

Understanding through experience

The German original of this article was first published in planung & analyse, issue no. 01/2018.

In addition to the health of the patient, manufacturers of prescription drugs (Rx) do not only focus on the patient, but also on the doctor who prescribes the product. Market research helps marketers to better understand drivers and barriers of the doctors' prescription behaviour. Katja Birke of Produkt + Markt shows how implicit techniques uncover hidden attitudes and motivations among physicians.

When it comes to *unconscious* motives, traditional qualitative methods sometimes hit a wall. Emotional drivers and barriers are difficult to verbalise, even though they are often essential for decisions. We use implicit tools to get to the deeper underlying motives – with increasing regularity also in quantitative research. For example, we work with images that we know correspond to certain motif dimensions. More and more frequently, we also use simple and playful queries that illustrate attitudes or emotions without the doctor having to answer large numbers of attitude questions.

In the qualitative field, we have a large toolbox that we use to facilitate individual interviews or for group discussions and creative groups. Depending on the clients' requirements, the individual methods and techniques are combined and optimally coordinated. An important phase is always the warm-up. Before going into the creative part, doctors must be provided with an opportunity to exchange professional information on a rational level. After that, we gradually take the doctors to the emotional level and dive deeper and deeper underneath the iceberg. The all-time favourites are methods like brainstorming, laddering, picture analogies and role plays or we let the doctors paint pictures or tell stories. Or they work on a certain question based on a specific briefing and subsequently present their solution to the group.

Depending on the question, we apply certain methods which usually also take a little more time and require a script. We may use figurines and create certain scenarios; or we use those scenarios to understand the brand perception or relationships on a purely emotional level. Together with the doctors, we might also build a wall in the studio and tear it down again in order to understand complex barriers and to develop solutions. We let elves and demons or angels and devils compete against each other to better understand what kind of messages the brand needs to become even more successful. We let doctors assume the role of a winner and ask them a number of questions on certain topics, while they are riding the wave of success.

A special kind of group discussion

Structural constellations have proven to be a very effective method. The method follows the systemic approach of Matthias Varga from Kibed and Insa Sparrer, and it is based on the psychotherapeutic constellation work. It is particularly suitable for uncovering complex structures that are difficult to put into words. The so-called trans-verbal language used

here does not only include gestures and facial expressions – or in other words non-verbal language, but also the spatial arrangement of the problem. What might this look like?

We recommend a structural constellation when conventional methods have not produced the desired insights. During the set-up of the constellation, we use of the spatial language of the room in order to gain a profound understanding of relationships with brands or manufacturers. The doctors are asked to turn off their heads and to follow their intuition instead. They become representatives of market elements such as brands, products, doctors, patients, manufacturers. They position themselves in the room and move around following their impulses, accompanied by a specially trained moderator. The frequent changes of position – stimulated by the moderator – and changes of perspective open up new perspectives on the market and its players. This spatial visualisation allows us to uncover deeply underlying blockages, displacements, motives and relationships on an emotional level.

Just like in group discussions, clients may follow the events in the room from behind a glass panel, keeping true to our motto „understanding through experience“. It is always astonishing what kind of knowledge may be derived from such work. Interdependencies are recognised and weak points uncovered, the manufacturer's image becomes just as clear as the product's position in relation to the competition. Of course, specific instructions are particularly important for our clients. Therefore our analysis leads back to the rational level; the results are discussed and put into the overall context during a joint workshop. This is a crucial factor for the successful application of this creative method.

About the author



Katja Birke

is Managing Director Healthcare and managing partner at Produkt + Markt. For over 20 years, she has been looking after key accounts from the pharmaceutical industry with a focus on life cycle management. She is particularly involved in studies focusing on strategy – or when it is all about creativity.