



Winning the 2013 Medicare Researcher

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PUBLISHED
April 2013

THE **RUNDOWN**

America's senior population is growing by 10,000 a day, and with 58 percent of them researching or buying Medicare via the internet, the future of the health insurance market is online. The key for brands is to develop a year-round strategy to be present in the market at the moments that matter - not simply during the costly and competitive Open Enrollment Period. By maximizing search ads and video content, brands can win consideration before purchase decisions are made.

HOW HAS DIGITAL CHANGED THE **HEALTH INSURANCE MARKET?**

The health insurance industry is riding the crest of a 'silver tsunami.' With an aging population increasingly turning to digital tools for research, information and education, traditional media marketing and direct sales are being replaced by opportunities for more targeted and effective brand building online.

If health insurance companies are to win these moments that matter, they need to be present in the Medicare market at every stage of the consumer journey - from discovery to consideration to purchase.

This is a year-round process. Consistently high volumes of research queries start early in the year, beginning a conversation that concludes during Open Enrollment Period, when customers execute purchase decisions they've already made.

And yet, traditionally, the OEP has marked the start of a costly scramble for consideration among brands. In fact, our research shows that health insurance companies that concentrate their marketing during this highly competitive and expensive window (when brand queries spike by 30 percent) pay more than triple the amount per click compared to the rest of the year.

Let's look in a little more detail at what consumers are doing, and how brands can give themselves a much greater chance of winning the moments that matter.

THE NEW CONSUMER **HEALTH JOURNEY**

US seniors are moving online: Eighty-four percent now access the internet via multiple screens, while search queries among the 65+ demographic have doubled since 2010. This is fundamentally altering the purchase path for health insurance, as Medicare shoppers turn to the web to search for information, discover brands, get educated and compare prices.

It's a long and complex process – the majority of Medicare shoppers spend between one and six months researching plans, and it's often up to a year. If brands are to be top of mind come the Open Enrollment Period, they need to own the conversation as it unfolds over the course of that year.

It starts with search. Seventy-one percent of seniors use search engines to look for information about healthcare (with mobile search a growing component), initially concentrating on generic queries ("What is Medicare?" "Who is eligible?") rather than brand terms.

This shows the vast and imminent need for consumer education online. The challenge is to understand what consumers are looking for when they're not searching for your brand, and to be ready with the information they need.

Search advertising can certainly help health insurers be found and be favorable in this competitive marketplace, with 65 percent of seniors who see a search engine ad looking up the advertiser in question within a week to get more information. But timing is everything: Brands need to make sure they're reaching potential customers from Q1 onwards, not just waiting for seasonal peaks.

The secret sauce in driving both engagement and awareness is answering their first question and owning the conversation. Generally speaking, brand recognition is high in the healthcare industry but consumer knowledge is shallow. At the same time, across all industries consumers are turning to online video as a 'how-to' guide for complex tasks or products. This holds true amongst health insurance shoppers, 40 percent of whom are using video to discover health insurance companies they weren't previously aware of. That gives brands a huge opportunity to connect with potential customers through higher-engagement channels.

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Some health insurance brands are already creating high levels of engagement through educational videos aligned with customer needs. These providers can take advantage of an emerging trend in the market, as today's shoppers are twice as likely to watch online videos about health insurance than they were 12 months ago.

Once a health insurance brand owns the conversation, that provider can look to drive micro conversions, whether directing potential customers to social channels, getting them to register on its site, offering a free quote, or tailoring specific plans to individual shoppers.

Success like this requires not just great content but effective marketing. Of those seniors not engaging with online videos, 41 percent simply aren't aware of them, which is truly the issue. Older shoppers are looking for instruction and education. Videos that serve this need will shape consideration and provider selection, which will pay dividends during the crucial in-market phase.

CONCLUSION

Digital is changing the consumer journey for health insurance shoppers. They're searching for information online, on mobile, and on video year-round. There is a huge opportunity for brands to be present before the Open Enrollment Period, when there is less competition in the marketplace, and search advertising is correspondingly cheaper. With the right content and marketing strategy, brands can avoid wasteful advertising and win the moments that matter.