



CRACKING THE CODE

With new regulations, the pharmaceutical industry has clamped down on promotional products. Here's what can and can't be sold in this market now – along with a showcase of items that prove ad specialty sales to medical companies are still viable.

By Dave Vagnoni

harold Zimmerman is looking for answers. ○ His company, *Counselor* Top 40 distributor Artcraft Promotional Concepts (*asi/125050*), is headquartered in New Jersey, close to some of the largest prescription drug manufacturers in the country. But lately, Zimmerman has noticed that Artcraft's pharmaceutical neighbors aren't quite as friendly as they've been in the past. ○ "It's been harder to get companies to buy," says Zimmerman, vice president at Artcraft. "In what I've seen, nobody is able to move quickly on sales."

Zimmerman, far from defeated, believes there's money to be made, once the code is cracked. It's now been nine months since the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA) released new voluntary guidelines designed to limit the gifting of non-educational items to doctors. And the self-enforced ban went into effect in January, causing a wave of confusion about what types of promotional products can be sold to pharmaceutical companies and what can't.

"I definitely thought companies would stick to the guidelines," Zimmerman says. "But now the hard part is one company will allow one product, but another won't. It's frustrating."

Mickey Hayes, national sales manager for *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Sunscope (*asi/90075*), shares Zimmerman's anxiety. "You need two people to get the ball rolling," Hayes says. "Some pharmaceutical companies are afraid to buy. Companies aren't really giving any direction, so we don't always know what items will be OK or not."

New Product Ideas

The slowed-sales environment has presented suppliers and distributors in the ad specialty industry with a challenge to get educated and get creative or get out. "This is actually an opportunity for us to reap the rewards," says Bonni Shevin-Sandy, president of Dard Design (*asi/48500*). "This will separate the companies that know what they're doing in product design. It'll be something to be proud of."

Suppliers certainly feel they're up to

the task. Companies are working to manufacture and market promotional products that fit within the PhRMA rules – much of which states that any pharmaceutical company item given to doctors has to be educational in nature.

We're selling pens in kits, along with pads. It might be a diabetes kit that a patient can use to track blood sugar levels!"

– BONNI SHEVIN-SANDY, DARD *asi/48500*

Dard is continuing to develop a series of guideline-allowable items, including patient kits, digital photo frames and anatomical charts. While Shevin-Sandy is a strong proponent of innovative product design, she also feels suppliers need to be proactive in educating their business part-

ners. "We've flown out to visit some of our distributors and tried to help them," Shevin-Sandy says. "We've given presentations and worked with them to come up with ideas."

Many companies are also realizing that it pays to be realistic. "We realized pads, magnets and a multitude of our products that we enjoyed success with through the years would not work anymore," says Richard Cordaro, vice president of pharmaceuticals at *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Norwood Promotional Products. "We already had success with publishing products and we knew these would fall within the guidelines."

Specific to the pharmaceutical market, Norwood is producing informational guides with details about breast cancer, blood pressure, stress management, and skin and sun safety, among other health topics. "The guides can be customized both with graphics and information to fit the individual needs of the pharmaceutical end-user," says Cordaro.

In a somewhat similar vein, TripBuilder (*asi/92147*) has taken the blueprint from its mini-maps and city guides and created pocket-size expandable folders. TripBuilder is actively promoting the new products, part of its iFoldz line, as a way pharmaceutical companies can convey drug launches, provide instructions and relay safety information. "We've already gotten a tremendous response from all sorts of distributors," says Steve Tanzer, vice president of TripBuilder. "This is a unique and fully customizable product that expands to deliver a message on both sides of a sheet

in a memorable way. There's no question that the iFoldz is educational."

Counselor Top 40 supplier Prime Line (*asi/79530*) has developed another way for pharmaceutical companies to distribute information through promotional products. "We have a whole line of educational puzzles and they're doing well," says Jeff Lederer, vice president of Prime Line.

The puzzles, which come in different shapes and sizes, have expandable parts that twist in several directions to reveal multi-sided messages and product information. Prime Line is also offering custom anatomical models that are three-dimensional.

