

**Adrienne Fanti and Tracy Peterson** take a look back at the extraordinary lives and achievements of the Medical Advertising Hall of Fame's three newest members

## Steven Girgenti



**1970s** Spent most of the decade in marketing positions with Squibb, Carter Wallace and Endo DuPont, where he was instrumental in the development and successful launch of Percocet

**1990s** In 1990, Girgenti acquired Rubin Reid Noto Ehrenthal—making him the first and only head of a medical agency to buy a consumer agency. He was also the first to take a healthcare agency public, something he did with GHBM in 1997. His accomplishments were acknowledged when he was named “Entrepreneur of the Year” by NASDAQ in 1999

"A lot of people would think it's radically different. Some ways it's different and some ways it's not," says Girgenti. "It's so much easier today because of the media mix available. It started as print and then DTC and now we have the digital evolution."



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 (Desferal peroxide)

- 1) Proper pharmacokinetic drug delivery system
- 2) Proven significantly improved Theronide 9% over leading brands
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- 1) The only prescription, shaving cream Contains benzoyl peroxide
- 2) Available in 1% and 5% strengths Supplied in 4 oz. tubes





































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and launch of Percocet. In a move that showcased his visionary determination, Girgenti convinced management at Endo to market Percocet before Johnson & Johnson got its hands on the drug. His bold move protected Percodan and became a major source of business for Endo DuPont.

“We ended up dominating the market,” says Girgenti. “The competition challenged the logarithm but the FDA didn’t know what to do because there were no limitations about computer

projected data [at that time]. We created a very good product in a short amount of time and that experience let us become experts in marketing for the drug product.”

In 1986, Girgenti co-founded Girgenti, Hughes, Butler & McDowell (GHBM), a company that started as a traditional medical ad agency, but soon became more heavily involved in DTC advertising. After having to prove that Girgenti’s consumer agency was better than a corporate medical agency (a challenge brought on by the pharma division from an existing GHBM account), Girgenti vowed he would never be tested like that again. He went to look for in-house expertise at a consumer agency, but discovered that all media buying was being outsourced at that time.

In 1990, Girgenti acquired Rubin Reid Noto Ehrenthal—making him the first and only head of a medical agency to buy a consumer agency. Under his leadership, Girgenti was able to produce an international agency that offered every marketing service in every major world market so that a pharmaceutical client would never have to go outside for any service. Shortly after the acquisition, GHBM had more than 20 DTC assignments and became the leader in the industry.

With its formidable scope, GHBM was able to go public in 1997 and become Healthworld. Girgenti continued to lead Healthworld and later Ogilvy Healthworld until his retirement in 2009.

## Irwin Lerner



### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1950s** After serving in the Korean War, he got a job as the assistant to the assistant advertising manager at Organon and rose up the ranks over the course of nine years

**1960s** Joined Geigy as sales promotion manager but was recruited to work at Roche in 1962 after only a short time at Geigy. He spent the next 32

years at Roche, 12 of them as CEO

**1980s** Conceived the idea of co-promoting Zantac along with Glaxo, the first time two competing firms joined to promote a single brand under unique financial arrangements

**1990s** Helped bring into public law the Prescription Drug User Fee Act (PDUFA) for which he received the Citizen’s Medal from then FDA commissioner Dr. David A. Kessler

Even though he’s been “retired,” for the last 20-something years, Irwin Lerner still feels as strongly about the pharmaceutical industry as he did when he was creating award-winning ads and speaks passionately about his efforts in testifying before Congress about the Prescription Drug User Fee Act.

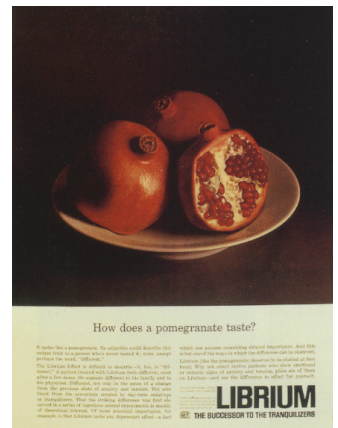
“I was one of the few people who wanted to create a relationship with those who regulate the industry,” he says. “I had a hell of a job to convince people of this. I was screamed at and called a Communist and a super liberal.”

His efforts paid off, however, and he was awarded the Citizen’s Medal from then FDA Commissioner Dr. David A. Kessler.

This was only one accomplishment in a colorful career in the pharmaceutical industry. Shortly after he returned from fighting in the Korean War, Lerner sought a job. He says he wasn’t too picky, but knew he wanted to work in advertising. Lerner was called for an interview at Organon for a position as the assistant to the assistant

advertising manager (the lowest job on the totem pole, he says). “I didn’t know a medical copywriter from a hole in the wall,” he explains, but he managed to do well enough in the interview and was asked to create an ad campaign as a test for the job. Through his tenure there, Lerner realized that working in pharma was what he wanted to do. He says he got into how well the company reached out and was really concerned about helping to heal people.

His career at Organon was a jumping-off point which led him to a job at Geigy. He was only at the company for a short time before a headhunter came calling for a job that he realized was at Roche. He took the job in 1962 as advertising product manager for Librium.



### Lerner’s first assignment at Roche was creating ads for Librium

“It was a tremendous opportunity for me,” he recalls, as this was his first foray into Big Pharma and a chance to help people on a much larger scale. Although Lerner’s first role at Roche was working on Librium, for the treatment of anxiety, he also simultaneously began work on Valium for anxiety/psychic tension and had the daunting task of distinctly differentiating them, which required creativity and ingenuity.

