



ZS Interview: Finding the Insights Inside Tracking

Participant: Bekia Fosam

While postlaunch tracking is an essential source for information on product performance, some pharmaceutical marketers may not be taking full advantage: Handled properly, tracking generates insights on marketing initiatives that can significantly improve performance.

The key element is that tracking can deliver more than just data. Not only can tracking show if a marketing strategy is successful or not, but it can show why it may not be working, and what can be done to change tactics in the midst of a campaign to maximize success.

Bekia Fosam, a ZS Principal based in Princeton, N.J., talked about the role tracking plays in pharmaceutical marketing, and why it should be considered an asset to improve performance, not simply a required part of marketing. He also spoke on ways pharmaceutical companies can improve the effectiveness of their tracking operations, and their brands' performance as a result.

About the Expert

Bekia Fosam,
Principal

ZS Associates,
Princeton, N.J.



Bekia focuses on ZS's pharmaceutical market research capabilities and has served numerous clients in new-product assessment, brand positioning and customer segmentation. His work has been featured in more than 20 publications on statistical methods.

What has changed in pharmaceutical marketing that makes tracking important?

BEKIA FOSAM: Things have changed in the market over the past few years. Payer and patient influence are increasing, which translates into the need for companies to get to know the marketplace more effectively.

Another change is how customers get their information and act on it—with e-detailing and detailing on the phone, sales reps are not the only channel to deliver messaging. Customers can go to websites, Twitter or Facebook, get information on your product and take that information to colleagues. That should worry pharmaceutical companies, because in those situations, they cannot shape the dialogue.

What are the consequences of these trends?

BEKIA: The marketplace has become so crowded that communicating your core message becomes difficult. Do you, as a pharmaceutical marketer, really understand how much you're communicating your message to your target customers? That's why tracking is important—it enables you to see if your message is getting through.

And the urgency is greater than ever. If you miss a week in tracking, it's like missing a month, and if you miss a month, it's like missing a year.

What are common misperceptions about tracking?

BEKIA: Executives may think the tracking data provides just another set of metrics—they may view tracking as a data dump. They need to ask what they are getting from tracking, and what is the value to their business. Executives may think tracking data is nice to know, but not critical, and so they might miss insight about what is happening with the brand, and why.

Another thing is that sometimes people will look at tracking from an adherence standpoint. Separately, they may simply look at how consistent all of their tracking results are with other market metrics. That's a missed opportunity. Tracking needs to deliver elements that reveal customers' attitude and behavior, and link those behaviors to product promotion. Otherwise, tracking raises more questions than it answers.

When it comes to tracking strategy, what do executives worry about?

BEKIA: The key questions are, how well is my strategy working? Are the decisions I make correct? If not, what do I need to do differently? Pharmaceutical companies spend millions of dollars each year on answering these questions, but they have misgivings because of how

some tracking studies are being implemented. They may feel that tracking has delivered metrics, but not insights. That's key in tracking—what do the metrics mean? What insights can you get from the metrics?

Is “tracking without insights” the only issue in tracking?

BEKIA: Tracking without insights is a problem, but it is not the only one. Another is the holistic view versus the compartmental view of tracking—it's important that you take everything possible into account. For instance, it's no good to ask how the sales force is doing without inquiring about the segment of doctors that they're approaching.

How do marketing teams cope with budget constraints?

BEKIA: Companies need to prioritize and customize. I have seen customization that involved combining multiple tracking studies onto a single platform. But simply minimizing the cost by using the same instrument for all markets—without due respect to therapeutic-area specifics—misses the point. It's a matter of being flexible versus rigid.

How well is tracking integrated with other elements of marketing?

BEKIA: When your overall marketing strategy is in place, you want to see how well it's working, what part of it is working and why. You have to know if the marketing effort was implemented in the way it was intended, and if it had the intended effects. If you're not really moving the needle in terms of perception and use of the product, it may be time to change emphasis.

For example, you want to see if you're delivering messages that resonate for a specific segment of the population. Are the messages resonating differently from one segment to another? If it is not working as you need, tracking will help tell you how to reorient your messages.

What are some of the operational keys to effective tracking?

BEKIA: Your approach to tracking needs to be comprehensive. Putting together not only primary research, but also secondary information generally available internally or externally, to ensure what you get are meaningful insights. The work you do in tracking should enable you to do business differently and get you to new outcomes, and being comprehensive helps you achieve this.

Do brand teams understand the value and need for continuous tracking after launch or a marketing campaign?

BEKIA: Generally, but they may not give it the priority it deserves. It doesn't get more priority than other areas of marketing, but if I, as a marketer, don't make tracking as important as other areas, how do I know my marketing initiatives or segmentation are working?

And if I don't know if they are working, then there is no way I can optimize outcomes. I'm not saying that you need to measure the effectiveness of every effort, but you need to know the overall effectiveness of your strategies.

What final advice can you share about tracking?

BEKIA: We see many companies go through tracking in a mechanical way—it's something they just do. But they need to make it count. They need to take it beyond data gathering.

Not only should you look at tracking from the perspective of the immediate business issue, but ask what you want to achieve in the marketplace, and then ask what's the evidence that will tell you if your plan is working or not. From this point of view, all of the analytics should be geared to investigating hypotheses on whether the customers are reacting the way you need them to, and how to change the situation if required.

About ZS Associates

ZS Associates is a global leader in sales and marketing consulting, outsourcing, technology and software. For almost 30 years, ZS has helped companies across a range of industries get the most out of their sales and marketing organizations. From 20 offices around the world, ZS experts use analytics and deep expertise to help companies make smart decisions quickly and cost-effectively. ZS comprises multiple affiliated legal entities. Learn more at www.zsassociates.com.



ZS Associates

www.zsassociates.com

inquiry@zsassociates.com

+1 847.492.3602

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