Getting Tools Used

Lessons for Health Care from Successful Consumer Decision Aids

U.S. News & World Report:
AMERICA'S BEST COLLEGES

CONSUMER REPORTS:
CAR BUYING GUIDE

eBay.com

NUTRITION FACTS PANELS

NOTE: THIS IS ONLY A PORTION OF THE GETTING TOOLS USED RESEARCH REPORT. FOR THE FULL DOCUMENT AND OTHER INFORMATION VISIT WWW.CFAH.ORG.

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Executive Summary

Research Objective:

Americans use a variety of purchasing guides to help make choices about the cars they drive, the schools they select for higher education, and other consumer goods and food they purchase routinely. Such guides have successfully helped many consumers consider a wide array of features when they have multiple options and limited time or access to information from which to do their own analyses.

In the healthcare sector, both private and public sector groups have developed tools to help people make informed decisions about health plans, hospitals, long-term care facilities, doctors, and medical treatments. But these tools are not being used as widely and frequently as hoped by their developers, even as the health and healthcare decision-making role for consumers grows.

Through in-depth case studies of the following four successful commercial, non-health related decision support tools; *Consumer Reports: Car Buying Guide*; eBay; *US News & World Report*:: *America's Best Colleges*, and the FDA's federally mandated Nutrition Facts Panels (NFP), our research identified the key variables for the success of these popular tools; and describes the implications of these finding for the development of healthcare decision aids.

Methods:

The Center for Advancing Health (CFAH) used a framework developed by David Kanouse and his colleagues,[1] that defined seven basic principles for successful quality-reporting as the template for the case study research. CFAH obtained in-depth background on the four cases through both research of available literature and discussions with private and public sector officials and industry analysts. Inquiries focused on identifying the key factors in the development, marketing, dissemination and application of the four purchasing guides that contributed to their widespread use.

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[1] Kanouse DE, Spranca M, Vaiana M. (2004). Reporting about health care quality: A guide to the galaxy. *Health Promotion Practice* 5(3): 222-231.

In the second project phase, a review panel of five leaders with expertise in the development and dissemination of decision support tools for healthcare examined the four cases to extract lessons that developers and marketers of healthcare-related tools can apply to increase adoption and utilization. The review panel subsequently created individual commentaries analyzing the cases for variables of success and for the implications for healthcare. These commentaries were later supplemented by responses from key healthcare leaders at a meeting convened by CFAH, and with additional support from the Foundation for Informed Medical Decision Making (FIMDM) and the California Health Care Foundation (CHCF) in March of 2009.

The panel of reviewers were: Margaret Holmes-Rovner, PhD: Professor of Health Services Research in the Department of Medicine, Michigan State University; David Kanouse, PhD: Senior Behavioral Scientist at RAND Corporation; Stephen Parente, PhD, MPH: Academic Director, Medical Industry Leadership Institute, Associate Professor School of Finance at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota; Dale Shaller: Shaller Consulting; Shoshanna Sofaer, PhD: Professor of Health Care Policy, Baruch College, CUNY.

Lessons Learned: Key Variables of Success from the Getting Tools Used Case Studies

Our research identified several specific variables that led to the marketplace success of our cases. A few of the key variables for success follow:

Consumers Must Trust the Source
Sponsorship identity affects adoption, use, and referral of decision aids. The case study tools attracted users, in part, because the sponsoring organizations have strong brand legacies and consumers perceive them as trusted sources of information.

Tools Must Be Consumer-Centric
In successful decision aids, the content and functions are closely matched to the attributes and concerns of the target audience. Target audiences are also more likely to use a decision aid when they have a clear, compelling need for external information or support in making a choice. Such audiences understand that alternative choices have important differences, are motivated to seek information and decision support, and possess sufficient ability (such as knowledge, skills, etc.) to use the tool competently.

There Must Be a Viable Business Model.

A viable business model for the decision aid is defined as a way to generate revenue that supports ongoing production of and investment in the tool, or as in the case of the NFP, the target industry operates with very explicit regulatory/disclosure requirements. In each of the cases, the sponsor has devoted resources to ongoing marketing, promotion, and dissemination, which are paramount to their widespread use.

A National Strategy is the Most Effective

The marketing, and dissemination of our case study decision tools all benefited from a national approach and contributed to robust brands and recognition across diverse consumer populations. For every tool we studied, successful and consistent "branding" was a powerful force in building consumer awareness and use of tools and such "branding" was extremely influential in establishing and maintaining consumer trust.

Advancing Healthcare Decision Aids: Implications from the Getting Tools Used Research

Our research also identified strategies that sponsors, developers, and promoters of healthcare decision aids can employ to improve use of their tools. There are six key messages for healthcare stakeholders:

Tools Must Provide Information that is Otherwise Unavailable to the Consumer

The most important implication is that for healthcare decision aids to be successful they must first, target decisions that users deem important and sufficiently complex to require assistance.

Healthcare Decision Support Tools Must Meet a Ready Audience

Tools must provide users with information and support tailored to their needs and preferences at a salient point in their own decision-making process.

Tools Created within the Healthcare Industry Will Have Less Resonance with Consumers than Those Created by Independent Groups

A high degree of independence freed the sponsors of the four decision aids we examined to apply their full technical expertise in informing and supporting a consumer's decision, as exemplified by *Consumer Reports: Car Buying Guides*. In current report card and decision support tool efforts within healthcare, pressure from many stakeholders makes it difficult for decision aid sponsors to focus on the public (or subgroup of the public) as the audience, let alone deliberately develop customizable tools that resonate with consumer users, because of actual or possible stakeholder reactions.

Further, formal and informal alliances, among tools sponsors and the entities they are evaluating, undermine appearances of objectivity and trustworthiness.

The critical importance of objectivity regarding the "good" being evaluated strongly suggests that there is a need for an independent entity with a board constituted exclusively of people committed to the interests of healthcare consumers and patients and with a staff that has a wide range of experts in measurement, report design, marketing, and evaluation to lead the development of successful decision aids in healthcare.

Tools must have a strong brand identity

There is clear need for ongoing strategic marketing of the decision aid – both to build the "brand" and also to ensure widespread awareness.

Sponsors must develop a self sustaining business model, allowing the sponsor to reinvest in the evolution of the tool toward the consumer

No feasible private sector business models have yet emerged within healthcare to support sponsorship with these characteristics.

The success of a healthcare decision support tool largely depends on strategic timing

There is not significant evidence that an audience has yet been created for these tools. There may need to be more investments in public awareness campaigns to create an environment to support the tool.

Future Research

The Getting Tools Used research merits further analysis to develop implications for specific types of decision aids. We hypothesize that in addition to these broad determinants of success, there are unique aspects of quality reports and ratings which have not been captured in this analysis and recommend refinements on these broad conclusions be pursued for tools for support choices of institutions, health plans professionals, and treatments, and e-health platforms helping people manage their health. More generally, the field needs research that will:

- Support audience segmentation, identifying groups of early adopters.
- Improve tool developers' understanding of priority audience segments' needs and preferences.
- Indicate the investment needed to prepare new audiences for using decision aids.
- Explore whether people need a wholly different type of decision aid than is now available.
- Figure out effective branding, messaging, placement, and dissemination strategies to achieve widespread adoption.