



Consumer Trends in Prevention & Wellness Are Impacting Your Bottom Line: How to Get Ahead of the Curve

Prevention and wellness have become tremendously important for global companies over the past decade – not only for their employees, but also for their customers and their communities. Fueled by the growing cost of health care, a global obesity epidemic and a crisis of chronic disease, the need for better prevention and wellness strategies is increasing pressure on consumers and businesses to help control health spending, save and improve lives, and even strengthen the economy by moving toward smarter employee, community, product, and marketing strategies.

Long recognized by the medical community as an area of importance, prevention and wellness are garnering rising prominence and favor among the media, policy-makers, employers and major national health care stakeholders. Consumers are also buying into the message.

During the past year alone:

- For the first time, the issue of prevention was a major focus of a national debate on health care.
- *TIME* published five separate cover stories on health and wellness issues, including a special issue titled “It’s All About Prevention.”
- Large U.S. companies continued to take up health and wellness programs in an effort to reduce health care costs – growing to 81 percent from 51 percent last year, according to a national study.
- Americans ranked prevention as **the most** important health care reform priority among a variety of issues under consideration in Congressional proposals.

No matter the outcome of health reform, the costs and consequences of consumers’ lifestyle choices are and will continue to be a matter of public debate – as will the practices and priorities of companies marketing to consumers. Many different strategies to “solve” health crises are on the table in Washington and across the United States, including greater regulation of marketing, packaging and labeling; taxation of specific products such as sugar and sodas; and policies designed to “reward” Americans for meeting health goals.

Companies that understand the opportunities presented by this movement and related regulatory and policy challenges will be able to capitalize in a way that is critically important to their bottom line. Five areas stand out as ways in which companies can meaningfully enhance their relationships with consumers and shape their brands, reputation and market power in this area.

1. Get ahead of the trend toward self-directed health care.

Increasingly, companies are being asked to help consumers make healthy choices – and make it easier for consumers to understand *what* is healthy and the benefits and risks of their choices. By relating to consumers in this way, companies (and brands) can engage in a dialogue with their customers about how products can help manage their health across the care continuum – and in doing so, become a partner in their quest to seek out products that support a healthier, more active lifestyle. Investing in tools and resources to help your customers improve their health and wellness “literacy” can help your customers and your business.

2. Take ownership of the prevention space.

Prevention is now a well-recognized consumer trend and a significant component of health care reform, but no company has yet emerged as an established leader in this space. There is real opportunity to set the tone for what prevention is all about and show how companies can partner with consumers to make a difference. Doing so will require not only the incorporation of prevention and wellness into targeted branding and marketing efforts, but also stated commitment to these areas in wider corporate messaging efforts that are backed up by actions.

3. Lead by example, and build your reputation from the inside out.

Perhaps the best way to show action is to lead by example. Demonstrating commitment to the health of your employees will translate to a reputation for commitment to health in all aspects of your business. You are aware of the trends in health care costs and the power that employers can have on shaping behaviors. Use this power to your advantage by creating internal programs that can help facilitate and build momentum for behavioral change in your community and among your customers.

4. Adapt to new channels of communication to reach consumers and build and protect your brand.

Messages are no longer conveyed from the top down, but laterally. Consumers are self-educating about products as the Internet becomes one of – if not *the* – primary sources of information. In fact, four-fifths (81 percent) of active Web users discuss, post or forward hearsay about companies, brands or CEOs. You must engage in new online mediums if you want to effectively communicate to your consumers in an organic way and establish your company as a trusted online resource.

5. Integrate programs to drive more meaningful change.

Starting a new effort is one way companies discover that they have a number of projects in a similar or overlapping focus, operating in a “silo” without any coordination of efforts – one of the best ways to minimize or negate a program’s impact. Without a proper “echo chamber” to magnify the impact of these efforts, they are wasted. By integrating wellness efforts across the company spectrum into disciplines where they may not currently reside – including corporate reputation, corporate responsibility, internal communication and other disciplines – you can successfully maximize their impact and recognition.

As your company considers this important consumer trend and builds and implements your own unique plan of action, we invite you to consider these ideas and reach out to us with your thoughts and questions.

About the Authors

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About APCO Worldwide

Founded in 1984, APCO Worldwide is an award-winning, independently owned global communication consultancy with offices in major cities throughout the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., APCO clients include corporations and governments; industry associations and nonprofit organizations; and seven of the top 10 companies on *Fortune’s* Global 500. APCO offers services related to business, industry and finance; media, public opinion and society; and government and public policy. The firm is a majority women-owned business. For more information, please visit www.apcoworldwide.com.

APCO’s Experience in Prevention and Wellness

APCO has a depth of experience communicating about prevention and wellness issues. Examples of our work include:

- *The Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (PFCD):* APCO led the conception, launch and management of this coalition of hundreds of the nation’s most powerful and respected voices in the health reform debate. Since the group launched in 2007, it has established itself as the “go-to” national authority on the issue, and it has helped promote solutions within the context of health reform. APCO has helped to place more than 1,000 news stories about the PFCD and the issue, and all of the major health reform proposals under consideration in Congress have been shaped by the groups’ outreach.
- *HealthyTown:* APCO worked with more than 150 local patient and provider groups and America’s pharmaceutical companies to launch “HealthyTown,” a community-based health, wellness and disease-prevention program designed to educate and promote positive health behaviors and health literacy. HealthyTown, which was launched in Fresno, Calif., and Jackson, Fla., engaged city mayors as well as other key elected officials and local business, community and faith leaders to drive change. The initiatives garnered significant attention in the communities, generating hundreds of print and broadcast media stories, and drawing more than 2,000 members of the public to receive health screenings.
- APCO works with a number of companies in the food and beverage category interested in creating sustainable product and marketing strategies that factor in evolving consumer and stakeholder expectations.