



# Building Trust

Would you trust a pharmaceutical brand with your life?



**T**hese are interesting times. The speed with which the threat of COVID-19 has swept the world has made the issue of our health—as individuals, societies and nations—our number one preoccupation.

We are in the unusual situation where we face an unknown threat and our only way to manage it is through trial and error. Where once we looked to the experts for a definitive answer, we now realise they are learning along with the rest of us.

But it's because of this lack of certainty, rather than in spite of it, that trust in medical scientists is more important than ever. We are being called upon to trust in their advice, trust that they will come up with the right answers and trust that any ensuing medical response will be effective. Pharmaceutical companies are also in the difficult position of having to marry promise to pragmatism. While individuals and governments clamour for answers, these brands understand that there will be no immediate solution. In the meantime, in the absence of solutions, they will need to find other ways to sustain trust; how they do that will have long-term ramifications for their brands, far beyond what COVID-19 holds.



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build consumer confidence to step  
forward and prove its mettle

### **The evolution of trust**

The first challenge is that the global populace has become less trusting overall. There was a time when we trusted the establishment, when the voice of the BBC was sacred, for example. Today, there is scepticism. We have lost our trust in government and other authorities, for a variety of reasons, leaving people unsure where to place their confidence. Often, it's brands that have taken over where the voice of authority has failed. In fact, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, 41% of people agree that brands have better ideas for solving problems than the government. Pharmaceutical companies used to enjoy a level of unequivocal trust. The 'white coat' prevailed – the advice from the scientist in the Colgate advert was accepted without question. We still trust Anadin to do what it says on the box, but even our trust in pharma brands is not now without its caveats.

### **How do brands earn trust?**

The way we think about brands is not dissimilar to how we think about people. Factors that earn our trust in them should, therefore, not surprise us. Brands we trust tend to be:

1. Those that are on our wavelength. Brands can be like familiar friends, they can relate to our needs, empathise with our perspective and tell us what we want to hear.
2. Brands that tell the truth and are true to their word (even when we're not looking). They have earned our trust by consistently delivering against their promises and not letting us down.
3. The brands trusted by those we trust. If a good friend, valued expert (a doctor perhaps) or impartial observer whose opinions we value trust it we are more easily persuaded.
4. Those over which we can exercise control should they fail to deliver (the promise of a money-back guarantee, the power to refer or maybe seek redress from a higher authority, etc.)



## **Pharma brands during a pandemic**

With the UK in lockdown and the establishment showing the strain, an anxious public is keener than ever to discover and hold firm to who and what it can trust. Now might be a prime moment, then, for a pharma brand needing to build consumer confidence, to step forward and prove its mettle. It would certainly appear that some have done just that, such as by spontaneously volunteering to turn their labs and resources to testing for COVID-19 and prioritising research into possible cures.

But words must be followed through with commensurate actions if such acts of apparent altruism are not to trigger the consumers' now finely honed scepticism nerve. How exactly is the firm helping and how consistently is it behaving across the rest of its business dealings? With the power of the internet and a surfeit of time for sceptical minds, there really is nowhere to hide—transparency is not only critical but inevitable and failure to deliver against public promises will not only be held to account, but could jeopardise future trust.

The right communications are now more critical than ever, even the geniality (and not just the credibility) of the experts chosen and cited by pharma brands will have a part to play in building perceptions of the brand's bearing and trustworthiness. There is also the challenge of being artful in communicating appropriately to those with different interests, without appearing disingenuous when these appear contradictory. Playing on different wavelengths, while maintaining everyone's trust, can be

challenging at times – such as reconciling the imperative for complete transparency against the assurance of absolute confidentiality.

Ultimately, this will be the litmus test for pharma brands that have been assiduously gathering and jealously guarding customer data. Who will have access to it? How will they use it? Can they be trusted to safeguard it? Brands in the sector might also consider aligning their goals at a time like this. It is when rivals link arms and behave in a truly open and honourable way, working towards the same goal, that the world sees how much they genuinely care about making a difference.

