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Consumer Outreach: DoctorSolve cures US sales woes with integrated initiative

Craig McGuire - 28 Feb 2005 00:00

As a Canadian online pharmacy catering to a US base frustrated with paying exorbitant prices, DoctorSolve Healthcare Solutions knew there was more money to be made.

However, before it could improve its web sales, there were major PR obstacles to overcome.

"There was a prevailing misconception among US consumers that purchasing prescription medication online was not safe or legal," says Phyllis Gerhardt, DoctorSolve's assistant director, marketing and PR.

To build credibility and dispel myths, DoctorSolve recruited The Karcher Group, which proposed an integrated campaign leveraging press release distribution and search engine optimization services offered by PR Newswire (PRN).

Strategy

While attending a conference in New York early last year, DoctorSolve representatives met Karcher pros - and they liked what they heard.

"We felt that when presented with objective information, US consumers would realize that not only were the drugs safe, but that DoctorSolve offered a valuable service to Americans who otherwise could not afford necessary, life-sustaining medication," says Melanie Broemsen, Karcher's online PR specialist.

Subsequently, Karcher and DoctorSolve built an arsenal of factual information regarding the safety of imported prescription medications and collected patient testimonials.

Karcher planned an aggressive strategy that focused on developing news releases optimized for search engines and distributed over PRN.

Tactics

Karcher crafted releases that integrated information about the safety of Canadian drugs and were littered with key phrases that web users type into search engines to find such products. The releases were distributed over PRN's US1 national newswire, including distribution to prescription medication and senior interest micro-lists.

"DoctorSolve was able to reach the general media and relevant industry trades while they were able to reach millions of consumers through the more than 3,600 internet sites to which PRN distributes," says Tony Santana, senior account manager at PRN.

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To help position the company as an authority, Karcher provided daily monitoring of ProfNet Leads, a PRN service in which journalists can access expert sources.

Results

Within three months of beginning the campaign, DoctorSolve reported a 302% increase in new orders and a 2% increase in refill orders for the same period.

Six months in, the company reported averaging more than 200% increases in new orders when compared to the same months in 2003.

"The jump in sales is directly attributed to this campaign and its ability to battle misperception," Gerhardt says. "If we weren't before, we are now completely committed to online marketing and PR, period."

Throughout the campaign, the firms' founding physicians were interviewed by national and local media outlets, including *Newsweek*, *Dallas Morning News*, and *The Seattle Times*.

Future

Moving forward, DoctorSolve plans to expand into alternative medicinal products and new non-medicine product lines, as well as into pet medicine, all powered by e-marketing and PR strategies, Broemsen says.

On the horizon, though, internet sales of prescription drugs to US consumers could be banned by Canada if a proposal currently being considered by lawmakers is approved.

"We don't think this will pass, but if it does, our US consumers will not be without their medications," Gerhardt vows, explaining that DoctorSolve is already shipping some medicines from offshore operations in the UK and New Zealand.

PR team: Melanie Broemsen (The Karcher Group, Canton, OH), Phyllis Gerhardt (DoctorSolve Healthcare Solutions, Vancouver), and PR Newswire

Campaign: Online PR and Marketing

Time frame: June to November 2004

Budget: \$2,500/month

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