

October 27, 2021

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In this episode, Taren Grom, co-founder and editor of PharmaVOICE meets with Lea LaFerla, Vice President of Marketing and Business Development, Scorr Marketing.

Taren: Lea, welcome to our WoW podcast program.

Lea: Thank you, Taren. I'm happy to be here.

Taren: We're delighted to have you as well. Lea, with 25 years of sales and marketing experience in the medical device, clinical diagnostic and pharmaceutical industries, you manage an exclusive portfolio of global health science clients. I would love to get started with what are some of the biggest trends you are tracking and then, what should we be watching for in the next year to 18 months?

Lea: Thanks, Taren. I think one of the largest trends that we're seeing right now with our clients, especially those that are in the drug development services space, is really a growth strategy that's focused on both on mergers and acquisitions. There's been a tremendous influx of available capital through private equity and many of our clients are really taking advantage of that capital.

And really what that means for us at Scorr is helping our clients navigate that internal and external communication strategy. If you're bringing two companies together, helping with the branding and messaging, and all of the steps that are needed to make sure that the organizations are sort of hitting their ultimate growth goals.

That's something that we've really been living and breathing. I think, we've, in the last two weeks have worked with clients on three different announcements, and that's something that we definitely see continuing in the next year to 18 months as this focus on consolidation in the market and smaller companies coming together to be able to compete with the bigger players.

I think the other big trend that we're seeing is around sort of that technology and digitalization. There's definitely been a focus in our industry for the last decade but we all know that the pandemic really pushed companies to demonstrate how quickly they can provide their products and services in the virtual environment. We're seeing this with decentralized trials either fully or partially using telehealth, connected devices, mobile apps, and the other technologies to really aid in patient participation and avoid having to do their check-ins exclusively in person.

I think that the FDA was really flexible during the pandemic on its guidance related to using alternative patient assessment methods, whether it was that telehealth or in-home patient

visits, sort of the direct to patient solutions that we were seeing, whether it was drug dispensing or wearable biosensors, the remote data capture, remote monitoring. Those solutions were all available pre-pandemic but adoption was slow, and I think that's something that you're going to definitely see accelerate in the next 12 to 18 months.

From a marketing perspective, I would say we're seeing a big focus on digital marketing. A lot of the industry was really comfortable with kind of lead generation through in-person trade shows and events and because of the pandemic, they all got cancelled and there was a real focus on looking at opportunities to bring in leads for digital approaches.

I think technology and marketing is another area that's a trend that we're seeing using AI and account-based marketing approaches to really be able to target the right message to the right audience.

Then we're also seeing a big focus on marketing and sales working together and marketing really driving lead management through automation and CRM integration.

Taren: Those are some very big trends. I'd like to touch a little bit more on the last one. We're seeing this closer connection to marketing and sales.

Lea: Yeah.

Taren: Perhaps they didn't work hand and glove before but now you're looking at seeing them being totally integrated?

Lea: Yes, for sure. It's interesting, Taren, because that's really my background. I started my career in sales and didn't move into marketing until about 7 years into my sales career, always understood the benefit of the messaging being on point.

I remember one time when I was a drug rep for Merck, I'm walking into an office in Omaha, Nebraska with a piece of collateral that was beautiful and done by an agency, I'm sure on Madison Avenue, and the doctor in the office in Omaha sort of laughed me out the door and I thought, oh gosh, I wonder if the marketing people have ever really talked to a urologist in Omaha. The message seemed to be really off.

So I think there's always been an acknowledgement from a messaging perspective that the two needed to be sort of closer, but I definitely think from a lead management perspective. Again, when you start looking at inbound marketing strategies, the ability for us from a marketing perspective, to help drive leads that the sales team can take over, there needs to be that close relationship between sales and marketing – when does the lead transfer from a marketing qualified lead to a sales qualifying lead? What does the sales team need from marketing to help sort of nurture that relationship through the close and then turn one customer into long term advocates of the brand, or of the company?

I think that it's even more important now that there's so much of a focus on return on investment when it comes to marketing dollars.

Taren: I think that's an excellent example of why in fact the two need to be so much more closely aligned and especially as we looked at not only personalized medicine, but those personalized communications that everybody is talking about through the use of digitalization that you touched on earlier as well. This is going to be an exciting thing to watch happen. Thank you for bringing that to the forefront.

Lea, you lead Scorr's client services and business development teams, what are some of your keys to leading high performing teams? You all are obviously operating at a very high level.

Lea: Yeah, I think one of the things that we pride ourselves on at Scorr is being a really collaborative, sort of team work focused environment. In fact, we had just rolled out to the entire organization a framework that's around the 5 behaviors of a cohesive team. That framework really starts with trust and trusting one another. We find that when team members are transparent and honest, we're able to build that foundation of trust and then from trust really talking about engaging in conflict around ideas.

