



WHITE PAPER

# Ethnography: Using Behavioral Science to Boost Business Success

January 2015

Written by:

**Kathleen Starr, Ph.D.**

Senior Vice President, Behavioral Strategy

Adheris Health, Behavioral Insights Group

[Kathleen.Starr@inventivhealth.com](mailto:Kathleen.Starr@inventivhealth.com)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction ..... 3
- Ethnography, Defined ..... 4
- Using Ethnographic Research to Support Behavior Change..... 5
- Case Study: Procter & Gamble’s Febreze ..... 6
- Tips for Planning Ethnographic Research ..... 6
- Conclusion..... 7
- About Adheris Health, Behavioral Insights Group ..... 8
- About inVentiv Health..... 8



## INTRODUCTION

There is growing awareness within the healthcare industry that individual behavior change is a key to business success. From lowering the costs of clinical trials to differentiating value for third-party payers in a crowded marketplace, improving patient behavior is a central element of achieving business goals.

Healthcare marketers have undertaken countless initiatives aimed at behavior change – to greater or lesser success. As an industry, we have become quite good at increasing consumer awareness around the importance of change and even successfully encouraging the willingness of consumers to consider change. We have spent millions of dollars providing information.

But achieving actual, positive and sustainable change has proven far more elusive. Many healthcare consumers know what needs to be done, they just don't always do it. As healthcare marketers, we can help – but only if we ourselves understand the forces that serve as obstacles or aids on the path to change.

Such an understanding can be achieved through combining the behavioral sciences with insights gathered through consumer research. This gives us the opportunity to design programs more likely to succeed – both for our businesses and those patients we serve. This paper discusses one, extremely valuable approach that allows the healthcare industry to tap into insights that reveal some drivers behind human behavior.

Recent books such as “Nudge,” “Predictably Irrational,” and “Switch” have sparked broad interest in leveraging the principles of behavioral science for business success. By incorporating the behavioral drivers such as emotions, social norms, and principles of reinforcement, healthcare companies can develop more successful strategies for influencing behaviors and choice.

But to do so, healthcare marketers also need to leverage a deep understanding of the broader behaviors of their target consumer. Ethnography should be a key part of the research mix as it provides unique insights that are often missed by other types of research.

## ETHNOGRAPHY, DEFINED

Ethnography is a powerful research methodology used to gather insights into what people are “actually” doing and into the forces that influence those behaviors. Ethnography provides us with a contextual understanding of decision-making and motivations, as well as barriers that make changing behavior difficult. It reveals how influences such as culture, social forces, and environment shapes what people do – or don’t do. In reality most people do not have a conscious awareness of these forces and so cannot report them. They can only be revealed by observing patterns of behavior within a natural setting.

Healthcare marketers will find that insights from ethnographic research could mean the difference between the success or failure of their efforts to change behavior.

Ethnography reveals how the realities of day-to-day life collide with illness or with efforts to stay healthy. These collisions represent significant opportunities for a marketer to engage with health consumers. For example, research we recently conducted revealed how children impact the eating behaviors of the entire family. This understanding is valuable to healthcare marketers trying to influence a patient’s eating habits to lose weight or support diabetes treatment. Including kid-friendly menu planning into programs is likely to be a critical resource for helping the patient appease the kids in the face of making new food choices.

In addition, ethnographic research often uncovers unmet needs and unanticipated barriers to successful behavior change. Research offers marketers a detailed understanding of the obstacles patients face when initiating a new behavior, breaking a habit, or maintaining a health behavior change and the kind of support that would be most useful. Patients themselves often have great difficulty anticipating the kinds of support they will need (or really use) when undertaking new behaviors.

For example, if a new therapy requires patients to start an unfamiliar behavior, such as self-injections, there may be additional behaviors that will influence whether the patient succeeds with self-injections, such as behaviors around the buying and transport of injection supplies.

Supporting each incremental behavior on the path to the ultimate desired behavior change could be critical in helping both patient and marketer succeed.

*Insights from ethnographic research could mean the difference between the success or failure of healthcare marketers’ efforts to change behavior*

## USING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH TO SUPPORT BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Ethnographic research also reveals insights into how to successfully execute programs to encourage behavior change.

For example, more and more healthcare marketers are using digital tools to promote healthy behavior change. Given the flood of health websites and mobile apps, however, healthcare marketers are facing stiff competition for patients' time and attention. Marketers must create tools that solve real problems without placing added demands on the end user. Ethnography can provide deep insight into how to best leverage technology to produce behavior change. Moreover, insights gathered from observing how people interact with technology in their homes, cars, and at work or school will help the marketer integrate existing routines and habits into tool design so that the tools created are ones that patients will actually use.

Once a behavioral change program is designed, proactive promotion is often required to encourage people to participate. Rarely is "build it and they will come" an effective engagement strategy. Ethnography can reveal important verbal and non-verbal cues people use to communicate about their illness. Incorporating these cues into promotional campaigns helps ensure that messages are relevant and impactful.

Despite all of the benefits of bringing together behavioral science and ethnography, we see limited adoption in healthcare marketing. One of the obstacles to undertaking this essential research is perceived costs. Healthcare executives, mindful of budgets, are resistant to spending time and money to gather this information.

But if we look at how other industries are investing in similar research and leveraging the behavioral insights gathered, we quickly see the enormous benefits of the investment.