Pens Still In Play

Sold alone, the standard pen is clearly not allowable according to the PhRMA code. But companies, including Dard, are still selling the industry standby in kits. "We're still selling pens, just not millions and millions and millions of pens," says Shevin-Sandy. "We're selling pens in kits, along with pads.

It might be a diabetes kit that a patient can use to track blood sugar levels."

Counselor Top 40 writing instrument supplier Sanford Business-to-Business (*asi/84833*) is promoting anti-fraud uniball pens, hoping pharmaceutical companies view them as functional products that are criminal deterrents. The pens contain special ink that gets trapped in paper fibers, helping to prevent prescription fraud.

"We believe the whole medical industry can benefit from using these pens," says Lisa O'Leary, marketing director for Sanford. "If doctors use these pens, it can really reduce the chance for a prescription to be washed off with chemicals and then re-written."

Thinking Outside the Box

With a voluntary guideline, different companies will obviously approach the new rules in different ways. So, from the distributor perspective, every pharmaceutical industry client should not be treated the same, because the drug makers are interpreting

the PhRMA code in different ways. Some of Dard's pharmaceutical clients have been willing to buy blank items that don't have an imprinted logo. These items don't have to be considered educational to be purchased.

"Basically, as long as you don't put the pharmaceutical logo on an item, they might still buy it," says Shevin-Sandy. "We've sold some blanks."

If you're struggling to secure sales to pharmaceutical companies, you may be able to sell directly to other segments of the medical industry, like hospitals. Lanyards, clipboards and bottles of hand sanitizer are possibilities. "These are very functional products that are needed and used daily," says Brandon Mackay, president and CEO of SnugZ/USA (*asi/88060*).

Ultimately, though, cracking the code to determine what items will work in the pharmaceutical market depends on testing new ideas and coming up with new concepts to suggest. Yes, this is a work in progress, as both pharmaceutical companies and their doctor customers determine exactly how to interpret the voluntary marketing guidelines now in place.

Many suppliers say they're continually receiving feedback from both pharmaceutical companies and distributors. And that back-and-forth conversation is leading to ongoing product development. For example, *Counselor* Top 40 supplier Gemline (*asi/56070*) is working on several products that the company expects will fit within the PhRMA guidelines. One product is a patient wallet that would include slots for informational pamphlets, doctor's notes, appointment reminder cards, dosing calendars, drug samples and even injection pens.

"We're trying our best to bring ideas to distributors, working to develop them and fine tune them," says Bill House, vice president of sales at Gemline. "It is a challenging market and there's a process to this that's evolving. But in getting feedback, we're working on some things right now." ○

See showcase starting on page 106.

Dave Vagnoni is a staff writer for Counselor.

Hot Or Not?

Here are 10 products commonly sold to pharmaceutical companies. Do they fit within the new marketing guidelines or not?



Anatomical Models – YES - Can include notepads within the base.

Bags – YES - If used as part of a patient starter kit.

Calculators – YES - If included in patient kits with dieting information, for example.

Journals – YES - If included in patient kits to monitor weight, dieting habits or drug dosage.

Medical Charts – YES - Can be sold separately or can be used as an illustration pull-out.

Notepads – YES - If included in patient kits with information guides or pens.

Pens – YES - If included in patient kits with items like journals.

Product Info Guides – YES - Pocket-sized and miniature versions are popular.

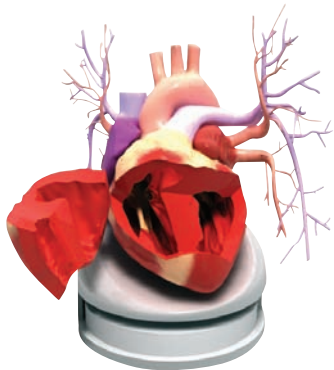


Caps – NO

Mugs – NO

Pharma Compliant Items

Here are products available through industry suppliers that can be sold to pharmaceutical and medical companies.



