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Customer-centric, senior-friendly packaging is smart!

There are many good reasons to opt for more customer centric packaging

Smart packaging trends

Innovative smart packaging solutions can fulfil many purposes.

Still, most pharmaceutical companies are mainly interested in solutions for Track & Trace logistics, unique package IDs, anti-counterfeiting measures, cost reduction or data mining. Basically producer-centric rather than customer-centric options. But such solutions either enable compliance with new regulations or reduce costs, thus providing a solid ROI in both cases.

With solutions that enhance the consumer experience, ROI calculations are not so easy. And above all, such solutions require a higher level of cooperation between normally separate departments. In large pharmaceutical corporations Lifecycle management, marketing, production, packaging and logistics are totally separate entities. Customer-centric smart packaging initiatives therefore often are not even considered, because no department truly is "in charge" of customer-friendly packaging.

Senior friendly packaging

Especially senior friendly packaging is becoming more and more important. Demographic and socio-economic data clearly show that the 65+ group is growing constantly. In the EU almost a quarter of the population already belongs to this group. A group representing the majority of daily consumers of medicines. Also, people are reaching a higher average age, many of them acquiring a disability in mobility, vision or hearing. And there is a strong trend towards home care and AAL (Assisted Ambient Living). The health care industry is already coming up with many technological innovations, as the demand is huge.

These facts lead to three conclusions for the pharmaceutical industry:

1. Any customer-oriented packaging needs to be senior friendly.
2. The pressure from regulatory bodies, consumer organisations and senior citizen associations for more senior-friendly, accessible packaging is growing.
3. There is a huge business opportunity for senior friendly packaging, especially for OTC products.

Smart user-friendly packaging as business opportunity

Up to now most "usability" improvements of pharmaceutical product packaging mainly happened only when they became legal requirements. Many originated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN DRPD). Therefore, the focus of the regulatory bodies was on accessibility for disabled consumers only - rather than on universal design and general usability. This led to regulations and solutions, that only a marginal group is going to use.

Therefore, the choice of a solution was based on just the minimum: In compliance, costs, effects on production and logistics, time and effort. With the result, that all companies did the same thing at the same time: Fulfilling the minimum of a mandatory regulation - for the benefit of very few. No surprise, that this did not create any competitive advantage, image value or revenue benefit.

So, why not instead turn a legal requirement into a business opportunity? Becoming a first mover with a smart packaging solution that offers real value for a relevant group of customers? By choosing a solution that has main-stream

potential and that is communicated to a wider audience than a disability organisation.

For those, who want to address customer-centric and senior-friendly packaging and create marketing opportunities, increase sales and boost the image, there are good news:

There is plenty of room for more customer centricity. After all, the consumer complaints about packaging are already well known: Safety opening mechanisms are difficult to understand and handle. Package inserts are hard or even impossible to read due to small font sizes and bad contrasts. Blister lettering is illegible due to reflections of the foil. Tablets crumble when having to split them, dosage of liquid medicines requires steady hands, etc.

Smart customer-centric packaging

Nowadays, latest technologies enable all kinds of smart packaging solutions to address all of the above issues. Once the problem with the best business opportunity has been identified, the research for the best smart packaging solution can start.

Smart packaging solutions are flexible sensors and chemicals providing colour information, whether the cold chain was uninterrupted. Sophisticated seals and labels with special inks make a product tamper-proof and confirm its authenticity. Innovative primary containers and opening mechanisms are easy to handle and safe at the same time. Latest production technologies allow the use of more sustainable materials. After all more and more consumers appreciate sustainable initiatives.

With the global spread of smartphones, app-based solutions became great tools for customer-centric packaging. All kinds of data codes or NFC chips on or in the secondary packaging offer added value for the consumers: Read out of the package insert, medication diaries and reminders or audio instructions for self-injection kits.