

Contact:
Jim McClure
Apollo Public Relations
630.845.8424
jim@apollopr.com

For Immediate Release

Marketers on Call with Nurses

Abbott Reaches Purchase Influencers with Listening Approach

GURNEE, ILL. – Reaching a target audience about an established product is difficult; getting that audience to provide feedback is the ultimate challenge.

Abbott Laboratories of North Chicago, Ill., one of the world's largest manufacturers and providers of hospital products and generic pharmaceuticals, found a better way to inform and learn from nurses about a particular product that had been on the market since 1997. The better way involved an approach that got the attention of nurses and obtained their feedback in a way unique in business-to-business marketing.

Abbott's design firm, Renquist Associates in Racine, Wisc., faced the daunting task of reaching secondary influencers, nurses, who would be the end-users of a pre-filled syringe called Carpuject (registered trademark).

Taking the Pulse of the Nurses

Although hospitals and pharmacists purchase Carpuject, nurses are an important purchase influencer, according to Renquist Associates Director of Client Relations Len Lamberg.

Renquist designed a series of high-impact mailings to hospital nurses. The direct mail approach carried the empathetic theme of "I've got better things to do with my time!" and encouraged the nurses to call in and say how their professional time could be used.

The method of receiving those calls was key to the success of the nurse outreach and the program goal of gaining informative responses. The answers were for use in sales calls and increasing awareness of the product among the RN's who would influence the hospital pharmacists that purchase the sterile cartridge units. Lamberg set two essential criteria for the 800 number portion of the campaign: "First of all I wanted ease of interface and

more ►

second was reliability,” states Lamberg.

“I wanted a caller system that was respectful to the caller. These nurses that were calling in were doing so because they wanted to, and we didn’t want to make it any more difficult for them,” explains Lamberg. After all, these were nurses whose busy lives and harried schedules were being recognized as part of the program. Lamberg had tried different inbound telemarketing services and found a better way for the nurse outreach.

Seasoned marketers and advertising managers know the pitfalls of systems that lose calls through unreliable technology, power shut downs, and callers being frustrated by the way their calls are handled.

Calling in the Experts

Lamberg recommended to his clients at Abbott that they use ConServIT, a service that brings a remarkably human touch to automated voice processing using “natural speech” technology. For the layman, one of the more fascinating aspects is how real the system sounds when contacted. “I was given a test number,” relates Abbott Associate Advertising Manager Darren Hillesheim, “and when I called it, I thought it was a real person...I almost talked to her right off the bat. That was one of the things that surprised me personally.”

“That’s not an unusual reaction at first exposure to intuitive call processing with intelligent branching software,” explains ConServIT President Peter Theis. “Technology aside, the most important aspect was that we were creating a forum where these nurses felt free to comfortably express their valued opinions.”

Theis, inventor of more than 25 technologies licensed to ConServIT, is credited as the father of interactive voice processing (IVR). But ConServIT has taken his original innovations to new levels by moving generations past frustrating voice mail and robotic pre-recorded messages. The service embodies a philosophy that it is important to give callers the same care that nurses give their patients.

“Look, if you can’t say it live to a caller, don’t say it with a machine,” Theis emphasizes from his Gurnee, Ill. office. “That is what natural speech is all about. Let the caller talk. In the case of the nursing professionals, Len Lamberg and Abbott learned some very interesting things because the callers could express themselves freely.”

Nurses Voice Opinions

“It was clear that the program hit an emotional hot button,” says Lamberg. “We got a huge response, and the response was heartfelt.” Nurses were eager to answer by phone the question of what they would do if they had more time, even though the entire call was automated.

The answers ranged from professional dedication and caring, “If I had more time on my hands, I could use my hands to heal,” to direct comments about the product. “Carpject is easy, safe and it saves me time - and time is the most important thing I can give my patients.” A nursing educator responded to ConServIT that “the time I spend drawing up an injection at the cart is time I can’t be at the patients’ bedside, preparing them and helping them with their treatment.”

The Impact

“This program struck a raw nerve — overworked nurses who felt that no one was listening to them — and generated an overwhelming response. Field sales staff were able to tap into the energy created by the mailings and develop strong allies in their sell-in effort,” relates Lamberg.

Normally, a direct mail program merits only a one or two percent response rate. “Our way of making callers feel at ease and respected plays a crucial role in the doubling or tripling of the average results,” notes Theis. “It was a very well-received campaign here at Abbott,” says Hillesheim.

Executives there praised the program and the responses it gained. Hillesheim adds, “it was a good interactive way to reach our clients and end-users. The call volume was very high, yet we received printouts of the caller comments right away. It was great. Everything went smoothly.”

Rapid Response

Once the call is answered and the natural speech conversation with the caller is complete, the comments and full caller information are “edited” shortly after the completion. Editing, which is the process of converting the caller’s voice to computer ready digital text, uses automation where appropriate. In the course of editing, characteristics such as the sex or age group of the caller can be entered without having had to ask during the call itself.

The first and foremost goal is to make the information highly accurate for ConServIT clients such as Renquist Associates and, in turn, Abbott Laboratories. “Our goal is that the accuracy is within hundredths of a percent,” says Theis. “It’s a must in business-to-business programs where the gathered information includes phone numbers, addresses and detailed medical information including precise medical terms.”

“It was fun for the nurses to give their own ideas and answers in their own words,” says Hillesheim. Renquist’s theme and ConServIT’s welcoming method of naturally asking for information clearly made for a one-two punch in gaining the valuable information from the nurses. “In cases like this you’re dealing with a limited audience, so each and every response is valuable,” says Theis, adding, “the nurses thought it was really neat. No one wants to listen to demeaning instructions, hear a long opening message or punch number buttons on cue. With natural speech technology used by ConServIT we don’t do that.”

In other words, make the experience friendly and cordial and the comments and the necessary marketing information flow as easy and natural as...a conversation. Listen.

As an intensive care unit nurse manager responded, “If I had more time on my hands, I would take those precious moments to sit with my patients and just listen.” That’s a good prescription for marketers as well.

About ConServIT, a service of Conversational Voice Technologies

ConServIT provides automated inbound teleservices using proprietary voice processing, switching, and reporting technologies. ConServIT is a leading provider of automated call handling services and database management of information. More information, including a real telephone call handled by ConServIT, is available at www.conservit.com or 1-800-994-4400. E-mail: sales@conservit.com.