

Akron Children's Hospital, Part B

>Abstract

Northeastern Ohio is a highly competitive health-care market, especially for the care of seriously ill children. With powerhouse health care institutions like the Cleveland Clinic venturing into the children's care segment, Akron Children's needed a way to differentiate itself. The research profiled in this case helped develop the positioning of Akron Children's hospital and its promotional approach that resulted in an increase in its bed-occupancy rate, a key metric in the health care industry.

>The Scenario

Marcus Thomas LLC created preliminary advertising based on the brand promise it recommended to Akron Children's Hospital:

Akron Children's Hospital focuses ALL of the hospital's resources (energy, creativity, state-of-the-art technology, compassion, technical skill, competence, etc.) toward the simple goal of helping every child reach his or her full potential.

Within the first quarter, Marcus Thomas reconvened to evaluate the preliminary advertising and refine the brand message. Research on competitors' messages revealed that the Cleveland Clinic and Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital were emphasizing the high-tech nature of their medical practice as a means of defining their quality. Since Akron Children's faced this competitive counterpunch, Marcus Thomas decided to test whether the care-centered brand message they recommended was truly effective in influencing parents' hospital selection.

To test message performance, Marcus Thomas conducted two more rounds of research: focus groups (phase two) followed by surveys (phase three).

>The Research

Focus Groups

For phase two, Marcus Thomas organized 120-minute focus groups in three markets, convening participants from Mahoning Valley, Medina, northern Summit, and Portage Counties. (Akron Children's is located in Summit County; the other counties were targets for business growth.) All participants were parents of children between one month and 18 years of age. All parents had experienced an acute care incident requiring a hospital stay by their child of at least

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three consecutive days. Half were admitted to one of the following services: cardiology or cardiac surgery, hematology or oncology, neurology or neurosurgery, pulmonary or asthma, or orthopedics or orthopedic surgery. In all, 25 parents participated in one of the three studies. Most were females between 25 and 54 years of age. Medina, Summit, and Portage Counties participants had household incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000; Mahoning county participants had household incomes less than \$35,000. Each participant was paid a \$75 cash incentive.



Researchers sought to learn parents' perceptions of hospitals that conduct medical research, and they wanted to understand the physician and hospital selection process for parents of adolescents (12 to 18 years of age). Focus group participants discussed the hospital selection process, criteria for acute care, and sources of information parents considered most frequently in selecting care providers for a major illness.

Telephone Surveys

For phase three, 1,000 telephone surveys of health care decision makers were conducted between July 11 and August 2, with a 3.1 percent margin of error (at 95 percent confidence). Of the sample, 154 (15.4 percent) were high-acuity respondents (who had a child in a hospital for three or more nights). Forty-two percent of all participants had experience with Akron Children's. Most were female, with ages, income, and education across a wide range. Respondents were asked to evaluate Akron Children's, Cleveland Clinic Children's, and Rainbow Babies & Children's on a range of issues, including awareness (aided and unaided) of children's hospitals, awareness and messaging of hospital advertising, hospital preferences for medical specialties, factors influencing hospital selection, preferred hospital reference sources, knowledge of hospital positioning and branding promises, and the means by which parents interpreted quality in medical care. (See instruments).

Advertising Creative

As an outcome of findings from phase two and phase three research, Marcus Thomas developed three television and radio commercials (see DVD). The actual creative approach takes viewers into the lives of patients at Akron Children's. To make this real for viewers, Marcus Thomas filmed actual children and the dilemmas faced by their parents and doctors.

"These parents were incredibly brave, letting our staff video them at their most traumatic moments," shared Jennifer Hirt-Marchand, vice president and director



of research at Marcus Thomas. “We captured real patients, undergoing actual surgeries with real physicians. There was no reshooting or posing. It was like a documentary.”

Cameras filmed for three weeks, often 12 hours a day, as they followed multiple children and families through acute care. Videographers accompanied parents and children during physician consultations, explanations of medical procedures surgeries, waiting-room vigils, postsurgery reports, chemotherapy, rehabilitative care, and more. These dedicated advertising creative staff, sometimes themselves exhausted from living the trauma with their subjects, would return to Marcus Thomas during breaks to study hours of tape.

The footage and resulting commercials (see ads on your text DVD) testify to what researchers hypothesized after their original observation study and confirmed through the focus groups and surveys: that Akron Children's *lives* a unique brand promise and that its promise resonates with parents. Akron Children's experienced an 11 percent increase in market share as a result of this Marcus Thomas–created branding campaign.

The firm conducts periodic follow-up telephone surveys to ensure that the ads and brand message continue to influence parents' hospital selection decision making.

>Discussion Questions

1. Develop a focus group discussion guide for the research described above.
 - a. What topics should be discussed in what order?
 - b. What pretasking exercises might be relevant?
 - c. What exercises might you use during the focus group?
2. Evaluate the use of the telephone as the method for the survey.
3. Evaluate the questionnaire used for the telephone survey. Make sure to discuss scale type, question wording, question number, topic order, transitions, and interviewer directions.
4. Interviewers screened potential participants for whether they were the health care decision maker in the household and whether children were in the household. Identify other criteria that might have been used for screening and offer reasons for its inclusion or exclusion.
5. Evaluate the sampling decisions:
 - a. Was this an appropriate sample size?
 - b. What parameters might have been used in structuring this sample?

