



Snow Companies

Finding a unique focus by letting patients speak for themselves

AT THE HELM

Brenda Snow, CEO

PERFORMANCE

Headcount topped the 90-employee mark

HIGHLIGHTS

Client roster consists of 40-plus firms doing \$50 billion in sales

Racked up “a number” of new account wins over the past year

Work spans categories from MS to autoimmune disorders to schizophrenia and Alzheimer’s

CHALLENGES

Negotiating legal and medical issues for clients

For contact details, service offerings and client roster, see Agency A-to-Z, beginning on page 187



Specializing in grooming patient spokespersons is the main order of business at the Snow Companies, a Williamsburg, VA-based boutique that was founded 12 years ago by CEO Brenda Snow.

“Brenda was our first Patient Ambassador,” says COO Corbin Wood. Snow had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in the early ’90s, and Wood, who was working on the US launch of Rebif for Serono, hired her to help patients understand the disease and treatment options through the lens of her experience. Realizing the power of patient stories in word-of-mouth marketing, Snow and Wood went into business.

From an initial staff of six in 2001, the shop has grown to more than 90 and trained thousands of patient ambassadors for “a Who’s Who of pharma and biotech,” says Wood. The agency’s client roster consists of 40-plus firms doing \$50 billion in sales. Their work spans categories from cancer to MS to autoimmune disorders to schizophrenia and Alzheimer’s.

“We’re a company that was founded by someone who really understands what patients want and need,” says Wood. “I came here with an understanding of the regulatory and legal landscape and the challenges of being a good brand steward. This is very analogous to what you would do on the professional side developing

KOLs and helping them to manage their key patients.” The power of patient ambassadors, says Wood, is writ deep into the human mind.

“Stories are the oldest form of communication,” he says, “and our brains are wired to understand things as stories. We help these individuals to share their stories in a way that’s legally and medically compliant so that the system can learn from them.”

The business includes Snow-Wood Productions, their multimedia production arm, which produces the web series “Courage with Brenda Snow;” Snow Global, which represents ex-US business; and three units—Snow Health, Snow Link and Snow P2P—managing patient ambassadors. They recruit people with chronic medical conditions and train them to speak on behalf of clients and to share their personal experiences through outlets including: live forums, from peer to peer mentoring to educational outreach programs and engagements; online activities such as moderated Web programs and social media initiatives; and multi-media content from Web videos, story segments and other assets to newsletters, advertising and direct mail. They’ll also handle implementation through their in-house creative team and full-service call center for event recruiting and registration. Wood said the shop has seen “a number” of new account wins over the past year and has kept close to clients.

“We have clients that have been with us for 10 years because they value the sophistication and sensitivity with which we manage our patient ambassadors,” says Wood. “That’s the greatest measure of success.



Incivek (above left) and the Epilepsy Advocate Summit (above) used the Snow Companies’ services

We retain clients well past the traditional 18-month to three-year brand-manager life cycle.”

Inc. Magazine rated the firm one of the fastest-growing in the US in 2010, when they clocked in with 483% growth to \$16 million in 2009 revenue.

“We work with brands to help humanize them and bring a real perspective that clearly resonates in the marketplace,” says Wood. “As things have evolved with social and digital, there’s an increased level of scrutiny, and the authenticity of this approach, balancing the risks and benefits in a real patient’s journey, is what people are seeking.” — Matthew Arnold

“Our brains are wired to understand things as stories”

—Corbin Wood