



## Rebuilding Pharma's Image: How Would Bill Clinton Do It?

By Sander A. Flaum, managing partner, Flaum Partners Inc.

*One of our most powerful strategic tools is still the old-fashioned thought experiment — “what if.” What if Steve Jobs had not returned to Apple? What if he had never left? Without expressing any lack of confidence in the current CEO, what would happen if an entirely different personality were in charge of PhRMA? Say – Bill Clinton?*

*Regardless of one's political leanings, it's hard to argue that Former President Bill Clinton is not a forceful and imaginative leader. What might be his approach to reinvigorating our industry? Since I posed the question, I had the honor of conducting the following (entirely imaginary) interview.*

**Flaum:** So, what does your plan for your first 100 days as the new CEO of PhRMA look like, Mr. President? What is the single most important goal you wish to accomplish for the organization in this span?

**Clinton:** The first thing on my “to do” list, it seems to me, is to launch a major public awareness campaign of what the pharmaceutical industry is all about.

**Flaum:** What exactly do you mean by that?

**Clinton:** Well, Sander, we have been immersed in an era of political lobbying for the past 10 years, and we have done a good job of convincing President Obama's healthcare consultants that we will certainly do our part what needs to be done to lower healthcare costs by offering an \$80 billion savings over the next 10 years. What we have not done is convince the public and Congress that we are the most innovative industry in the US — actually, in the world. We have not been able to communicate that critical message in a meaningful way. Who or what has done more for global health improvement than our industry?

**Flaum:** What kind of campaign are you thinking about?

**Clinton:** I am thinking of a massive campaign using all the media, interviewing heads of the pharma industry about the new products they have introduced over the past 5 years in all the therapeutic areas, such as infectious disease, including HIV, oncology, and neurodegenerative disease. Then we could garner some press on possible breakthrough compounds in development.

**Flaum:** Why do you think P.R. is that big a priority?

**Clinton:** I think it is incredibly important because we are being portrayed in the media and by certain members of Congress as a step below malpractice attorneys. We have really lost touch with the people. For instance, how many people know that most pharmaceutical companies offer programs whereby patients at a certain income level, who cannot afford insurance or the co-pay,

can get their drugs for free? We in this industry know that, but does the general public know about it? That's the question.

**Flaum:** Whom do you have in mind to execute a program like this? What shape will this program take?

**Clinton:** Well, at PhRMA we are very big on sharing other patients' experiences (under HIPAA, of course) with prospects suffering from the same maladies. Social media will play a big role here. We plan to use networking tools such as Facebook, Google, and Twitter so patients can learn from other patients what these important drugs did to cure them or to extend their lives and the lives of their family members.

**Flaum:** Mr. President, what are some of the mistakes you believe Big Pharma has made over the past 5 years or so?

**Clinton:** I believe we have lost our focus. I recall an era in the pharmaceutical industry when people within individual companies were media-trained to speak to local TV stations, radio stations, and newspapers to respond to inquiries, positive or negative, about the industry. They were trained, in every zip code, to get on the air to arrange interviews and speak to the public. I know someone quite well who actually grew up in that era who spoke to Rotary clubs and other neighborhood organizations about where the industry was headed and what we were doing. At some point, we just stopped talking to our public about what we were doing, and I think that was an egregious blunder.

**Flaum:** What are some of the things this industry has done recently that you are most proud of?

**Clinton:** Well, the first thing that comes to mind is our great accomplishments in the area of vaccines. Prevnar 13, for pneumococcal disease in children; Menveo, in that space for meningococcal disease. In the oncology area, Avastin . . . just amazing, and, in the area of ovarian cancer, carboplatin and Taxotere remain incredibly useful. Then consider how far we have come in the HIV space, with medications that have made a world of difference not only in this country but also in Africa. And what about neurology? A vaccine for Alzheimer's disease is in development, and we've made great strides in MS with Rebif, Copaxone, Tysabri, and a litany of other compounds. Yes, we have accomplished a lot.

**Flaum:** Thank you very much, President Clinton. We look forward to your new vision and a very positive turn for the pharma industry. Glad to see you're on the side of the real Innovators.

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