



ACCURACY'S IMPACT ON RESEARCH  
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## Driving effective drug development and targeting through a consultative research approach: An interview with Novartis's Tjun Wong

As Executive Director of Market Research at Novartis Pharmaceutical, Tjun Wong guides the market research efforts for products in a wide range of categories, from cardiovascular to respiratory. Now in his seventh year with the company, Wong leads a department of 30 researchers and works with brand teams to help determine product and marketing strategy. Previously, he spent six years in marketing and market research at Eli Lilly, where he helped support strategy development and launch preparation of several neuroscience products, including Prozac, Cialis, and Cymbalta.

A\*I/R was lucky enough to spend some time with Wong recently, getting his perspective on how research should work with other areas of the company and what are the ingredients of a truly valuable segmentation.

*Can you tell us about your role at Novartis – what you see as your guiding functions?*

First and foremost, I guide my group to partner with our brand teams, helping to grow in-line products and successfully

launch new ones. To maximize the value of Novartis's brands, we need to proactively identify issues and opportunities – while of course performing our functions ethically and following legal guidelines. I am also focused on strengthening the foundations of the department – its skills and knowledge. A lot of my time is spent looking at ways that we can make things better in terms of research processes; so I try to stay close to the trends – what's important and what's driving the system. I am also very focused on the development of our associates' and managers' functional competency and their consulting skills – which is very important in what we do.



### *And what are you looking for in a research partner?*

As we're working to better develop ourselves as consultants, it's important that we find vendors to complement us. Take a segmentation study, for example. I can call up any one of our vendors and say, "I want to do a segmentation study," and they will be glad to handle it. But very seldom will they ask, "What are you doing a segmentation study for?" – really dig deep to find out how the results will be applied. I've seen people spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on a segmentation study and get a lot of nice, vanilla information that is not very actionable.

One thing I appreciate about Knowledge Networks (KN) – especially people like Justin Edge and his team – is their being a good partner for us in segmentation. They are able to work with us throughout the whole process – identifying up front how this information is going to be used, making sure that the team is comfortable as we go through the entire process of segmentation. We look at interim results and have the right workshop, the right discussions happening, all the way through to the end. I think this sets KN apart; and, as a result, they have a lot of credibility with our line partners – which is very important, of course, in terms of how the information will be accepted and used.

I think the power of the segmentation study is actually the discussions that the team is having as they look at a lot of the interim solutions, and then make a decision with our outside partners and our own internal researchers to say, "This is

the direction that we want to go. This solution is something that we can really use in terms of implementation." That's also the case in the area of positioning; there is a strong need to conduct workshops and meetings with our internal line partners to make sure that the right message or right research stimuli is being developed.

### *Can you talk more about the role of a consultative approach in your training and guiding of researchers at Novartis?*

I think, first and foremost, our researchers need to have the basic, fundamental knowledge, the technical competencies in market research. But just as important, maybe even more so, are consulting skills. When people start out in market research – myself included – we have more of a project management mentality. We identify the objectives, design the study; the result comes back, and we present the information.

But as people progress in their careers, there's a need to become more consultative. To be an effective consultant, you have to understand the fundamentals; the technical competency has to be there. Second, you have to understand the business. And third, you have to be able to think like our internal customers, our line partners. You have to know what's important to them and what kind of information they need to help them drive their decisions.

A lot of times when we conduct research, there may be a lot of information that's not really given to us by our internal

customers; they're not hiding it from us – it's just that they themselves may have not thought it through completely, and they also may not know how to phrase it to us. An effective market researcher – a true consultant – will help our line partners think through the issues to what is the core decision, the business decision, and then how you are going to implement the information once you have it. Only by helping our line partners think through all these will we be able to effectively design the study.

The strategic planning on the front end, I think, is often overlooked when we work with vendors and the market research agencies. They also have a project management mentality – take things at face value from their clients, then design the study without probing to find out what they want to do with that information. They just present the findings; and oftentimes the client will say, “Well, this is interesting, but that's not what I really need.” Of course, by then, it's too late!

The back end is also very important – how to effectively communicate the decisions that influence decision making. The role that we play is different than that of an outside consultant, in that we get to see it through implementation. We want to make sure that the information we provide is being used and implemented.

*I'm wondering if you see a special role for market research in enabling the drug development process – making approval and success as likely as possible.*

In the past, pharma product development was more clinically driven, without a lot of marketing input. When a phase three study was completed, they would bring in the marketing people and say, “Well, here's the data from our phase three trials.” Then they decide how they want to make use of the data in terms of the promotion. But by then – if the data doesn't support the product positioning – it's too late, right?

Our promotion has to be based on sound clinical trial data approved by the FDA. And the way to do it properly would be to start early, as your product – your compound – goes into phase two and phase three. You have to help the company look ahead, trying to identify the endpoints that we need to hit so that we have a commercial success. We try to help the company identify the key unmet needs of the marketplace. This is a joint effort between the commercialization team and their clinical and pre-clinical colleagues.

*This is definitely a time where companies are anticipating a contracting economy, and pharma has experienced revenue pressure. What are your thoughts about the importance of the need for higher quality research at a time when there's less room for error?*

Now, perhaps more than ever, we need to understand better the needs of our customers – the patients, caregivers, physicians, and payers. We have to zero in on the needs of the customers in specific segments that the products can be used to target. As the market becomes more and more crowded, you're going to have to look at certain segments as key targets for your medications. You really have to see how you can differentiate yourself and for which patient types. This really brings forward the importance of doing the right research – identifying the best patient types and needs so that we can position the product appropriately.

*What do you see as the biggest goals and challenges for your department right now?*

I always encourage my team to really look at the business holistically, so that we don't put on the blinders of a market researcher. You really have to see all the themes that are driving the business. How is the reimbursement status of our products impacting our prescribing? How is the field performing, the reps? They're using the material that we helped develop, so we need to know how are they executing it. What's impacting physician prescribing, and patients filling the drugs? When the co-pay is high, how is the patient reacting? And how is it impacting the physicians

when you have prior authorization or restrictions being put on your drugs?

You might argue, "Oh, that's not really the job of the market researcher"; but you can't avoid having to know that. You have to know the right colleagues to work with – in managed care or other areas – so that you understand what's driving the business. It's only then that you'll be more effective as a true partner, as a true consultant.