>URLs

www.akronchildrens.org
www.marcusthomasllc.com

Our grateful thanks for the willing participation of Akron Children's Hospital and Marcus Thomas LLC.



>Sources

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AKRON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AD RESEARCH

Introduction

Hello. May I please speak with the lady of the house? Hi, my name is [INSERT NAME] from [INSERT COMPANY.] We are conducting a survey on regional hospitals. Be assured this is not a sales call.

[IF NECESSARY, YOUR OPINION IS VERY IMPORTANT TO US.]
[IF NECESSARY: THE SURVEY LASTS LESS THAN 5 MINUTES.]

S1. Do you have any children under the age of 18 currently living with you?

Yes	[CONTINUE]
No	[TERMINATE]

S2. And into which one of the following age brackets do you fall?

Age	
Under 18	[TERMINATE]
18-25	[CONTINUE]
26-35	[CONTINUE]
36-45	[CONTINUE]
Over 45	[TERMINATE]

S3: And in what county do you reside? [TRACK]

Summit County	exclude any ZIP code within Northern Tier	[CONTINUE]
Northern Tier	N. Summit (44056, 44067, 44087, 44236, 44264, 44286) N. Portage (44202, 44231, 44234, 44241, 44255, 44288) N. Medina (44212, 44233, 44280)	[CONTINUE]
Mahoning Valley (Trumbull/Mahoning/Columbiana counties)		[CONTINUE]
Medina County	exclude any ZIP code within Northern Tier	[CONTINUE]
Mansfield/Wooster (Wayne/Richland/Ashland counties)		[CONTINUE]
Stark & Tuscarawas counties		[CONTINUE]
Other		[TERMINATE]

QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1: Have you seen advertisements for local hospitals on television recently?

- Yes
- No [TRACK, BUT TERMINATE]

Q2: For what hospitals were these commercials? [DO NOT READ, RECORD AS MANY ANSWERS AS NEEDED.]

	Q2
Akron Children’s Hospital	1
Akron City Hospital	2
Akron General Medical Center	3
Alliance Community Hospital	4
Aultman Hospital	5
Barberton Citizens Hospital	6
Bedford Hospital	7
Cleveland Clinic Children’s Hospital	8
Columbus Children’s Hospital	9
Cuyahoga Falls General Hospital	10
Doctors Hospital	11
East Liverpool City Hospital	12
Euclid Hospital	13
Fairview Hospital	14
Hillcrest Hospital	15
Lodi Community Hospital	16
Marymount Hospital	17
Massillon Community Hospital	18
Medina General Hospital	19
Mercy Medical Center / Timken Mercy	20
MetroHealth	21
Northside Medical Center	22
Parma Community General Hospital	23
Pittsburgh Children’s Hospital	24
Rainbow Babies and Children’s	25
Robinson Memorial Hospital	26
Salem Community Hospital	27
Sharon Regional Hospital	28
South Pointe (Suburban/Brentwood)	29
Southwest General	30
St. Elizabeth Health Center	31
St. Joseph Health Center	32
Summa Health System	33
Tod Children’s Hospital	34
Trumbull Memorial Hospital	35
Twin City Hospital	36
Union Hospital	37
University Hospitals Health System	38
Wadsworth-Rittman Hospital	39
Other _____ (Specify)	97
Don’t Know	98

Q3: [IF Akron Children's Hospital is not mentioned] Do you remember seeing TV commercials for Akron Children's Hospital recently?

- Yes
- No [SKIP TO D1]

Q4: What did the commercials mention about Akron Children's Hospital? [DO NOT READ, RECORD MULTIPLE ANSWERS.]

- A. Heart /Cardiac Services/Cheyenne
- B. Orthopedic Services/Hip Operation/Dysplasia/Maria story
- Other _____

Q5A. [IF ANSWERED A in Q4] Were you aware that Akron Children's Hospital had a heart or cardiac specialty service before seeing the TV commercial?

- Yes
- No

Q5B. [IF ANSWERED B in Q4] Were you aware that Akron Children's Hospital had an orthopedic specialty service before seeing the TV commercial?

- Yes
- No

Q6: After seeing the TV commercials from Akron Children's Hospital, did you visit Akron Children's Hospital's Web site?

- Yes
- No

Q7: And what are your impressions of Akron Children's Hospital after seeing the TV spots?

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

D1: For classification only, can you please let me know the ages of your children? **[RECORD AS MANY ANSWERS AS CHILDREN.]**

- Toddler
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 13
- 14 to 18

D2: And what is your marital status?

- Married
- Single
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

D3: Are you currently employed?

- Yes
- No

D4: What is the highest level of education you've completed?

- Grade school
- High School
- Some college
- College
- Graduate school

D5: In which of the following brackets does your total annual household income fall?

- Less than \$15,000
- \$15,000 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$44,999
- \$45,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- \$200,000 or more

D6: And finally, can you please let me know what your ZIP code is?

CONCLUSION

This concludes the survey. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and opinions!