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Subimo solidifies its standing

Craig McGuire - 10 Apr 2006 11:00

With health insurance premiums up 285% in the past five years, HMOs and employers are under pressure to provide new tools and information to millions of plan subscribers.

Web-based healthcare decision-support tools that help consumers make informed choices, such as those from online giants like WebMD and HealthGrades, are now in high demand.

But what happens when you're a smaller competitor - like Subimo, with 25 employees - convinced your product is better, but your budget is significantly smaller than your larger rivals?

"We sell to high-level individuals at major health plans and larger employers, so we needed a level of credibility that you can't get with webinars," says David Shevock, Subimo VP of marketing and product management.

Strategy

Subimo engaged Schwartz Communications to establish its brand and products in the trade and business press, and at the same time position CEO Ann Mond Johnson as an industry expert.

Following extensive media research on the nature of industry coverage, surveys of key reporters, and interviews with consumers, Schwartz set its sights on a national business publication to break the Subimo story.

"We knew we had to position Subimo as a thought leader and provide journalists with insight and data that were issue-oriented and not just a pitch for a quick media hit," says Shawn Whalen, SVP at Schwartz.

Tactics

Schwartz set its sights on *BusinessWeek* because of its broad reach and focus on business trends. *BusinessWeek* e-Business editor Timothy Mullaney was targeted, as he had written healthcare trend stories and chronicled his own bout with cancer and his frustration in not being able to find reliable, unbiased information.

Schwartz pitched a trend story on these tools and their benefits, and proposed a virtual "bake-off" among Subimo and its competitors.

A key element was having the appeal of real-life examples. The consumer voice materialized in the sympathetic form of Godfrey Wood of the Portland, ME, Chamber of Commerce, a recent purchaser of Subimo's tools for his employees, who had used the tools to help his

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father, who lived hundreds of miles away in New York, find a hospital after suffering a heart attack.

Schwartz also harnessed Subimo's consumer case studies for personal testimonials, showing compelling examples of the tools and the value proposition for employers and health plans.

Results

On June 11, *BusinessWeek* hit newsstands with "Hunting for Hospitals That Measure Up," which eventually cascaded into more than 65 articles, including hits in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Fortune Small Business*, *CNN*, and *Reuters*.

In addition, Subimo was voted "Best of Web" by a *BusinessWeek* online readers' survey for health information Web sites, beating out both *WebMD* and *HealthGrades*.

With substantial media coverage in the span of just two months, Schwartz was able to elevate Johnson as a true expert and bring her on an extensive New York City business media tour.

Future

"With revenues less than *WebMD* spends on advertising, we plan to continue down this road," Shevock says. "As we move into new markets - we recently scored successes in banking and government - we will be tweaking a strategy, rather than reinventing it."

PR Team: Subimo (Chicago) and Schwartz Communications (Waltham, MA)

Campaign: Subimo "Healthcare at Your Fingertips"

Duration: August 2005 to January 2006

Budget: \$60,000

PRWeek's View

This campaign exemplified the value of PR in enabling smaller brands to level the playing field against much larger rivals.

That the effort was able to not only garner impressive coverage, but secure a feature in *BusinessWeek*, where Subimo bested competitors, is an invaluable coup for elevating the brand onto the national stage. It represents what can be accomplished with the right packaging, injecting a client into a trend, and establishing its executives as thought leaders.

Journalists will always cover the Citigroups and Googles of the business world. It's reassuring to know that the Subimos also still have a shot.

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