Conflict has such a negative connotation. A lot of times people think conflict is bad, but really when we talk about conflict around ideas and having that trust is like we can have a constructive debate with one another. We can weigh the pros and cons of different solutions and come up with the best solution either for ourselves or our clients, and so really trying to change the narrative internally to say conflict isn't bad. Conflict really helps drive us and helps innovate our organization.

The third piece of that 5 behaviors is around being committed to the decisions that we're making. We find that if we're having an open and honest debate with one another, there aren't any hidden agendas and we can get everybody on the same page, and even if you don't disagree with the decision, you've had an opportunity to weigh in, your opinion has been considered and we find that people are more likely to sort of commit to that decision that's reached as an organization. And because of that commitment, we're able to hold each other accountable to the plan of action and then finally, that leads to that focus on achieving results. It's been a really great exercise that we've worked with the team on and something that we want to continue to build as an organization.

I think personally I've subscribed to this idea of a radical candor for a number of years now. The idea behind radical candor is caring personally while challenging directly. So being able to give guidance and feedback to team members that's kind and clear and specific and sincere. I think the radical candor and the 5 behaviors of a cohesive team are areas that we're really focusing on to make sure that we're driving the results and the performance that we want as an organization, especially as we're scaling and growing our business.

Taren: I have never heard that term radical candor and I think it's such an interesting concept. When we talk about high-performing teams, we often speak about curiosity, intellectual

achievement, team members who want to go beyond. Talk to me about what are those qualities you look for in those team members that lead you to your high-performing teams.

Lea: Yeah, I think that – you’re absolutely right, Taren. I think when we look to our teams where really one of our core values is always be learning and ready to adapt, looking for people who are curious, who want to be lifelong learners. This industry is complicated and changes and really having people that are focused on rolling up their sleeves and looking for an opportunity to learn something new every day.

I think the other kind of thing that’s part of our core values is falling in love with problems and not solutions; and so looking for opportunities to hear challenges that our clients are having and not just think immediately to know what’s the list of potential services or solutions that we could bring forward that are we able to customize and really bring forward innovative ideas. People that are outside of the box thinkers, that are lifelong learners, that are driven – I think drive is a really big success factor for people that do well at our agency.

Taren: Thank you so much. Those are excellent tips. I love how you frame everything. It’s so positive. You know we’re talking about complex issues, not to be – fall in love with the solutions but fall in love with the problems. It’s a really different way and a unique way of looking at a group dynamic.

With your breadth of industry knowledge, pharmaceutical knowledge and client partnership expertise, what are the keys to developing results oriented integrated marketing programs that are – as everybody wants them to be – on budget, on time and defect-free, if you will?

Lea: Yeah.

Taren: We talked a little bit about the matching of sales and marketing. So let’s explore that a little bit more.

Lea: Yeah, that sounds great. I think at Scorr we have a motto that strategy drives everything. And so from our perspective, the key to developing successful marketing programs really starts with that strategy. Looking at the goals and objective of the organization at a higher level and then building out the marketing goals to support those overarching business goals.

We really do start with what is the strategy of the organization, who are they today, who do they want to be in the next 3 to 5 years, what can we set out as goals from a marketing perspective to help drive that business forward.

Once we’ve sort of started with that strategy, we do look at sort of the branding and the messaging and really making sure, especially in the highly competitive and somewhat undifferentiated world that we live in, we really look to say, what is that unique and clearly articulated value proposition, what differentiates you from your competitors and making sure that that brand and that messaging is, in fact, a reflection of the value proposition and is, in fact,

differentiated. I think without that foundation, marketing tactics and channels really aren't going to deliver the ROI that organizations are looking for.

Once you've got sort of the strategy set and the branding foundation is built, we do believe in a truly integrated approach to marketing. We know that there's not a single tactic or a silver bullet in marketing. We know that in order to be effective, you have to clearly communicate across multiple channels. We also know that it takes a minimum of 7 impressions before someone recognizes your brand and as many as 50 before you can expect action from a buyer.

By looking at kind of an integrated approach, looking at a digital approach, how do we incorporate thought leadership and PR, how do we leverage events and trade shows, how do we use media to sort of pull together this integrated plan that really ensures that we can deliver that right message to the right audience at the right time.

Then, I think the other thing that's really important when it comes to sort of defining success and budgets and all of that is setting KPIs and measuring ROI. We do that. We report to our clients. We have an online dashboard that measures all of the tactics that we're deploying for our clients. That dashboard is available 24/7.

We also do monthly performance reporting and kind of real-time adjustments to the tactics, to ensure that we're getting the best results and ultimately trying to, again, that sales and marketing relationship, trying to say here's a number of leads that we were able to convert over into a number of opportunities within the sales pipeline that turned into a dollar amount from a one business perspective to really be able to justify and show marketing's effect on sort of the bottom line.

