

Healthcare Marketing

Using a Speaking Engagement to Deliver Key Marketing Messages

By Janis Berkman, for HealthLeaders News, Nov. 14, 2003

We've all heard about the enormous sums that ex-Presidents and famous CEOs rake in for speaking engagements across the country. While lesser-known senior executives can't expect the same monetary rewards, their speaking engagements can be worth their weight in marketing and public relations dollars, generating valuable opportunities to publicize their company-and its marketing messages.

Healthcare marketers can use the speaking engagement as:

1. A strategic communication tool to reach prospective customers and clients about new products, services, or programs.
2. A reason to contact target media outlets to discuss key healthcare trends as they relate to their company's particular market niche - before, during and after the event.

Why bother with speaking engagements?

A speech before the right audience can be an effective and powerful means of communicating ideas to both educate and influence the listeners. Even in the Internet age, a speech has its place as a vehicle to increase a company's visibility and differentiate it from competitors, ultimately generating new business, more revenues and greater market share. A speaking engagement may also serve as a springboard for wider and longer-lasting marketing and public relations opportunities, such as getting an executive's name out to the media as a potential industry expert.

When executives speak at conferences, seminars and forums sponsored by professional and industry trade groups, associations, academic institutions and independent event organizations, they create exposure for their companies. For a company whose clients are hospitals and health plans, for example, speaking to members of the American Hospital Association or the American Association of Health Plans/Health Insurance Association of America would be high priority. But smaller or more regional gatherings needn't be ruled out, depending on a company's objectives. A corporation planning to expand to new markets might target the local chapters of national organizations in those areas, and a company that caters directly to healthcare consumers might investigate speaking at community health fairs and hospital-sponsored lectures.

How to get a speaking engagement

It's been estimated that over 6,000 seminars, meetings and conventions are held every day across the country. But securing a choice venue for a speaking engagement can be challenging and time-consuming. Here are some suggestions for the planning phase:

- **Plan ahead.** After identifying the various groups whose members represent the customers and healthcare groups your company wants to reach, prioritize your list to focus on those that will deliver the most exposure for your organization. Keep in mind that many large healthcare and insurance organizations book speakers at least six months to a year in advance of a conference, and some groups require your company to be a member of their organization to qualify as a speaker.
- **Prepare for the competition.** An abundance of speakers will be vying for the same slots, so you will have to submit compelling and timely speaker proposal topics and/or speech abstracts that not only grab the attention of the event organizers, but also offer needed information and solutions to problems facing the attendees.
- **Prepare a knockout proposal.** If possible, take a look at last year's sessions to see the types of topics that were chosen. Try to select a catchy session title. Increasingly more event organizers are also selecting proposals that have clearly defined learning objectives, expertise reflected by previously published articles, and a track record of delivering well-received presentations. Be sure to list speaker references from previous engagements.
- **Consider using a client co-presenter.** Today's event coordinators are also looking for client co-presenters, since these are the people typically representative of conference attendees. Laying the groundwork to get clients involved in presentations can be extremely valuable. The session would essentially showcase the client, but the client would in turn discuss how they benefited from your healthcare product or service. For instance, an executive from a healthcare vendor who is speaking on the issue of claims processing could co-present with one of their customers. The client would then explain how the vendor's technology made it more efficient and cost-effective to pay their claims.
- **Propose the right speaker.** Healthcare CEOs or other senior executives chosen to be designated speakers on behalf of your organization should ideally have speaking experience and media training under their belt. Some executives use professional courses such as the High Impact Presentations program from Dale Carnegie Training, Inc., to hone their speaking skills.

Getting maximum mileage

Once you've secured a speaking engagement, it's time to craft a presentation that doesn't sound like a sales pitch, yet positions your company as an industry leader with valuable knowledge, insights and innovative solutions that the audience can use in their own organizations. It's helpful to present an overview of the larger healthcare picture, outline major problems faced by your prospective clients or customers, and then demonstrate how your company's products and services remedy those problems. Company messages

should be supported by "proof points" or a body of evidence, such as studies, demonstration projects, or statistics that support the validity of the company's new products, programs, or approaches. Quotes from satisfied customers and clients can be included, but they shouldn't sound like an ad; they should explain in some detail how your organization was able to help them. The messages and proof points can also be highlighted in a slide or audio-visual presentation with easy-to-read graphs, charts and bullet points.