Companies in packaged goods, automotive, banking, sports equipment and more are finding that by studying the behavioral routines of their customers, they gain insights that increase sales. Let's take a look at how Procter and Gamble applied behavioral insights to turn around their product, Febreze.

***Ethnography can reveal important verbal and non-verbal cues people use to communicate about their illness. Incorporating these cues into promotional campaigns helps ensure that messages are relevant and impactful.***

## CASE STUDY: PROCTER AND GAMBLE'S FEBREZE

P&G spent millions of dollars developing a colorless, cost-effective liquid to spray on smelly fabrics to make them odorless. When they launched the product, they marketed it as a way to remove odors – such as cigarette smoke or pet odors. But after months of effort, sales went from bad to worse. Febreze sales were so poor that P&G was on the brink of terminating the business.

But first, P&G invested in consumer research to find out what was going on, and this investment identified a big problem. They went to their customers' homes to better understand their behaviors, and then hired a team of experts to analyze their customers' cleaning habits and routines. They discovered that they were asking too much of their customers – wanting them to admit to an odor problem of which they might not even be aware and then changing cleaning behavior to use the Febreze product.

From this insight, P&G quickly began positioning Febreze as part of an existing cleaning routine rather than trying to create a new one. They came up with a marketing campaign that sold Febreze as the reward for a job well done rather than an additional cleaning task. Sales exploded.

Within two months of revamping their marketing approach, Febreze sales doubled and within a year product revenue topped \$230 million. The Febreze product portfolio now accounts for more than \$1 billion in annual sales. And most of this success is traceable to those insights from behavioral research.

## TIPS FOR PLANNING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

To make the most of the investment, there are a number of things to consider when planning ethnographic research:

### *Don't treat ethnography as a one-off tactic.*

Research is part of a larger effort to understand your customers' behavior and how it impacts business. Insights from ethnographic research add most value when they are combined with:

- 1) an analysis of how behavior is contributing to your business problem;
- 2) the latest behavioral science principles relevant to this behavior; and
- 3) how much time and money can be spent on changing that behavior.

### ***Picking the right insight team is critical.***

Choose a team that knows how to maximize your investment. The team that designs and implements the research must have rigorous academic training in the behavioral sciences. Behavioral scientists are best equipped to interpret the findings, align them with the science, and make recommendations for evidence-based interventions. In healthcare research, this behavioral research is even more valuable if combined with the valuable input of clinical practitioners who understand the illness being studied and the treatment dynamics that influence behavior.

Ultimately, the insights gathered should further business success so the overall team should also include experts in consumer marketing who understand how insights can shape media, digital, and CRM strategies and tactics.

### ***Incorporate behavioral research as early as possible into product development and commercialization.***

Research-derived insights, especially those gathered from ethnography, are useful in influencing a patient's medication decisions around marketed products. But insights into patients' behaviors have even broader implications. They can help the industry identify potential successful molecules, inform clinical trial design, and help build successful business cases for reimbursement. Even if done closer to or after product launch, this type of consumer research provides essential guidance in developing acquisition and adherence strategies.

## **CONCLUSION**

The healthcare industry is more focused than ever before on the healthcare consumer as the decision-maker in selecting products and services. As this shift picks up speed, the most successful healthcare companies will be those with a more complete understanding of what drives consumers. Understanding behavior leads to the development of strategies more likely to produce change and more successful in creating positive health outcomes. It all begins with understanding the healthcare "customer." Investing in research to improve this understanding helps assure better ROI on all other marketing investment and gives a boost to your business success.

## ABOUT ADHERIS HEALTH, BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS GROUP

Adheris Health, Behavioral Insights Group brings together experts from a variety of disciplines to create the best possible patient experience that results in better outcomes and increased brand loyalty. Behavioral Insights Group's staff of health psychologists, behavioral scientists, clinical specialists, design experts and user experience specialists helps develop and implement scientifically designed behavioral interventions that improve the patient experience and strengthen the patient/physician relationship. Its patient support programs are vertically integrated with its in-house HIPAA-compliant database management system and custom messaging capabilities.

Behavioral Insights Group's patient-centric programs have been shown to improve health outcomes, enhance therapy adherence, increase patient satisfaction and loyalty, and drive product preference and market share gains.

Headquartered in Newtown, PA, the Behavioral Insights Group brings over 20 years of experience in healthcare relationship marketing to develop best-in-class patient relationship marketing programs.

## ABOUT INVENTIV HEALTH

inVentiv Health, Inc. is a life science knowledge and services company purpose-built for the new healthcare marketplace. inVentiv has created a new model by converging a vast range of essential services to fully align with our clients' development and commercialization goals. With more than 13,000 employees supporting clients in 70 countries, our global scale and broad expertise make us an attractive strategic partner for companies seeking to get medicines to patients in a complex operating, regulatory and reimbursement environment. inVentiv Health's clients include more than 550 life sciences companies, including all 20 of the largest biopharmaceutical companies in the world. inVentiv Health, Inc. is privately owned by inVentiv Group Holdings, Inc., an organization sponsored by affiliates of Thomas H. Lee Partners, L.P., Liberty Lane Partners and members of the inVentiv management team. inVentiv Health transforms promising ideas into commercial reality for the financial success of our clients and the delivery of better treatments to patients worldwide. For more information, visit <http://www.inVentivHealth.com>.