Taren: Thank you so much for sharing some of Scorr's secret sauce. I didn't mean that to be so alliterative there but that's where we are. Those are excellent tips and such great insights. Thank you so much for sharing. You obviously are a very successful leader, would you be willing some of the best leadership advice you've ever received?

Lea: Yeah, I think it's to be yourself. An old boss told me that you can't just blindly subscribe to someone else's leadership philosophy or something that you've read in a management book; you really need to define it for yourself. Early in my sales career at Merck, I had six different managers in seven years, and so I was exposed to a wide variety of different leadership styles. I learned what I liked but maybe more importantly, I learned what I didn't like or what I didn't want to do from a management perspective. I really think that leadership needs to be authentic. You need to figure out what you believe in and build your leadership style on those beliefs.

I also think there's this whole is leadership born – are leaders born or are they made and I definitely believe that leadership is something that you can refine and practice and develop over the years. I think being open to other people's ideas and being willing to adjust your leadership style, dependent on who you're leading at that time and understanding sort of the needs and motivators of your team.

Taren: It's great advice. Is this the same advice you share with other women or do you have different advice that you share with other women who may want to reach the executive level? What such should they take to give them some of the best advantage of doing so?

Lea: Yeah, I definitely think being yourself and finding your authentic leadership style is something that I share with women who are looking to sort of advance their careers. I also think it's really important to find ways to increase your visibility within your organization and build a network of mentors. People talk a lot about mentorship, formal and informal. I think surrounding yourself by other leaders you admire gives you an opportunity to sort of build that personal relationship and as far as increasing your visibility, look for opportunities to take special projects or other ways to sort of increase your own cache within your group.

I also tell them to ask for what you want, right. Be your biggest advocate. I know – this is something that I've struggled with in my career. As a female manager, most women do a really great job of advocating for their employees but maybe not so much when it comes for advocating for themselves. Don't be afraid to ask for what you want.

I also think raising your hands is important. Don't wait until you check every single requirement box before you ask to take on that next big project or promotions. Stop asking yourself – am I qualified for this? Believe in the fact that you can do it. I think you have to have that belief in yourself first because if not, others are going to struggle to believe in you.

Taren: Lea, that's such excellent advice and especially, I love that self advocating – ask for what you want. Because most folks aren't mind readers, they don't know that maybe you're ready for that next step. Being your best advocate is so important.

Finally, tell me about an accomplishment or a wow moment that it has shaped your career or change the trajectory of your career.

Lea: This is a tough one, Taren. I was thinking a lot about the last question you asked about sort of advice for female executives. One of the things that I think is something that I'm really proud of is I have had the opportunity to advocate for higher and promote quite a few women to their first management role. It is something that I'm really proud of. I don't know if you saw, but McKinsey and Company just released their 2021 Women in the Workplace Study and something that they talked about in the study was that women continue to face that broken wrung at the first step as a manager and that for every 100 men promoted to manager, only 86 women get promoted. Because of that discrepancy, men sort of routinely outnumber women at the manager level. So the fact that I've been able to sort of advocate and mentor and help grow women is something that I'm really proud of.

I think the other big thing for me that definitely shaped and changed the trajectory of my career was four years ago when I decided to join the Scorr team. I have 25 years of experience, this is only the third company that I've worked at. So when I had the opportunity to join, I don't know that 15 years ago if you would have told me that I would work at a marketing agency, I would

have necessarily believed you. I'm actually – my degree is in science. I ended up in sales. I moved into sort of marketing throughout my career but when I have the opportunity to join the team, what I learned was that I love the challenge and diversity of working with multiple clients and multiple organizations. The idea that I would ever go back and just work for one company is like crazy to me now.

I love the fast-paced that we work at, the different challenges and the different clients that we get to work with. The team of really brilliant people that I work with internally at Scorr and also with the clients, it's just been a real – I would say that I'm more invigorated today than I have been in the last 25 years. It's been a really fun change of pace for me and opportunity to continue to grow and learn.

Taren: I chuckled there when you said you didn't think you would do that but see, that's what keeping yourself open to possibilities is all about, right?

Lea: Yeah, for sure.

Taren: Thinking beyond and that out of box thinking that you look for in your high performing teams is something you embrace yourself. Congratulations to you in joining Scorr and leading such a great team and working with so many clients has got to be really exciting as you said and hearing all the different solutions that are possibly put out there –I don't say challenges because we talked about those. So congratulations to you, and thank you so much for being part of our WoW podcast program. I certainly learned a lot, and I wish you all the continued success that you deserve.

Lea: Thank you, Taren. I've really enjoyed the conversation.

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