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DAN O'DAY'S COMMERCIAL COPY MAKEOVER

PREEMPTIVE ADVERTISING: A CASE STUDY



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O'DAY

In a recent issue of my *Advertising Letter* I explained the concept of "preemptive advertising." In a nutshell, you can obtain a preemptive advantage by being the first in your product category to claim credit for all the behind-the-scenes details of your product or service.

I gave as an example a brewery that took consumers step by step through the intricate process it uses to make its beer. It's the same process used by its competitors, but the competitors had never bothered to explain it to the beer-buying public. As a result, the brewery, Schlitz, achieved a huge competitive marketplace advantage.

Let's apply this concept to a Los Angeles retailer of which I am a regular customer. Ralphs is a very large supermarket chain. During the past year it's added something to some of its stores that I find rather interesting: a pharmacy. Here are some of the reasons I've switched from the drugstore I'd been using to Ralphs' pharmacy:

- Convenience. I often have to go to Ralphs anyway, because that's where I buy groceries. The pharmacy is open seven days a week, and I can drop off a prescription at the pharmacy, buy my groceries, then pick up the prescription when I'm done.

- Speed. If I don't have shopping to do but instead have to wait for the prescription to be filled, it takes the pharmacist only 10 minutes or so. That's half the wait time of the big pharmacy I had been using.

- Personal service. I can actually reach a pharmacist by telephone. I don't know what it's like where you live, but if you call most Los Angeles pharmacies, you either go through automation hell ("Press 1 if you're in a life-threatening situation that requires immediate medication"), or you're expected to wait on hold for a few hours. At Ralphs you have the option of requesting a prescription renewal simply by inputting your prescription number with your telephone keypad, or you can speak to a live human being. When opting for a human, I don't think I've ever been on hold for more than one minute.

- Courtesy. Simply put, courtesy is an endangered species at Los Angeles pharmacies. On the phone or in person, the folks at my Ralphs pharmacy are polite to customers.

During a recent visit (where I got a flu shot for \$10 — what a great way to draw customers into the store), I asked the pharmacist a few quick questions designed to help me understand why the customer experience at Ralphs is so much better than elsewhere. The entire "interview" lasted maybe a minute.

Combining the information I received from the pharmacist with my own experiences as a Ralphs customer, I created a few radio commercials. I don't feel these are good enough to air because I didn't do enough research to make the copy really come alive. If Ralphs were actually a client, I would have interviewed at least 10 of the pharmacy's customers,

who probably would have led me to some nuggets I hadn't already mined.

These commercials use preemptive advertising by detailing the professional qualifications of the pharmacies' employees. They also demonstrate problem-solving by pointing out that the customer will save time by using Ralphs' pharmacies, anticipate objections and educate the customer by explaining how and why they'll save time at Ralphs.

Would any of these spots motivate you to consider leaving your current pharmacy?

RALPHS 'ANTIGRAVITY'

ANNOUNCER: To become a Ralphs pharmacist, you've got to be a pretty special person. First, you have to successfully complete a four-year bachelor of science program. Then it's four more years of school to get your doctorate in pharmacology. Once you pass our admittedly stiff professional and educational requirements, you'll face the most important test of all....

PHARMACIST: With this medication, it's very important that you take it *before* meals.

WOMAN: How much before?

PHARMACIST: Not more than 30 minutes. The easiest thing to do is just swallow one of these with a glass of water right before you take your first bite of food.

WOMAN: (Lightly) People will think I'm a pill-popper.

PHARMACIST: Tell them it's a reverse antigravity pill and that if you don't take one with every meal, you'll float away.

WOMAN: Oooh, I like that....

ANNOUNCER: The job of a Ralphs pharmacist is not simply to dispense medicines, it's to help people — with information, advice and a genuine concern for the customer's well-being.

PHARMACIST: Remember, one pill before every meal for the next three days.

ANNOUNCER: Your nearby Ralphs pharmacist is ready to help you. Reverse antigravity pills not available in all areas.

