

Business

The New York Times

Article 1 of 13 in Business

[◀ Previous](#)

[Next ▶](#)

[Skip to article](#)

[NYTimes.com](#)

[Go to a Section](#)

[Log In - Register Now](#)

[▶ TimesSelect FREE 14-DAY TRIAL!](#)



SEARCH

Business	Media & Advertising	World Business	Your Money	Markets	Company Research	Mutual Funds	Stock Portfolio	Columns
--------------------------	---	--------------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------------	------------------------------	---------------------------------	-------------------------

Gimme an Rx! Cheerleaders Pep Up Drug Sales

- [Sign In to E-Mail This](#)
- [Printer-Friendly](#)
- [Single-Page](#)
- [Reprints](#)
- [Save Article](#)

By STEPHANIE SAUL

Published: November 28, 2005

As an ambitious college student, Cassie Napier had all the right moves - flips, tumbles, an ever-flashing America's sweetheart smile - to prepare for her job after graduation. She became a drug saleswoman.

Ms. Napier, 26, was a star cheerleader on the national-champion University of Kentucky squad, which has been a springboard for many careers in pharmaceutical sales. She now plies doctors' offices selling the antacid Prevacid for TAP Pharmaceutical Products.

Ms. Napier says the skills she honed performing for thousands of fans helped land her job. "I would think, essentially, that cheerleaders make good sales people," she said.

Anyone who has seen the parade of sales representatives through a doctor's waiting room has probably noticed that they are frequently female and invariably good looking. Less recognized is the fact that a good many are recruited from the cheerleading ranks.

Known for their athleticism, postage-stamp skirts and persuasive enthusiasm, cheerleaders have many qualities the drug industry looks for in its sales force. Some keep their pompoms active, like Onya, a sculptured former college cheerleader. On Sundays she works the sidelines for the Washington Redskins. But weekdays find her urging gynecologists to prescribe a treatment for vaginal yeast infection.

Some industry critics view wholesomely sexy drug representatives as a variation on the seductive inducements like dinners, golf outings and speaking fees that pharmaceutical companies have dangled to sway doctors to their brands.

But now that federal crackdowns and the industry's self-policing have curtailed those gifts, simple one-on-one human rapport, with all its potentially uncomfortable consequences, has become more important. And in a crowded field of 90,000 drug representatives, where individual clients wield vast prescription-writing influence over patients' medication, who better than cheerleaders to sway the hearts of the nation's doctors, still mostly men.

"There's a saying that you'll never meet an ugly drug rep," said Dr. Thomas Carli of the University of Michigan. He led efforts to limit access to the representatives who once trolled hospital hallways. But Dr. Carli, who notes that even male drug representatives are athletic and handsome, predicts that the drug industry, whose image has suffered from safety problems and aggressive marketing tactics, will soon come to realize that "the days of this sexual marketing are really quite limited."

But many cheerleaders, and their proponents, say they bring attributes besides good looks to the job - so much so that their success has led to a recruiting pipeline that fuels the country's pharmaceutical sales force. T. Lynn Williamson, Ms. Napier's cheering adviser at Kentucky, says he regularly gets calls from recruiters looking for talent, mainly from pharmaceutical companies. "They watch to see who's graduating," he said.

"They don't ask what the major is," Mr. Williamson said. Proven cheerleading skills suffice. "Exaggerated motions, exaggerated smiles, exaggerated enthusiasm - they learn those things, and they can get people to do what they want."

Approximately two dozen Kentucky cheerleaders, mostly women but a few men, have become drug reps in recent years.

While there are no statistics on how many drug representatives are former or current cheerleaders, demand for them led to the formation of an employment firm, Spirited Sales Leaders, in Memphis. It maintains a database of thousands of potential candidates.

"The cheerleaders now are the top people in universities; these are really capable and high-profile people," said Gregory C. Webb, who is also a principal in a company that runs cheerleading camps and employs former

cheerleaders. He started Spirited Sales Leaders about 18 months ago because so many cheerleaders were going into drug sales. He said he knew several hundred former cheerleaders who had become drug representatives.

"There's a lot of sizzle in it," said Mr. Webb. "I've had people who are going right out, maybe they've been out of school for a year, and get a car and make up to \$50,000, \$60,000 with bonuses, if they do well." Compensation sometimes goes well into six figures.

The ranks include women like Cristin Duren, a former University of Alabama cheerleader. Ms. Duren, 24, recently took a leave from First Horizon [Pharmaceuticals](#) to fulfill her duties as the reigning Miss Florida U.S.A. and prepare for next year's Miss U.S.A. pageant.

1 [2](#)

[Next Page >](#)

[Next Article in Business \(1 of 13\) >](#)

[Order an Online Edition of The NY Times & Read at Your Leisure](#)

Related Articles

- [Memo Emerges As a Key Part Of Bias Lawsuit](#) (February 23, 2005)
- [12 Women File Bias Suit Against Large Drug Maker](#) (February 18, 2005)
- [THE MEDIA BUSINESS: ADVERTISING; Wal-Mart and Eli Lilly turn to full-page ads to address their critics.](#) (January 14, 2005)
- [COST OF BENEFITS CITED AS FACTOR IN SLUMP IN JOBS](#) (August 19, 2004)

Related Searches

- [Drugs \(Pharmaceuticals\)](#)
- [Hiring and Promotion](#)
- [Cheerleaders](#)

Inside NYTimes.com



[Review: HBO's 'Yesterday'](#)



[Dynamic Modernism in Germany](#)



[Waiting for Havana](#)



[Gaza Prepares for a Harvest](#)



[The John Henry of the Information Age](#)

Advertisement

 **Most E-Mailed Articles** *The New York Times*

[Past 24 Hours](#) | [Past 7 Days](#)

1. [Just Try to Sleep Tight. The Bedbugs Are Back.](#)
2. [Pension Officers Putting Billions Into Hedge Funds](#)
3. [The Quick Fix | Easy Grades for Athletes: Poor Grades Aside, Athletes Get Into College on a \\$399 Diploma](#)
4. [Holiday Books: 100 Notable Books of the Year](#)
5. [The Nation: Kids Gone Wild](#)

[Go to Complete List](#)

1. [Just Try to Sleep Tight. The Bedbugs Are Back.](#)
2. [Editorial Observer: Why the United States Should Look to Japan for Better Schools](#)
3. [Holiday Books: 100 Notable Books of the Year](#)
4. [This Is Your Brain Under Hypnosis](#)
5. [Making Artists: Video Games Are Their Major, So Don't Call Them Slackers](#)

[Go to Complete List](#)

SPONSORED BY

Technology
nytimes.com/tech

**CYBER
MONDAY**

**CYBER
MONDAY**



[Before buying gifts, do comparison shopping online](#)

Also in Technology:

- [➔ Compare digital cameras in every price range](#)
- [➔ Compare the most popular cellphones](#)
- [➔ Compare iPods to other MP3 players](#)

Advertisements

- [**Affordable security from HP**](#)

[HP Smart Desktop Management Service.](#)

www.hp.com

- [**\\$7 Trades, No Inactivity Fees & Free In-depth Research. Scottrade.**](#)

- [**Earn 4.00% APY with hsbcdirect.com Online Savings. Member FDIC.**](#)

- [**Affordable security from HP**](#)

[HP Smart Desktop Management Service.](#)

www.hp.com



[The New York Times STORE](#)



[Forever Fab commemorative newspaper](#)

[Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company](#) [Home](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Search](#) [Corrections](#) [XML](#) [Help](#) [Contact Us](#)
[Work for Us](#) [Site Map](#) [Back to Top](#)