

Similarities exist among women, however, healthcare branding experts believe it is just as important from a marketing standpoint to identify the differences among them. Healthcare ad agencies, including AbelsonTaylor, MicroMass Communications Inc., StrikeForce Communications, and The Core Nation, share their perspectives on marketing and advertising to women and strategies like behavioral science and peer-based communities

Jessica Brueggeman, director, behavioral service, MicroMass Communications (micromass.com) believes what is more actionable from a marketing standpoint are the differences between women and the behavioral buttons that can be pushed. MicroMass has a behavioral services group that works closely with strategists, like Kelly Andrews, director, strategic planning, MicroMass, to form the foundation for healthcare communications programs.

Women have a lot going on, Ms. Andrew explains. Not only are they taking care of themselves, but also of taking care or coordinating care for their husbands, kids, and acting as information gatherers for their parents.

“We use behavioral science to really get at how women are approaching certain health issues,” Ms. Andrews told Med Ad News. “That’s really a science-based approach.”

In addition, MicroMass’ research finds that women are slightly more likely than men to have complete trust in their doctor, however, they prefer a more collaborative approach.

“Although they trust their doctor, they prefer to be very engaged and involved in their treatment decision,” Ms. Brueggeman says. “That’s an example of a high level insight about women based on some research that we’ve done.”

According to Mike Rutstein, founder and president of StrikeForce Communications (strikeforcenyc.com), people have thought of women as a homogenous group, which in many ways has been a detriment to the brands in the marketplace because women — like any other population — can be segmented apart. For example, women that comprise the 35 year old and older group have a different wants and needs base than women who are in the 18 year old and older group.

“What we found is many marketers regardless of the age group or the lifestyle are talking to women in a way that assumes that they’re all part of the same interests, wants, and needs set and it couldn’t be further from the truth,” Mr. Rutstein told Med Ad News.

Mr. Rutstein believes agencies need to go back to the basics and help clients understand that women are no different than any other target audience. They need to look at them as a distinct population and they need to look within that group for the specific segments and what the motivating insights and drivers are against that group. They also need to understand that not only do they need to look at those groups in a distinct way, but they need to think about how that product in that specific category is going to connect with that group.

“It’s really a two front attack,” Mr. Rutstein says. “They need to get way beyond the expected and begin to look at these groups as individual segments.”

Mr. Rutstein cited Merck & Co.'s (merck.com) HPV vaccine Gardasil as a good example in the direct-to-consumer category. He believes the company did a terrific job in individualizing the work for the HPV indication in that group and believes the company will do the same for boys, now that the product is approved in that population as well.

"The work clearly is speaking to a very specific group of people," Mr. Rutstein says. "Not only is the voice appropriate for the women in that age cohort, but the look, the feel the imagery, everything about it connects with a woman in that age group, which helps them identify with the brand."

One of the greatest challenges of marketing healthcare to women is that most consumer products are also targeting women, according to Dorene Weisenstein, executive VP, chief creative officer of The Core Nation, which includes Core-Create Inc. (core-create.com), Alpha and Omega in Somerset, N.J., and Brandkarma in Santa Ana, Calif. Ms. Weisenstein believes the noise level is high with this target audience and can be challenging to distinguish a product or message in this space.

"From a brand perspective, you have to first grab women's attention visually," Ms. Weisenstein says. "After a while, all the visuals start to look the same. Images and ideas are stereotyped. Women are accustomed to seeing other women in ads and campaigns, and they relate to that, but that doesn't mean that they won't also relate to campaigns with an entirely different concept."

StrikeForce uses a technique called psychological emersion that enables the agency to get beyond what is said on the surface and underneath at some of those unconscious emotional layers. The agency works with behaviorists, who structure a different battery of questions and research allowing women to get beyond what is said on the surface and to tap into truer inner feelings.

"One of the ways is they use a technique called art hypnotherapy," Mr. Rutstein says. "They'll use this art expression to be able to almost put on paper how they're feeling and we've found that that actually allows us through archetypes, symbols, and art expression to get a better understanding of how they're feeling below what they're saying."

While campaigns in traditional media, such as magazines and television continue to resonate well with women, increasingly, women are occupied by the digital universe like women's blogs, "mommy blogs," Facebook, and other online communities. Ms. Weisenstein believes women rely heavily on other women for information, advice, and support. Media changes quickly, and women are often early adopters, she explains. "This is truly an extension of the word-of-mouth recommendations that women have been making for centuries," Ms. Weisenstein says. "We all try products that have the endorsement of those we trust. Consumer marketing campaigns are already capitalizing on this universe, and healthcare is sure to follow." According to Jay Carter, AbelsonTaylor (abelsontaylor.com), women are more relational than men. Relationships and peer groups help them process the conflicts they have.

"I notice that Novartis' Reclast spots now have two women with osteoporosis rather than just one," Mr. Carter says. "I think that's because somebody did some insight work and figured out that women process organically better that way. I don't know that for a fact, but looking at other peoples work that's certainly my guess." While agencies work to decode the minds of women through behavioral means to create more meaningful and effective advertising, some analysts believe more programs are needed to raise awareness among conditions that may be stigmatized. Maya Marescotti, associate analyst, healthcare, Datamonitor Plc. (datamonitor.com), says the non-cancer women's health market is different from other therapeutic sectors as most of the diseases are not life threatening and are stigmatized in society.

“One could strongly argue that this is why there has been less investment historically from academia and the pharmaceutical industry,” Ms. Marescotti told Med Ad News. “Social barriers prevent women from seeking help about certain conditions, such as endometriosis, where the extent of the disease is often not fully appreciated by the public.”

Some ways in which awareness and acceptance is being raised are through the use of celebrity spokespeople for diseases and to support patient advocacy groups that organize events to raise awareness. The celebrity Padma Lakshmi is a sufferer of endometriosis and has been working towards raising awareness of the condition in the United States.

In the areas of hormone replacement therapy, osteoporosis, emergency hormonal contraceptives, and infertility, companies need to overcome several challenges, such as negative perceptions about safety, ethical issues, the loss of patent protection for major brands, and mature and saturated markets. In the area of hormone replacement therapy, the main challenge is to overcome the negative perception on the safety. In the area of osteoporosis, the gold standard therapy Fosamax, marketed by Merck & Co., lost U.S. patent protection in 2008.

The use of emergency hormonal contraceptives is a very controversial issue as demonstrated by the reaction to the launch of Plan B in the United States. In contrast to many other treatments, marketers have to face continuous ethical problems that have been associated with these drugs.

“In order to increase acceptance companies have to invest in promoting the message that emergency contraceptive pills do not induce abortion but rather prevent pregnancy,” Ms. Marescotti told Med Ad News. The hormonal contraceptive market is a mature and saturated one. It is crucial for companies to maintain their sales and marketing forces in order to keep some market share. As pressures to cut costs in the industry become higher, however, maintaining adequate sales and marketing resources is increasingly more challenging.

Primary research of the in vitro fertilization market conducted by Datamonitor has shown that more than 40 different treatment regimens are prescribed. This is the result of no proven differences on efficacy and safety profiles of the available drugs.

“Market players need to differentiate their products based on cost and drug delivery technologies while building relationships with prescriber and payers,” Ms. Marescotti says.