If at all possible, present a case study on how your company was able to produce a significant return-on-investment for a client. Better yet, invite that client to be a co-presenter so together you can demonstrate, for example, how the client was able to save money and deliver more efficient patient care within a year after implementing your company's product, service or program.

Another option is to create a panel to discuss and present different views of a topic. For example, a panel could consist of a hospital administrator, health plan executive, and healthcare analyst giving their views on a trend. At least one of the participants should be able to cite a case study illustrating how the issue was successfully addressed. Another combination might be a physician, an executive from a pharmaceutical company, and a pharmacist or executive from a pharmacy benefits management company addressing "real world research" into compliance with prescription medications.

As far as the mechanics of speech writing, there are plenty of "how-to" sources on techniques to capture the listener's attention from the outset and add vitality to the speech. Above all, the writing must be clear, concise, and informative without heavy use of industry jargon.

Before the event...

About a month before the speaking engagement, if it is taking place at a conference, contact event organizers for a list of media planning to attend. If they have one, add those names to your company's key media list if necessary, and send a media alert several weeks before the event to announce the speaking engagement. To capture media attention, the topic should be tied to one or more timely and relevant "hot trends and topics" that currently impact the healthcare arena, and the alert should include solutions to these issues backed by supporting evidence and statistics.

One-to-three days beforehand, send out a one-page media advisory, with "who, what, when, where, why," using the "why" section to underscore the prime ways companies are resolving the big-picture problems. Include a note to the media about the availability of the speaker as a resource for upcoming stories on this and other industry topics.

You may also want to personally invite key media via phone or e-mail to hear the speech and/or schedule one-on-one interviews to learn more about the organization, how it is helping the healthcare industry, or to become better acquainted with its senior executive

staff.

At the event...

An audience can only grasp a few points during a speech, so it's wise to give them material they can read in depth later. Although experts warn against handing out notes that follow exactly what you're going to say before you make your presentation, they recommend passing out companion materials to the audience and media, e.g., industry backgrounders, white papers or reports. (For more information on white papers, scroll down to "Using White Papers to Market Healthcare Products" in related features below).

At the end of the presentation, allow time for Q & A, a good opportunity to reinforce company messages. Some experts recommend anticipating audience questions in advance and having answers ready. After the speech is an opportune time to network, and introduce yourself to prospective business associates and reporters.

After the event...

In the weeks and months following the presentation, capitalize on all the time and effort you've already spent by re-packaging the speech in as many ways as possible. Here are some suggestions:

- Tailor the presentation to different geographic areas that encompass target markets, e.g., adapting a speech given for an American Medical Association conference to a state medical association meeting.
- Organize a panel of healthcare leaders, including your company executives, to speak on relevant topics from various perspectives, and if that succeeds, consider taking the panel "on the road" for maximum exposure.
- Use the text of the speech in direct mail pieces or newsletters aimed at the company's clients or customers.
- Post the speech on the company Web site's "In the News" section.
- Rework the text of the speech and submit to targeted publications as a proposed bylined article or Op-Ed piece for healthcare trade publications, and depending on the topic, local newspapers.
- If your company belongs to industry and trade associations that publish member newsletters, contact the editor to gauge interest in the topic of the speech. Many use members' material, e.g., "The following excerpts are from a speech given by..."
- When contacting the media to offer your organization's CEO as an expert resource on various topics, you can mention that he or she "spoke recently at the XYZ conference" and list important elements of the speech as well as additional topics the CEO can address.

Practice Makes Perfect

A company's first speaking engagement may very well be the toughest. Although it takes

considerable time and effort to secure, and then prepare for a presentation, the process becomes somewhat easier as the executives become accustomed to public speaking and interacting with the audience and the media. As part of a company's comprehensive marketing and public relations plan, the speaking engagement - if carefully planned for the appropriate audience-is a valuable tool to generate broad and ongoing awareness of the organization and effectively project its messages.

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