Eli Lilly’s Big Task: Become a Loved and Trusted Pharma Brand



Help wanted: Healthcare professionals who “do exceptional things” and “refuse to accept medicine as it is.” Those who are “unsatisfied, emotional, defiant” and “take things personally.”

A new film from Eli Lilly sounds like a recruitment ad, but it doubles as a brand manifesto to showcase the pharmaceutical company’s values. The campaign continues Lilly’s marketing push to transcend the pharma industry’s negative image and build a brand that emotionally connects with people.

“Seeking,” created by Wieden+Kennedy Portland and directed by Justyna Obasi through production company Anorak, defines the brand’s purpose to challenge the status quo in healthcare while “showing what it takes to work at Lilly,” said chief corporate brand officer Lina Polimeni.

“It’s important because the [pharmaceutical] category is typically full of mistrust,” Polimeni told ADWEEK. “There’s a

dissonance between the values of the people who work at Lilly and how pharma is seen by the public."

The campaign will run in the U.S. and comprise film, social media, print, and out-of-home advertising. Along with the hero spot, shorter videos focus on the characteristics of employees working in different business areas like manufacturing or quality control.

"Seeking" is the latest chapter of a marketing shift that began four years ago, when the team realized "we had never taken the time to tell the story of the brand," Polimeni said. "People knew our products but didn't know who Lilly was."

Aiming to build awareness and trust, Lilly has been positioning itself as a "medicine company" with humanity at its core: "At Lilly, we see a person on the other side of the prescription," Polimeni said.

The company hired Wieden+Kennedy Portland, the agency best known for its long-running Nike work, to debut its first corporate brand campaign in 2021 at the Tokyo Summer Olympics. The ad, "Health Above All," featured athletes and shared a message about the importance of prioritizing "our collective health."

Following the campaign, Lilly saw an 85% increase in awareness and a 40% increase in trust among consumers, Polimeni said.

Since then, it has aired ads to redirect the public conversation toward health during other cultural events such as the 2024 Academy Awards, where it hit back at those who misused weight-loss drugs for "vanity," and the 2025 Grammy Awards, when it encouraged people to check for signs of breast cancer.

Also this year, Lilly, which manufactures blockbuster weight-loss drugs Mounjaro and Zepbound, ran a sparse ad during the

Oscars that didn’t mention its own brand or any competitors by name. The spot urged consumers to be “skeptical” of weight-loss alternatives flooding the market that are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Lilly plans to run more ads throughout the year showcasing its values, according to Polimeni.

Along with “Seeking,” its work over the past four years has aimed to improve the craft and creative quality of pharmaceutical advertising. Lilly’s commercials have been more “cinematic, authentic, and human,” said Polimeni, who added that esteemed directors are now approaching the company about working on projects.

“People tend to dismiss pharma as a place where good creativity doesn’t happen,” Polimeni said. “But talking about health lends itself to a level of creative work that people don’t typically think about with pharma.”

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