“Lerner carefully shepherded the two campaigns with great skill, so that physicians understood where, how and why to prescribe each,” says Win Gerson who helped launch Valium while with William Douglas McAdams. “The introduction of Valium also successfully employed audio-visual systems [deployed] by the Roche sales force and created by advertising, which was tough and primitive by today’s standards. The systems were unique and gained valuable dialogue time in physician offices.”

Another use of innovative methods by Lerner—and one of his most enduring achievements—came in 1965 with the Network for Continuing Medical Education (NCME). Lerner called it a breakthrough in continuing medical education. He says the idea initially involved using closed-circuit TVs to allow doctors to get information “sitting at home in their undershirts, with a six pack like the rest of us did at the time.” That led to taking the idea into hospitals and establishing a private hospital television network which grew rapidly to hundreds of hospitals. In addition to presenting new medical and surgical information and techniques to hospital-based audiences, the first product-specific ads were developed for this medium. According to the NCME website, the network has attracted more than 58 million CME participations to date.

His long career at Roche garnered Lerner many great achievements such as creating the NCME and his work with the government as an advocate for the industry, but he credits earning the CEO position at the company, which he held for 12 years before retiring, as the highlight.

"After 23 years at the company, I drew the short straw and became CEO and president," he jokes. "I always had the firm belief that I could do it and I did. I had the chance to do what I wanted to do in that great role."

It was while he was at the helm of Roche that he embarked on what many call a major pharmaceutical marketing innovation, the first-ever co-promotion deal with the then recently established US Glaxo organization. He enlisted the help of Glaxo president (and his friend) Joe Ruvane to co-promote Zantac. The landmark deal achieved enormous success in the US, with Zantac becoming the market-leading H2 blocker in a very short time and the first billion dollar US prescription entity. Roche and Glaxo subsequently teamed to promote the antibiotic Ceftin, also with great success.

"It's been imitated by many, but its success has never been duplicated," says Lerner matter-of-factly of the deal. The same could be said of Lerner's long and storied career in pharma advertising.

## Mel Rubin



### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1940s** As an officer in the US Navy, edited a daily newspaper printed aboard the ship, setting the tone for a future in communications and publicity  
**1950s** Connected with a high school buddy while working as a copywriter for D.H. Ahrend Company and together they started Shaller Rubin Company in New York

**1960s** Won the Garanimals TV campaign, a \$6 million effort (huge for that era) that made the brand, virtually overnight, the fastest growing line of infant, toddler and pre-school clothing in the US

**1970s** At a session on "How to Use TV for Marketing of Rx Products," he created a spot about a hypertension product. The attendees only debated the commercial but not the idea of using TV to market Rx drugs

In some ways, Mel Rubin's career evolved organically, through no fault of his own. He enlisted in the US Navy and spent two years as a communications officer. During that time, he edited a daily newspaper printed aboard the ship and later wrote speeches for admirals and Marine Corps generals. He also conceived and pitched the Navy communications hierarchy on setting up a tour of Navy Combat Art. He traveled the US with this tour doing publicity. After he was detached from the Navy, he was called back to take the art tour (Operation Palette) to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, and was promoted to full lieutenant, US Navy.

This work prepared Rubin for the advertising and public relations industry, where his first job was as a copywriter for a large direct marketing company, D.H. Ahrend Company.

"My first writings were mail order ads," he recalls. "You become sensitive to words. If you see an ad repeated in some way, you know there's magic in the ad, magic in the words."

It was through his work at D.H. Ahrend that he learned about the importance of ROI and the art of the mail order. He set out to start his own agency with a high school buddy. In 1950 they started

the Shaller Rubin Company. The company grew quickly and its founders amassed clientele by working seven days a week. Rubin landed business for several pharma clients, including Schering. The agency was assigned to write and produce a monthly, multi-page, plastic-bound brochure for the Schering sales force, featuring every product in the line. After that, the pharma clients came pouring in. One of those clients was Norwich Eaton Pharmaceuticals which assigned the firm its Chloraseptic business. Rubin was tasked with introducing the OTC product.



Rubin was a pioneer in creating consumer ads for pharma products

"I told them if I didn't double the [Chloraseptic] volume, to fire me," he says. "I doubled it in three months. I used to send out recordings of famous speeches to show people that if they had a sore throat, they wouldn't have been able to give that speech."

Rubin was a forerunner in DTC and was responsible for creating one of the country's first hybrid agencies which did consumer and pharma accounts all under one roof. "I didn't decide to do consumer," he explains. "It evolved."

He is "one of these rare people that combines confidence and charisma," says Pacific Communications president Ryan Abbatte.

Fellow inductee Steven Girgenti agrees: "Mel is a vibrant, terrific guy with a lot of wit and enthusiasm." His can-do attitude is what has made him so successful throughout his long career.

He continually pushed the limits of what was "allowed" to be done and broke those barriers down. In the mid-1960s he created a commercial for Chlor-Trimeton that never mentioned the name of the product but instead instructed potential patients to talk to their doctor, a taboo in the industry. This spot was well-received by the client and heralded as "charming," "inventive," "amusing," "creative" and "utterly impossible" by Schering's management.

This type of inventive thinking and advocacy led Don Lee, of Eaton Laboratories, to put Rubin on the program to manage a rostrum at the upcoming meeting of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturer's Association, a special session on "How to Use TV for Marketing of Rx Products" in the 1970s. He presented a spot for an unbranded hypertension product. Instead of attendees debating whether or not TV was an acceptable avenue for promoting Rx products, they left the session only talking about the spot Rubin had created.

Abbatte sums up Rubin's influence and effect on people. "Mel is bigger than life," he says. "You don't soon forget when you've worked with him. ■"