RALPHS 'WORRY'

WOMAN: When I heard I could get all my prescriptions filled while doing my grocery shopping at Ralphs, it sounded like a good idea. But two things worried me. One was that Ralphs is a big supermarket — great prices, huge selection. But what do they know about filling prescriptions? Turns out all of Ralphs' pharmacists have bachelor of science degrees and doctor of pharmacology degrees. That's eight years' training before they can even apply for a pharmacist's job at Ralphs. My other concern was that ... oops, my prescription is ready! Gotta go!

RALPHS 'WORRY NO. 2'

WOMAN: When they put a fully stocked pharmacy inside my local Ralphs supermarket, it sounded like a great idea: Do my grocery shopping while my prescription is filled. But I worried that it would be a big hassle to transfer all my prescriptions from my old pharmacy to Ralphs. Here's how hard *that* was: I called the Ralphs pharmacy nearest me and asked them to handle everything. And they did. Now I hand them my prescription, and it's ready in about 10 minutes — before I've even finished my shopping. Ralphs supermarket — they fill my prescriptions while I shop for groceries. I like that idea!

RALPHS 'BANKERS' HOURS'

WOMAN: At my old pharmacy, I could never get them on the phone. They weren't very nice in person, and they expected me to wait around forever while their one employee slowly filled everyone's prescriptions. So I made one phone call to the Ralphs supermarket closest to my home — one that has a full pharmacy. They acted like they *wanted* me as a customer. They offered to call my old pharmacy and have all my prescriptions transferred.

At my old pharmacy, if I needed them to call my doctor for a new prescription, it took a few hours. Here's how it works at Ralphs: I call their pharmacy. I give them the information. I hang up, get in my car, drive to Ralphs, pick up some milk and eggs and maybe some of those minimuffins I'm addicted to, then I walk over to the pharmacy at the back of the store, where my prescription is waiting for me. Oh, and my old pharmacy had what my dad calls "bankers' hours" — they closed early during the week and were open a half-day on Saturday. Ralphs' pharmacies are open seven long days a week.

Strange, but I don't miss my old pharmacy at all.

RALPHS 'HERE'S WHY'

WOMAN: Here's why you save time when you get your prescriptions filled at the pharmacy inside your neighborhood Ralphs supermarket.

1. You can actually reach them on the telephone without spending half a day on hold.

2. For a prescription renewal, just call them, and it'll be waiting for you when you get there.

3. They don't make you wait around forever at Ralphs, and here's why: Most pharmacies have a single pharmacist on duty. Maybe there's a helper there too. At Ralphs they always have at least two full-time pharmacists on duty plus a couple of pharmaceutical technicians. That's four people dedicated to filling your order quickly so you can get on with your life, compared to one lonely, overworked pharmacist. No wonder your old pharmacy makes you wait so long. No wonder the pharmacist is so cranky. If you enjoy being told, "Not ready yet. Maybe in 20 minutes," then *don't* come to Ralphs. But if you want a friendly, superfast, superconvenient, seven-day-a-week pharmacy, I know just the place.

RALPHS 'LET'S REVIEW'

ANNOUNCER: In case you didn't know, many Ralphs supermarkets now have pharmacies right inside the store, seven days a week. Drop off your prescription, do your grocery shopping, pick up your prescription on your way out. Even if you hurry through our 10-items-or-less express lane, we'll probably have your prescription waiting for you when you're ready to leave.

So let's review what we've learned here: Get your groceries and your prescriptions in one trip, not two. Give your prescription order to the pharmacist. Buy your groceries. Pick up your prescription on your way out. Go live your life, knowing that Ralphs is always looking for ways to save you time and make you happy.

This column is excerpted from The Dan O'Day Radio Advertising Letter. For your free e-mail subscription, send your request to danoday@danoday.com with "R&R Ad Request" in the subject line of your e-mail, or subscribe online at www.danoday.com.