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Multichannel Treatment LifeMed's mailing to diabetics pairs co-op with other media

BY RICHARD H. LEVY

HEALTHCARE MEDIA FIRM LifeMed Marketing began its first direct mail campaign this month, a co-op package sent to 2.5 million diabetics.

The mailing is an extension of the dLife media network, which also includes informational radio broadcasts, a Web site (www.dLife.com), and dLifeTV, a television show focusing on diabetes information and people with the disease. Other distance and retail programs also are in place.



LifeMed's co-op will go out to 2.5 million consumers.

The multichannel approach allows each medium to promote the others. For instance, the mailing encourages recipients to go to the Web site and register for a sweepstakes. First prize is a trip to New York to view a taping of dLifeTV, which will debut March 20 on CNBC.

"We thought there was a lot of value [the mailing] could add, but we have an emotional hook—this television show," said Howard Steinberg, CEO of Westport, CT-based LifeMed Marketing.

"It seemed like it was the most logical offer to make to our audience," he continued. "This type of sweepstakes is not the typical Publishers' Clearing House offer. It's very specific to our brand. Nobody could offer this but us."

The mailing, itself has several purposes. First, it's a delivery mechanism for a series of inserts. Several marketers—including Atkins Nutritionals, Aventis, Becton Dickinson, Beiersdorf, Colgate, Drugstore.com, Novo Nordisk and Splenda—have submitted pieces for inclusion. Second, it contains an eight-page newsletter providing information and value beyond that of the inserts. Third, Steinberg hopes consumers will opt to give their e-mail addresses to the company when they log onto the Web site. Finally, the mailer incorporates a questionnaire that will allow for future targeting and segmentation of its efforts: Currently all inserts are run-of-press, with only limited variations (promotion tests, for instance) offered.

Direct mail might seem an odd choice of medium for Steinberg, who founded promotional marketing firm Source Marketing in 1989 and subsequently sold a controlling interest in it to MDC in 1998. (Source Marketing now does work for LifeMed.) But the channel was an obvious choice for a diabetes-themed package, he noted.

"There was a real gap in the marketplace," Steinberg said. "So many advertisers that want to reach people with diabetes do solo direct mail." When he realized that many of these efforts were in non-competitive categories, he saw an opportunity for a co-op mailing.

While the company did not issue a rate card for the initial drop, Bill Drolet, vice president for business development, described it as "competitively priced," based on an advertiser's participation in the other elements of the dLife media network.

Two-and-a-half-million names don't spring up from nowhere: According to Steinberg, prospects were culled from a variety of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act

(HIPAA)-compliant sources, including businesses that built diabetes-related databases, research partners and sponsors that have opt-in names. Whenever possible, LifeMed screened or used overlay information to determine direct mail responsiveness.

The survey information that the year-old LifeMed is collecting will aid in future targeting. Steinberg hopes to augment existing customer names with diabetes-related data, such as how aggressively targets manage their condition and the types of medications they use, in addition to demographic data.

"We would be able to more precisely target for ad hoc efforts," Steinberg said. "Frequent blood-sugar testers, for example, are one segment of high value interest to some marketers."

And there will be additional mailings: LifeMed has scheduled another 2.5 million-piece drop for September.



TV Guide: LifeMed uses an eight-page newsletter to tout dLife TV, its new cable show.