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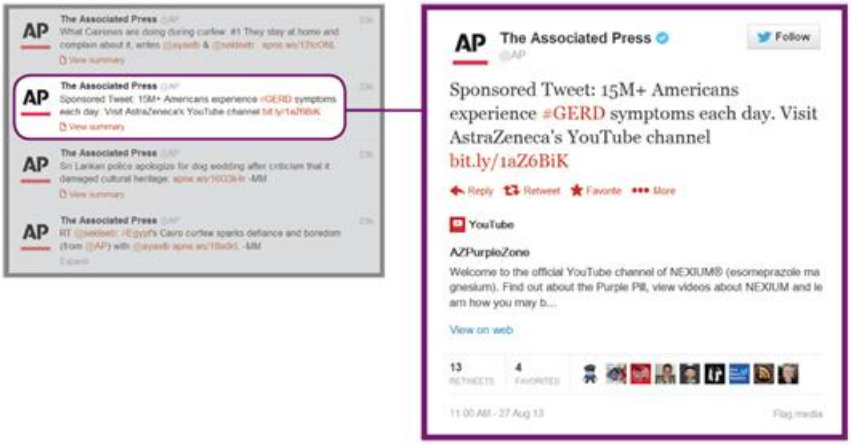
point of view

Social Media is Still Safe for Pharma Despite AstraZeneca Pulling Their Sponsored Twitter Ads

At Intouch we have always maintained that when it comes to pharma using social media, you must understand the technology and pay very close attention to **the details**. This has been proven once again. As reported by ***The Pink Sheet*** on August 30th, AstraZeneca pulled their sponsored tweets on Twitter after being made aware that the unbranded content in their sponsored tweets, which appeared in the Associated Press' Twitter feed, actually included the name of a prescription drug.

The two tweets in question, posted on August 27th, looked like disease awareness ads at first glance, but when the tweets were expanded through a user's click on an included link labeled "View Summary," they revealed a summary for AZ's YouTube channel. The summary included the name of AZ's acid reflux treatment, Nexium (esomeprazole), without the required important safety information making the tweet non-compliant. This was due to a shortened link (bit.ly link) in the initial tweet and Twitter's product, Twitter Cards.



What are Twitter Cards?

Nearly a year ago, Twitter introduced **Twitter Cards**. According to Twitter, the idea was to "make it possible for you to attach media experiences to tweets that link to your content." By simply adding a few lines of HTML, or meta tags, to web pages, users who tweet links to the content on those pages will have a "card" added to the tweet that's visible to all of their followers.

A Summary Card on Twitter.com with content attribution.

There are seven card types that Twitter has made available to content owners, each of which enhances a tweet that contains a link to the tagged content on Twitter's web and mobile clients:

- **Summary Card:** Default card, including a title, description, thumbnail, and Twitter account attribution.
- **Summary Card with Large Image:** Similar to a Summary Card, but offers the ability to prominently feature an image.
- **Photo Card:** A Tweet sized photo card.
- **Gallery Card:** A Tweet card geared toward highlighting a collection of photos.
- **App Card:** A Tweet card for providing a profile of an application.
- **Player Card:** A Tweet sized video/audio/media player card.
- **Product Card:** A Tweet card to better represent product content.

There are three criteria that have to be met to create a Twitter Card:

1. A site owner must determine what type of Twitter Card they want to be shown when a user clicks on a tweet with a link to their content.

2. The site owner must place the Twitter Card meta tags in the HTML code of the web site where the content resides.
3. The URL of the page where the Twitter Card meta tags exist must be validated through **Twitter's validator tool**.

What Happened with AstraZeneca's Sponsored Tweet?

AstraZeneca's situation is somewhat of a tangled web. There are a few players involved that made the Twitter Summary Card appear when users clicked on the "View Summary" link, making the tweet risky and possibly non-compliant. So, let's look at the players and their actions in these events:

- **YouTube:** AZ's Nexium YouTube Channel, AZPurpleZone, was the content being linked to by the original tweet. The channel is compliant and contains all of the necessary disclaimers and safety information. What many people may or may not know (including AZ) is that YouTube has placed Twitter Card meta tags on many of the channels hosted on YouTube. Although it is only speculation, YouTube may also have validated the Twitter Card meta tags ensuring the Twitter Summary Card would appear when a link to the content was used in a tweet.
- **AstraZeneca:** AZ or, more likely, one of its agencies composed an unbranded, sponsored tweet with a link to their "compliant" YouTube channel using a shortened bit.ly link. AZ, or their agency, then bought placements for this tweet on Twitter.
- **Associated Press:** AP either had inventory on their Twitter feed for the sponsored tweet to be placed in, or AP was selected by AZ or one of their agencies for the sponsored tweet placement. Either way, the sponsored tweet was posted on AP's Twitter feed. Again, this is speculation, but AP was one of Twitter's partners when they first introduced Twitter Cards and may have been the organization that validated the Twitter Card meta tags.

What happened to AZ could happen to any company that did not understand Twitter Cards and what sites or companies were using them. However, had they known that YouTube had placed the Twitter Card meta tags on the AZPurpleZone channel, this all could have been avoided. In fact, AZ could have used this to their advantage and created an even better Twitter experience beyond the 140 character limitations.

As *The Pink Sheet* pointed out in their article, this situation is similar to Novartis' use of the ShareThis sharing widget on their Tasigna site that received a Notice of Violation letter from the FDA. Like the Novartis issue, non-compliant meta data was the culprit that led to the violation. In AstraZeneca's case no notice has been issued.

Mitigating Pharma's Risk

There are two ways that AZ could have taken some simple steps and avoided having to pull their sponsored tweets from Twitter and the AP feed. First, is ensuring that the content they were linking to had compliant Twitter Card meta data. Working with YouTube, AZ could have created Twitter Card meta tags for the AZPurpleZone channel that did not put their tweet at risk. It may even have made the experience more interactive. And although it is unclear at the time of this writing whether or not YouTube would allow this type of collaboration, it is theoretically possible.

Along the same line of thinking, AZ had the opportunity to create very relevant and interactive tweets using Twitter Cards and the appropriate, compliant meta tags. Many industries, including pharma, have clamored for options on Twitter that go beyond the 140 character limitation, and Twitter Cards are that option. Instead of the original tweets being paired with the branded YouTube channel, the unbranded experience could have been extended and enhanced through other content including videos and imagery that could have been presented within the Twitter Card.

Finally, if using Twitter Cards and embedding meta data was not an option, AZ could have used a different URL shortener in place of bit.ly. Intouch clients have access to, and utilize, a pharma-safe URL shortener, ssshare.it. The shortened links created by ssshare.it do not allow Twitter Card meta tags to be enabled and the "View Summary" link to be shown to the end user. Therefore, the Twitter Card for AZ's tweet would have never shown up on AP's Twitter feed because the "View Summary" link would not have appeared on the sponsored tweet.

At Intouch, we understand the technology and all of the various communications platforms that exist today are making marketing more complex. But those platforms are also allowing us to have extremely relevant conversations with, and provide brilliant experiences for, our customers. But, we must understand the technology and exactly how even the smallest detail might effect our marketing to make those conversations and experiences a reality.

If you have any questions about Twitter Cards and how to use them effectively, please feel free to contact Jim Dayton at (913) 956-4496 or jim.dayton@intouchsol.com.