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Creating a Successful DTC Campaign on the Inside

By **Dan Limbach**

While most major direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising campaigns in the medical device and pharmaceutical industries are created and managed by outside agencies, outsourcing a DTC marketing campaign can be expensive. When budgets are lean—as they are in today’s marketplace—marketers need to look at how much can be done with in-house resources. But with fewer people being asked to do more than ever, how does a company handle bringing more of the work in-house?

Carrie Nelson, Manager New Hope Parkinson Program, and Laura Virden, Market Development Manager, of Medtronic shared the story of their two-year journey tackling this problem at the recent “Direct to Consumer Strategies for Medical Devices” conference organized by the Center for Business Intelligence.

Medtronic’s New Hope DTC Program

Nelson and Virden spearheaded the award-winning DTC efforts for Medtronic’s Activa Therapy, widely regarded as the most significant advancement in treatment for Parkinson’s disease in 30 years.

Over 1 million people suffer from PD. The DTC program, called New Hope for Parkinson’s was launched to capture a significant share of this market through e-communications and interactive services, raising awareness of Activa Therapy and encouraging prospective patients to find out if they could benefit from it.

The New Hope for Parkinson’s Program offers insights from the country’s leading movement disorders clinicians and other experts, including people who are living with Parkinson’s.

Medtronic wanted New Hope to be a source of both information and inspiration to the Parkinson’s community. The communications goal is to engage the hearts and minds of patients through informative, holistic and inspiring health and wellness information while educating them about Activa Therapy. The tone of the program is one of compassion, hope and empowerment.

Capture-Cultivate-Close-Support

Activa Therapy is 87% effective, implanted in over 30,000 patients, and covered by Medicare and most private insurance plans. What’s the “catch?” It’s brain surgery. It’s an elective procedure. And the referral channel is weak.

Medtronic decided on a “capture-cultivate-close-support” strategy: Capture leads through an awareness campaign; Cultivate prospects through education; Close deals through clinical evaluations; and finally, Support implanted patients. Execution was the key issue once the strategy was determined.

Questions to Ask Before Beginning

Nelson and Virden were part of a three-person core team within Medtronic, and dedicated 90% of their efforts to this project. That meant they needed to marshal resources within Medtronic, but also bring in outside resources. They asked four principal questions when considering an inside-driven campaign:

1. Does it make sense for you to create your own campaign?
2. Does your staff have the skills, resources and drive to be successful?
3. Do you know what you should manage and what you should outsource?
4. Can you maintain what you build?

Program elements included a website, an email newsletter, a direct mail campaign, and physician interaction events.

“This is a first-of-its-kind therapy,” said Nelson, “and there is no real competition. We know the therapy best, have spoken to patients extensively, and we knew what we wanted for our brand building strategy. We felt it would be difficult to transfer this kind of knowledge to an external agency.” Ultimately, Medtronic developed its strategy internally and outsourced much of the execution.

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Internally, Medtronic kept the following responsibilities:

- Developed and held the vision
- Strategy
- Promotional concepting and copywriting
- Brand/creative development
- Campaign development and execution
- Analytics

These are the tasks they outsourced:

- Design
- Copywriting articles
- Much of the HTML programming
- Advertising buys
- Some direct mail
- Fulfillment/call center

Manage Resources and Delegate

Managing outside partners was a crucial component of the project. Medtronic was successful with this because they (1) shared the vision and the enthusiasm with all participants, (2) understood the big picture and how the partners fit in, and (3) they made their partners truly feel like part of the team.

Roles were assigned to all team members, including:

- Team leader
- Editorial and brand manager
- Creative
- Campaign manager(s)
- Advertising manager
- Campaign execution manager
- ROI manager, analyst
- Technical and administrative support

When selecting resources, each had different skill requirements. For example, technology team members were expected to handle things like spam laws, database technology, servers, and analytics.

Keys to Success

There were several key points that contributed to a successful internally-driven campaign. First, they put the patient first. Second, they believe in the therapy. Finally, they provided a great deal of creative freedom. Medtronic was able to infuse their obviously genuine passion into the project. Compare that to the less intense passion an outside agency would have for the treatment.

“Market with a vengeance or don’t market at all,” stated Nelson.

To keep management on track with the project, they suggest scheduling an “early win,” such as acquiring a specific number of email subscribers by a certain date. When management sees solid progress, they are more likely to offer increased support and funding for the project.

The project cost “Well under a million dollars a year,” according to Nelson. Outsourcing the bulk of the work would have cost the company considerably more.

Companies can bring a large portion of work in-house if they know their limitations, get management on board early, and plan well in advance of each milestone. Outsourcing will always play a key role, but companies can take on more of the work when budgets are skimpy. It’s comforting to know that a successful DTC campaign under this hybrid approach is not only possible, but likely when managed properly.

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