## **The transition from masters of chemistry to processors of data**

In the not so distant future we will all be using smart wearable devices that can track not only body movement, temperature and heartbeat, but blood pressure, oxygen and glucose levels. They may even track markers of an existing medical condition, in real time, with the accumulated data combined with personal information (such as bodyweight and family medical history) to create a detailed profile which, aggregated across a database of millions of other users, not only tracks our current health, but anticipates our potential future health profile.



Drug dosages will be personalised to our precise biological needs, with reminders to take them and prompts about side effects. New supplies of medicines (in personalised dosages) will be ordered automatically – perhaps in customised polypills, containing several medications in one capsule. Geo-positioning and access to our emails, social media feeds and diary, will also enable them to anticipate our medical needs – as well as alerting us if we enter a location where a medical risk is anticipated (while providing advice on how to protect ourselves).

These new technologies will massively improve the effectiveness of medications, as well as reducing waste (in the UK, unused drugs worth an estimated £150 million are thrown away each year, in the US the figure is nearer \$2 billion); over time the wearable device is likely to become a lifelong embedded microchip and personalised medications will be 3D printed and machine dispensed. Best of all, many potential conditions will be avoided altogether.

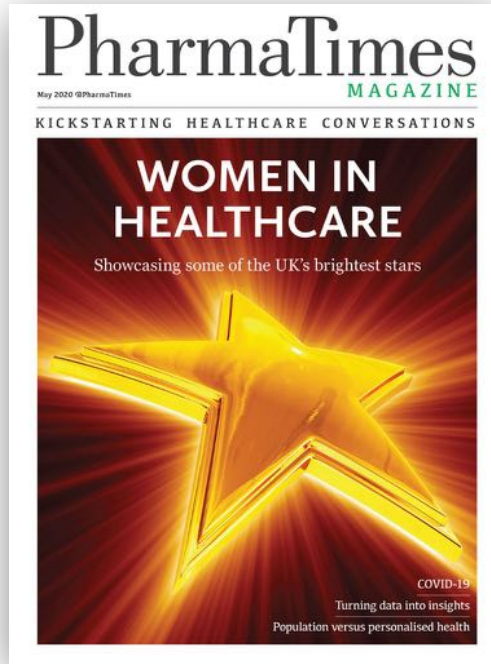
The challenge for pharmaceutical brands, however, is that they must undergo a radical transformation from being trusted as masters of chemistry, to processors of data. Although we have, over many years, come to trust them with molecules, the industry has yet to earn our confidence in treasuring our private information – the digital imprint of our life.

**In the here and now, COVID-19 is all about maintaining confidence while the industry powers up to find a solution. But then as it gathers more and more information about its consumers and works to provide deeply personalised treatments, consumer trust will be built on the whole package, the company's legitimate need to hold data, what it does with that information and in whose interests those actions are.**



# First published in Pharma Times, magazine, May 2020

(Keith Lucas writing as Strategy Partner, Superunion)



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By Keith Lucas



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We are in the unusual situation where we face an unknown threat and our only way to manage it is through trial and error. Where once we looked to the experts for a definitive answer, we now realize they are learning along with the rest of us.

But it is because of this lack of certainty rather than the speed of it, that trust in medical scientists is more important than ever. We are being called answers and trust that any ensuing medical response will be effective. Many promises to progress. While individuals and governments clamour for answers, these brands understand that there will be no immediate solution. In the meantime, in the absence of advice, they will need to find other ways to maintain trust; how they do that will have long term ramifications for their brands, far beyond what COVID-19 holds.

