

Prosumers lead change in attitudes toward health - survey

Research conducted on new realities in health and wellness by integrated marketing communications agency, Euro RSCG Worldwide, shows there is a revolution in consumers' attitudes towards their health - with interesting implications for brands both within and outside the healthcare arena.



Lynn Madeley - Group CEO Euro RSCG SA

The survey, which tested the attitudes of 7213 men and women aged 18 or older across 19 countries showed that Prosumers (proactive consumers) - those consumers who use information to wield power in their lives - are leading the change in relationship between consumers and their health.

Power shift

"When we look at our research findings, we see that Prosumers are significantly more apt to be informed about health, to be more proactive health advocates for themselves and their families, and even to believe they can, to some extent, control whether they get sick or not," says Group CEO of Euro RSCG, Lynn Madeley.

She says the implications for retailers and manufacturers are significant. "Prosumers have shifted the balance of power away from retailers and manufacturers and instead towards themselves. They are now using their access to information and new tools of communication to siphon power away from the medical community as well."

The Euro RSCG Worldwide research shows that increased knowledge and new tools and technologies, such as the Internet, social media, and portable technologies such as smartphones and tablets have removed some of the mystery around healthcare. With consumers able to research their illnesses, hunt for alternative treatment options and choose which practitioner is best suited for their care, dying and illness is perceived less as a fate to be accepted than as a failure of disease management.

Diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, auto-immune conditions and degenerative diseases, where lifestyle plays as great a role as heredity or chance, are also on the increase.

"This changes everything about how people regard, prevent and treat physical disorders," says Madeley.

Balancing solutions

The survey demonstrates that there are forces pushing consumers toward higher-tech solutions such as genome exploration and implantable nanotechnology while simultaneously pulling them toward the past, by focusing on wholesome lifestyles.

The change in attitude has led to an increased demand for proactive health boosters ranging from alternative therapies to functional foods. In many cases, these activities are meant not just to ward off ailments but also to negate the need to buy and consume pharmaceuticals. "Natural healing" has become a hugely attractive concept for people with three-quarters of Prosumers and 63% of their mainstream counterparts saying that they try to "listen" to their bodies more than they used to - further evidence that people are beginning to assume greater responsibility for their own health.

Meanwhile, the increasingly strong link between money and health means people are focusing not only on the physical impact of serious illness but also on the consequences for themselves, their families and communities.

Brain health trend

The company says the next wave of healthcare will focus on brain health, with consumers looking for products and services that stave off the mental effects of aging, including supplements, devices and activities, such as targeted exercise, Sudoku and adult learning.

"There will be a much greater focus on the continued care and feeding of our brains, especially given the widespread acceptance that the physical health of our bodies is intrinsically linked to the powers and health of our minds," says Madeley. "We are at the very beginning of the brain's movement from something mysterious and sacred (impossible to explore) to a body part that must be exercised and cared for just as we do our heart and other organs."

Tools to aid wellness

She says as consumers - and Prosumers especially - seek to wield greater control over their health, they are increasingly looking for tools that will help them keep their wellness goals on track.

Madeley points to innovative developments, such as Reebok's "The Promise Keeper" app as an example. The app allows the user to share when he/she goes for a run and automatically posts or tweets when the person fails to exercise. Another, Apple's Design + Health kit is intended to help designers exercise, keep proper ergonomic posture at the keyboard, and eat right. The kit includes a set of weighted mugs (for lifting), sticky notes with health "nudges" printed on them, an exercise guide, and more.

"A lack of consumer trust in product categories related to health and wellness - including food and beverages, pharmaceutical and insurance, offers great opportunity for businesses that operate on a model of transparency," says Madeley. "As consumers begin to accept more responsibility for their health, they are looking for brand partners that promote their progress."