

Hiring Yourself: Finding Marketing Staff

BY NORA CALEY

WELLESLEY, MA— According to the 2006 Salary, Compensation, and Work Satisfaction Study, job satisfaction seems to be rising among healthcare marketing professionals. The survey, which Wellesley, Massachusetts-based Lawrence Associates conducted online for the Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development (SHSMD), indicated that respondents would change jobs for a 19.3 percent increase in pay, compared to 16.1 percent in 2003, and 70 percent of respondents would recommend that colleagues enter the field. Ninety-three percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the healthcare industry, and 88 percent felt that way about their areas of responsibility.

So if healthcare marketing professionals are happy, how difficult can it be to find people to fill marketing jobs? "It's difficult to find people who really are excellent," says Lindalee Lawrence, President of the compensation consulting service. "I think that's the issue across the board."

One problem is that there is not a large pool of people with many years of healthcare marketing experience. Healthcare hasn't been developing marketing experts for as long as the automotive or packaged goods industry has been working at it. So most people have different marketing experience, and it's hard to predict whether they will be able to adapt those skills to healthcare. "You can find people with the skills who are unable to produce the outcomes, or people who produce outcomes but don't have the training," Lawrence says.

In healthcare, she says, outcomes refer to increased market share. That becomes more difficult as hospitals become more competitive, and as physicians' groups set up ancillary services.

Gretchen Genello, Assistant Director of Corporate Communications for LifeBridge Health in Baltimore, says hospitals compete not only for patients, but for good employees. "It's hugely competitive in this market because we have Johns Hopkins," she says. "If given the choice to work here or work at Johns Hopkins, many people go there because it looks better on their resumes."

She says Baltimore does have one advantage: the cost of living is lower than in nearby Washington DC. That means there is a talent pool that can likely provide graphic designers,

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web experts, and other advertising professionals. She sometimes hires graphic designers from temporary agencies that specialize in that work. Writers are especially plentiful since the Baltimore Sun started laying off reporters. "These are people who are used to working on deadlines," Genello says.

It's handy to have a local pool of marketing people, because LifeBridge, which consists of Sinai Hospital, Northwest Hospital, and others, doesn't have a budget to relocate marketing professionals to the area. That's for higher level searches, such as for president of the organization.

Lawrence says hospitals don't often have to look outside their markets to find non-executive level marketing people. Even if few applicants have hospital marketing experience, there are

always people with marketing backgrounds. "A fair number of people come in from other industries, and they need to pick up an understanding of healthcare," she says.

Candace Quinn, Chief Marketing Officer and Senior Vice President for Inova Health System in the Washington DC area, says even entry level workers need some experience. "None of the folks are right out of college," says Quinn, who recently added two entry to mid level people to her staff of about 35. Some gained experience at other nonprofits, or at universities, where she says some of the politics and other idiosyncrasies are similar to those of hospitals.

It's difficult to find senior level marketing people. She would like to hire people with seven to ten years of healthcare marketing experience. Ideally, she'd hire someone who earned an MBA. "But they graduate and go work for consulting firms," she says. "They don't work for not-for-profit hospitals, because the pay is not there."

She adds that some people do want to work in healthcare, because they are motivated by something other than money. "What motivates us to get up in the morning is something different from the guy selling Kibbles n' Bits® and diet soda. It may sound contrived but there is a calling for those of us who opted to work in healthcare in a business capacity."

Sandra Mackey, Director of Marketing for Emory Healthcare in Atlanta, says it's rare to fill a hospital marketing department with healthcare marketing experts. In her 16-person department, staffers formerly worked in energy, law, and in advertising agencies that didn't handle healthcare clients.

"Finding highly skilled professionals in any field can be challenging based on criteria you set," she says. "In marketing you

ask yourself the question, what are the most important attributes? Is it more important in this position to find someone that brings more marketing experience and less healthcare experience, or the other way around?"

She adds that negotiation skill, a creative eye, the ability to manage projects, and understandings of the creative process are all skills that are more important than healthcare marketing experience. "You find that in marketing consumer products or services. What you're looking for are skills that are transferable," she says.

Lawrence notes that in healthcare, "there are few marketing positions that are straight marketing. Most are combinations of marketing, planning, business development, fundraising, public relations.

The Solutions

For some, the solution is to hire people with marketing experience and then train them in healthcare marketing. Some of that training has to do with jargon, and some of it has to do with understanding the markets, which Genello says includes doctors and nursing staff. "You have to be familiar with medical jargon," she says. "Marketing a piece of surgical equipment is different from marketing a new flavor of soft drink. Our message is more complex."

Quinn says for the senior level staff, she offers them a job contingent on their completing an MBA program within a reasonable amount of time. "It's an important piece because you learn budgeting, understanding the business plans, how to analyze trends, how planning fits into all

this. Marketing is not, 'Gee, I think we should get an ad, I'll call our agency.'"

To find candidates, Quinn sometimes works with recruiters, but that's a last resort. She'd rather network at conferences and other healthcare marketing events. She posts job openings, accepts resumes, and talks to vendors.


She also talks to people who are employed. "There is something to be said for hiring someone who didn't know they were looking. There are a lot of people who worked seven to ten years who have taken packages and said, 'The politics here are just too crazy.'"

Mackey says when Emory's marketing department advertises an open position, the ads are similar to ads for hospital service lines. "We talk about the strongest attributes of the job, and also about selling the organization, and delivering on the brand promise on many different levels. People come to work in an organization mostly based on reputation, so when writing ads that will attract people to come and work here, you want to be able to build a profile that will be successful," she says.

LifeBridge also talks about employees in its image ads, in a campaign that has freedom as the theme. For example, one ad profiles Bernice Rubenstein, who came to work at Sinai Hospital in 1964, and ends with the phrase, "LifeBridge Health. The freedom to enjoy your job." Another describes Julie Coplan, a physical therapy specialist, and ends with "LifeBridge Health. The freedom to share."

Although the ads don't specifically mention marketing staff, the campaign fits into the broader goal of positioning LifeBridge as a good place to work. "It conveys a message to our public and builds goodwill in our system," Genello says. "It's part of our recruitment." ■

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