents. This was seen as a cost challenge, but a critical issue in future leadership development.

Key Takeaways

Participants said this about key takeaways from the session:

- I liked your idea of developing a test ground on a regional level first.
- Good to discuss global buy-in which is often missing and is such a key element to a successful training program.
- I agree it's important to find advocates internally and build a really good program on a small level and go from there.
- I found the concept of career mapping to be a valuable approach in the training process.

Meeting global needs. The other group discussed issues about who pays for the global program and how to gain acceptance:

- “If a program is going to be used globally, who pays for it? Should each country or region foot the cost or should the corporate office pay for the participants to attend the training?” The consensus was that the corporate office should sponsor and support the program in the development stage, but once the program is developed and successfully implemented, the countries/regions should be responsible for training costs for their participants.
- “There’s a problem with other countries not accepting the program because they feel they do not have ownership of it.” One solution suggested was to involve everyone proactively and up front in the development stages. The program should also have enough flexibility so that it can be localized or adjusted based on responsiveness to local needs and with follow-up analyses on effectiveness. Another approach I have used successfully when one region is already doing a good job: let that region control that portion of the program; then they will become missionaries to help sell the idea elsewhere.

Key Elements

One of the first steps in development is to distinguish areas of training needed by all marketing professionals versus specialized or regional needs. For example, these topics would clearly fit into the category of global requirements:

- Marketing planning
- Managing product profitability
- Compliance and safety
- Corporate policy
- Communications and presentation effectiveness
- Leadership development

Other areas may apply only to some regions or divisions and don't need to be included in the overall training program, such as

- Therapeutic area knowledge
- Direct-to-consumer marketing

Career Mapping

In addition to training, map other development tools and processes. Build alternate paths to growth, adjusting to different "entry points" and different career goals. Then, establish a means of tracking exactly who has what background and capabilities, their stage of development, their performance, and their current location.

It is important for companies to make the effort and investment of moving senior marketing professionals across markets in order for them to gain broader experience and prepare for leadership. It is also important not to back off once expectations are set. Meet the development goals, measure performance, and then tie that into succession planning.

Metrics

How do you measure the results of your new training program? It's important to set your measures up front—consistently let management know that the measurements are not precise, but continually track the results through program assessments and refine the program in correlation with the results. Particularly for key programs, establish a means of quantifiably assessing effectiveness and impact.

Dorothy Erlanger, president of Erlanger Inc., has over 29 years of business knowledge and consulting experience gained in a corporate setting for ten years and as an independent consultant since 1984. In projects across Asia, Europe, North and South America, South Africa, and the Middle East, she has worked on corporate-wide and region-specific marketing personnel development programs as well as market feasibility studies and market entrance assistance, strategic plan development, and the creative use of metrics in research and development project management. She recently won a national award from the National Association of Women Business Owners. You can reach her at derlanger@erlanger-inc.com or visit her Website at www.erlanger-inc.com.