### The evolution of trust

The first challenge is that the global populace has become less trusting overall. There was a time when we trusted the establishment, when the voice of the BBC was sacred, for example. Today, there is scepticism. We have lost our trust in government and other institutions, for a variety of reasons, leaving people unsure where to place their confidence. Often, it's brands that have taken over where the voice of authority has failed. In fact, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, 4% of people agree that pharmaceutical companies are in the difficult position of having to be more transparent to progress. While individuals and governments clamour for answers, these brands understand that there will be no immediate solution. In the meantime, in the absence of advice, they will need to find other ways to maintain trust; how they do that will have long term ramifications for their brands, far beyond what COVID-19 holds.

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### Pharma brands during a pandemic

With the UK in lockdown and the establishment downing the flag, an anxious public is keen to know who to trust and hold firm to who and brands need to build consumer confidence, to stay forward and prove to spontaneously volunteer to turn their skills and resources to a matter of public health and prioritising research into possible cures.

But words must be followed through with consistent actions. If such honest optimism never. How much is the firm helping out how consistently is it behaving across the rest of its business dealings? With the news of the impact and a surplus of time for sceptical minds, there really is nowhere to hide transparency is not only critical but inevitable and failure to deliver against public promises will not only be held to account, but could jeopardise future trust.

The right communications are now more critical than ever, even the quality and not just the timeliness of the experts chosen and cited by pharma brands will have a part to play in building perceptions of the brand's being and trustworthiness. There is also the challenge of being without appearing disingenuous when there appear over-assertive. Playing on different wavelengths, while maintaining eye-to-eye, can be challenging at times - such as reconciling the imperative for complete transparency against the assurance of absolute confidentiality.

Ultimately, this will be the litmus test for pharma brands that have been audaciously gathering and valuably guarding customer data. Who will have access to it? How will they use it? Can they be trusted to safeguard it? This, it is when rivals link arms and behave in a study open and honourable genuinely care about making a difference.

**The transition from masters of Chemistry to processors of data** In the not so distant future we will all be using smart wearable devices that can track not only body movement, temperature and heartbeat, but also an existing medical condition, in real time, with the accumulated data combined with personal information such as bodyweight and family medical history to create a detailed profile which, aggregated across a database of millions of other users, not only tracks our current health, but anticipates our potential future health profile.

Drug designers will be personalised to precise biological needs, with reminders to take them and prompts about side effects. New supplies of medicines (as personalised drugs) will be ordered automatically - perhaps in customised polybags, containing several medications, in one daily, will also enable them to anticipate our medical needs - as well as providing advice on how to protect ourselves.

These new technologies will massively improve the effectiveness of medications, as well as reducing waste in the UK, around drugs worth an estimated \$20 million are thrown away each year. In the US the figure is more \$2 billion) over time the wearable device is likely to become a printed and method dispersed, but overall, many potential conditions will be avoided altogether.

The challenge for pharmaceutical brands, however, is that they must undergo a radical transformation from being trusted as masters of chemistry, to processors of data. Although we have, over many years, come to trust them with molecules, the industry has yet to earn our confidence in transparently our private information - the digital imprint of our life.

**In the here and now, COVID-19 is all about maintaining confidence while and more information about its consumers and works to provide deeply personalised treatment. Consumer trust will be built on the whole package, the company's legitimate need to hold data, what it does with that information and in whose interests those actions are.**

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Keith Lucas is UK strategy partner at Superunion





## Keith Lucas

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An experienced marketer, agency planner and strategy consultant. Keith has been a strategic advisor on brand and communications for a wide range of clients from Deloitte and McKinsey to Vodafone, Rolex and Jaguar, from banks and lawyers to healthcare providers and schools, as well as digital start-ups and retailers.

He lectures in marketing and business strategy, holds an MA in International Marketing, is a Chartered Marketer and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

Lucasbrand, the strategy consultancy he founded in 2002, has created, developed and repositioned brands across numerous sectors including broadcast, publishing, airlines, airports, luxury goods, perfumery, telecoms, cars, energy, consumer electronics, professional services and banking.

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