

WHAT MAKES A GREAT DEVICE AGENCY

The ad agency that truly understands a device client's unique needs is a rare but valued commodity, says **Steve Speares**

Medical device marketing is a different animal from pharma marketing. Many agencies fail to grasp that, leading to great frustration. When you find an agency that speaks your language, things look up. And when that agency is as good as its first impression, you've found a valued business partner. Following are six qualities that distinguish great device agencies.

1 They understand our world. The key feature of a great device agency is the ability to understand devices and the high level of accountability associated with them. Most agencies don't understand this, but good ones do. They seek to understand not just the product, but the procedure. Everything begins with this understanding.

2 They share our responsibility. Surgery is a major invasion of the body. Because a surgical device functions as an extension of a surgeon's talent, it has to uphold every promise made by the device manufacturer. The quality of any device is a tremendous responsibility, which we live daily. Our agency needs to, as well.

3 They act quickly and effectively. The device world can change in a heartbeat. In pharmaceuticals, the market leader can plan strategies to ward off competitive threats well in advance. In the device world, competition moves quickly and unexpectedly. One day to the next can mean a change that results in a redirection in strategy. A great agency is ready to shift gears at a moment's notice.



IMAGE: JUPITERIMAGES

4 They build symbiotic relationships. A great agency understands everything that touches the device. At the end-user level, there are multiple touchpoints. Surgeons, nurses, biomed, purchasing, materials management—all are part of the decision process and any one can be a roadblock or the key to adoption. A great agency can speak with every target and understands each one's unique needs.

5 They invest their time and people in our business. A great agency invests the time, effort and resources to gain a deep understanding of our devices. We have to be willing to incentivize them to take this deep dive. Great agencies also assign smart, genuinely engaged people to sit at our table—folks who can give us a critical and objective perspective that is invaluable to our marketing teams.

6 They put our minds at ease. The final ingredient in a great device-agency relationship is trust. Agencies and clients have to work together to squeeze the most out of every dollar. When you have complete trust that your agency is looking after your interests and stewarding both your brand and your budget, you sleep well. And in these tumultuous times, a good night's sleep is a rare but appreciated commodity. Kind of like a great device agency. ■

Steve Speares is VP, global franchise head, Alcon Surgical, Alcon Laboratories, Inc.



WHAT MAKES A GREAT DEVICE CLIENT

The more a client shares about their technology, the more passionately the agency can promote it, says **Nancy Beesley**

After many years in the device ad business, I've come across all kinds of clients. Most have been pretty great, with a few exceptions. Once in a while, you get the perfect device client. You might be skeptical that such an elusive creature exists, but I can tell you, it lives and breathes. So what makes a great device client?

1 They know their customers. The connection between device makers and the surgeons who use their products is a trusted partnership. Great clients don't learn about their customers by reading statistics or studies—they know them by being in the field or in the O.R. with them. They understand that loyalty is based on solid relationships.

2 They develop new devices based on market needs. We've all had the client who asks us to create a market for a device that's very cool but no one needs it. Great device makers are so ingrained in their customers' worlds that they base all their R&D on unmet needs and the relentless pursuit of making what they have even better.

3 They know how to segment the market. Devices are essentially technologies that are adopted by different doctors at different rates. Innovators see things much differently than late-majority surgeons do. Both are important targets, but they have different motivations and different wants and needs. Great device clients understand that to get the right message out, you have to know where you're aiming.

4 They make us part of their world. When a great device client brings us on, they ask us to be at live surgeries, learn their machines, attend their conferences and talk to their surgeons. They know that the more we know about their technology, the better we can help sell it. You can't get this kind of intimate working knowledge from a clinical study. You have to experience it.

5 Devices are their passion. Great device clients are devoted to their products. They look for agencies that share their passion and understand the differences between marketing devices and drugs. When the agency presents creative for a device, it's not going to show smiling patients running on the beach. That's pharma. Device marketing is based on the doctor's relationship with the technology.

6 They're smart AND nice. These two often seem to be mutually exclusive in the corporate world. Device companies attract very smart marketers who are on a constant rollercoaster—everything moves quickly. This can be frustrating and stressful, but great device clients remain nice and say “thank you” after working together.

It's not easy to find all these qualities in one client, but it is possible. When both players bring trust, knowledge and a passion for devices to the table, you unleash the freedom to do your best work. ■

Nancy Beesley is partner, chief marketing officer, HCB Health.