THE RIGHT BEAT

This anatomical heart model, produced by Sunscope (*asi/90075*), includes a tear-off informational pad that a patient can use after a consultation. Doctors can use the product to explain problems and potential treatments.

FRAUD-PREVENTION PEN

These uniball pens offered by Sanford Business-to-Business (*asi/84833*) use ink that can't be easily erased by chemicals, helping to prevent prescription fraud. Can be included in doctor education kits during new drug launches.



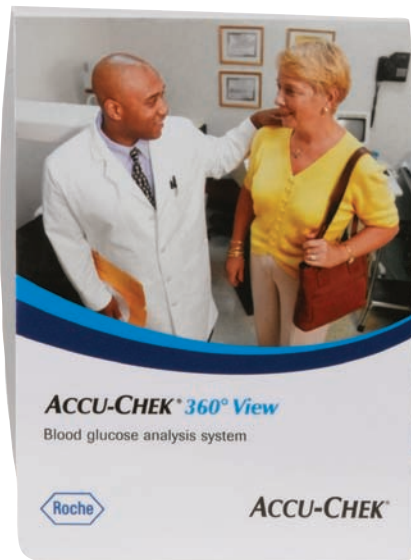
ROPE 'EM IN

Lanyards from SnugZ/USA (*asi/88060*) can be sold directly to medical practices or to hospitals, without the need to comply with PhRMA guidelines. Can be packaged with a clip-on hand sanitizer or sold separately.



PIECE BY PIECE

Prime Line (*asi/79530*) has unveiled a series of multi-color puzzles of varying shapes and sizes. The puzzle pieces open and rotate to reveal information and product messages. Can be customized with directions and illustrations.



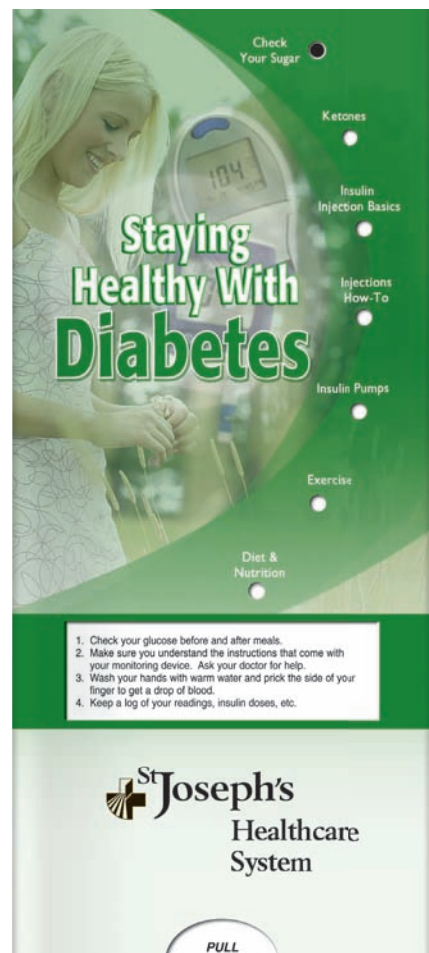
FOLD AND GO

Designed as a tool for patients, the iFoldz is a pocket-size expandable folder. Developed by TripBuilder (*asi/92147*), the iFoldz can include charts, dosage schedules and even surveys. Fully customizable for a variety of medical needs.



INJECTION GUIDE

This Dard (*asi/48500*) product teaches patients how to self-inject insulin. The kit includes injection pens, a workbook and pull-out illustrations. A pharmaceutical logo can be placed on the front base of the item.



SLIDE RULE

This information guide from Norwood Promotional Products contains a slide chart revealing 15 bullet points in a cutout window. The chart can list any number of tips or health guidelines. A company logo, address and phone number can be displayed on the front.



EASEL EASE

This easel, produced by Dard (*asi/48500*), can be used by a doctor as a table display. The anatomical cards give a doctor a more visual way to explain a condition to a patient. The easel has a write-on/wipe-off surface and comes with a marker and eraser