

Translating medical science into communications: Shaping a compelling message

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This is the fourth in a series of articles from [Precision Medicine Group](#) on advances in clinical trials and new strategies for market access and reimbursement.

Traditional Madison Avenue agencies used to see specialized healthcare communication agencies as beneath them. “We always felt like the red-headed stepchild. People didn’t think there was an opportunity to do creative work in the medical area,” said Deborah Lotterman, chief creative officer of Boston-based healthcare marketing agency [precisioneffect](#).

Times have changed. With Boston’s advertising acumen, and as the hub of medicine-meets-technology, agencies like [precisioneffect](#) (part of Precision Medicine Group) are proving that medical communications can stir the heart, while educating patients and physicians to adopt new therapies.

Ironically, government regulations spurred healthcare agencies to up their game. When pharmaceutical sales representatives could no longer legally woo physicians with incentives, agencies were charged with finding better ways to spread the word. “You had to educate and market on the merits of the product,” said Lotterman. “That approach is benefitting patients and medicine as a whole.”

The challenge is conveying the message within a tight regulatory framework, accurately representing the product and data. “In a lot of other marketing, we talk about agencies thinking outside the box,” Lotterman said. “In medical communications, we have to think inside the box.”

Humans don’t just need data, they’re impacted by emotions. They need to understand the therapy’s promise. “And

that's our job, to convey the promise in a way that's aspirational, but completely accurate and supported by data."

Agencies find marketing success by understanding and focusing on the patient, physician and payer perspectives. For example, one of precisioneffect's clients is Cologuard, a home screening test for colorectal cancer. While an invasive colonoscopy is 98% effective in diagnosing colon cancer, the noninvasive Cologuard is 92% effective. "It seems obvious that everyone 50-plus should screen for colon cancer, but not everyone does," Lotterman said. Through patient interviews and research, precisioneffect found that the target demographic isn't concerned about colon cancer, and patients wrongly believe that if they eat well and have no family history, there's minimal risk. Add a lifestyle factor, not wanting to prep and take an out-patient test. "We really thought of in-home diagnostic testing as fitting into their lifestyle," she said.

So far the message is working, with double digit sales increases from television ads driving patients to the website. "They're moving through the education and discussion guidelines on that site. We track that with metrics. They're going to their doctor and asking for the product in an appropriate way," she said.

Lotterman is excited to share Precision Medicine Group's [capabilities with Boston area bio-tech companies](#), including those who participated in last week's HUBweek events. "Boston and Cambridge are the epicenter of medicine and new therapies," she said. "These companies are combining technology and medicine. We think like that too. There's the chance for remarkable synergies that will truly transform how we manage our health."