

## **Incorporating Chinese Herbal Medicine into the Western Medicine Cabinet**

Traditional Chinese herbal medicine (TCHM) deserves a place in the western medicine cabinet due to its safety and efficacy. Currently, however, lack of knowledge and familiarity with TCHM creates too big of a culture gap for this to happen. Given the choice between a bottle of vitamin C and a bottle of Gan Mao Ling, a common TCHM remedy for the common cold, westerners will undoubtedly reach for the Vitamin C. To overcome this barrier, I propose a phased strategic approach to indoctrinate TCHM into western culture.

### *Phase 1: Partnership with Industry*

“If you must play, decide upon three things at the start: the rules of the game, the stakes, and the quitting time” – Chinese proverb

Consumer choice is ruled by brand recognition and loyalty. Instead of competing with well-established brands, I propose to partner with them as a vehicle to introduce TCHM into mainstream western culture. Creating this partnership will increase the effectiveness and profits margins of western remedies, give consumers a natural choice under a brand they trust and, most importantly, expose the public to TCHM. Once culturally accepted through big brand recognition, companies can begin to effectively market stand-alone TCHM to the primed western consumer.

As with any business decision, partnering with industry comes at a price. The intention is not to dilute the power of TCHM, but rather open a door that will allow it to become a future household remedy. To make the stakes of this partnership worthwhile, we must ensure brands give TCHM the credit due in advertising and on the product label to successfully expose the public to TCHM. Below I propose to partner with brands in the top three over-the-counter (OTC) therapeutic areas by market share: cold remedies (34%), analgesics (23%) and digestive remedies (16%) (Havas Worldwide, 2017).

Under cold remedies, I propose to partner with Airborne, the third leading multivitamin brand in the US, grossing 124 million in profits in 2017 (IRI, 2017). The company is familiar with and currently uses a blend of Chinese herbs, including Jin Yin Hua, Lian Qiao, Ban Lan Gen and Jing Jie. I propose that Airborne expand their product line using pattern differentiation and core TCHM formulas. For example, for preventative immunity, Airborne could market “Immune Guard” that uses Yu Ping Feng San as a base. For sore throat, a more complete Yin Qiao San could be marketed as “Throat Rescue.” For sinus congestion, Cang Er Zi San could be marketed as “Nose Clear”.

Analgesics have the next largest percentage of the OTC market. Current western options for analgesics come with serious side effects. Long term NSAID use is associated with GI bleeding and most recently, a meta-analysis in 2017 found that taking NSAIDs for just 7 days or longer increases the risk of a heart attack (Bally et al., 2017). To help westerners better manage pain, I propose to partner with brands such as Icy Hot and BENGAY to produce product lines containing the major herbs of the external application remedy Dit Dow Ja. This formula includes herbs such as Dang Gui, Ru Xiang and Mo Yao to manage pain, reduce inflammation and boost circulation.

Finally, under digestive remedies, two profitable brands currently using TCHM can be used as market evidence to partner with other leading brands. The first example is Dramamine Non-Drowsy Natural. Instead of using the drug dimenhydrinate, this product

uses dried ginger (Gan Jiang) to cure motion sickness, helping the producers gross 140 million in their GI market of OTC remedies (Prestige Brands, 2017). Another example is the use of senna leaf (Fan Xie Ye) by the brands Ex-Lax and Senokat to relieve constipation. These two products gross over 35 million in yearly sales (IRI, 2015). Using these profitable examples, I propose to partner with leading brands such as Prilosec, Zantac and Gas-X to create natural product lines that incorporate digestive herbs such as Huo Xiang, Cang Zhu and Hou Po, or formulas such as Bao He Wan for indigestion.

### *Phase 2: Effective Marketing to Western Culture*

Once the public has been exposed to TCHM through big brand recognition, other entities can begin to effectively market stand-alone TCHM remedies. A successful business model to follow is Four Sigmatic, a US-based company that makes drinking mushrooms delicious and easy-to-do. Their product is sold in over 1,000 stores, including nationwide at Whole Foods and online as a best seller on Amazon. In 2017, Four Sigmatic tripled annual growth, marketing brilliantly to western culture using several key principles (Raphael, 2018).

First, the product uses simple, easy-to-understand western terminology to clearly explain the purpose and effects of each of its ingredients. Next, the product assures the safety of its ingredients by testing in third party laboratories for heavy metals and pesticides. The product uses high quality ingredients by working directly with an organic family farm in China that uses traditional methods to cultivate the most potent mushrooms. The product provides user-friendly packaging in single-serve packets, which at about \$1.25/serving are affordable, convenient to carry and perfect for the busy westerner on the go. The company empowers the consumer by providing knowledge about the medicinal value of mushrooms through a 100% free e-learning platform called Mushroom Academy. Finally, the company has a strong presence online using e-commerce, social media and influencer endorsement to diffuse the market.

In closing, to set TCHM apart from other natural health remedies we must take an innovative approach by first partnering with western brands. Once the public is exposed, then companies can effectively market stand-alone TCHM using key principles targeted to western culture. Looking to the future, as TCHM household remedies become a part of western medicine cabinets, consumers will begin to create the market demand for more integrative care in other areas of health. This will open the door for the large-scale use of TCHM in the western medical model, offering a clinically effective, safe and cost-effective method of preventative care and disease management.

## References

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