

Career Case Study



Georgie, Account Manager, Agency

Job overview

I am an Account Manager within a PR agency working in the healthcare team. I work across four accounts in the area of pain, respiratory, diabetes and oral systemic health.

Career path to current role?

I went a round-about way to where I am now but all my experiences have played a significant part in getting me to this point.

After graduating with a degree in Human Biology from Leeds University in '97, I wasn't sure what I really wanted to do long-term but started saving to go travelling immediately. During this time, I worked in a customer service role in a bank, skills that then came in very handy on my year long trip around the world. On my return from my travels, I took a graduate post in a car manufacturing company (which was a lot more interesting than it sounds!) and I acted as a coordinator on a number of projects.

It was then that I decided that I did want to use my science degree and pursued a career in the pharma industry. It wasn't long before I secured a role as a medical sales representative for AstraZeneca, promoting products in the area of respiratory diseases. I learnt a great deal and sales in our area soared (which was great for bonuses). Two years down the line, I decided to take my skills and move into Healthcare PR but rather than move in-house, to work on the agency side for the pharmaceutical clients. The best way to learn about the role and show your commitment to the career is to take a work experience post, so I did just that. This paid off and I managed to secure a permanent post very quickly. Now, with well over four years PR experience, I am in my second agency and I am an established Account Manager at my current agency.

Why I chose this career?

As a medical rep, I learned a lot about the pharmaceutical industry, NHS structure, different drugs and therapy areas, not to mention the wealth of selling skills. It was an excellent spring board into the industry however I wanted to be more office based, to move away from the pushy sales role, with more variety in my job and a career path that I could look forward to. So I explored agencies that support pharmaceutical companies: market research, marketing, advertising and finally healthcare communications (medical education and PR).

It was the variety that initially attracted me to PR and that I could learn about so many different therapy areas and treatments. It was office based and I could still utilise my experience in sales in many ways. There's a real feeling of working as a team and lots of interaction with different sorts of people - something that I had enjoyed in all my client facing roles to date.

Typical day?

A typical day starts by planning my day, checking my emails and working with junior members of my teams to alert our clients to any relevant breaking news that morning. I normally have at least a couple of meetings in my diary most days, e.g. a weekly client call to provide an update on progress of activities, an internal brainstorm to come up with some great ideas for a new business pitch, or perhaps an internal meeting to divvy up actions on a particular activity.

Each day varies hugely and depends on the activities that you are working on for your clients at any one time. Taking this week as an example:

- liaising with both the client and a production company to finalise a video B-roll to be used by broadcast media around future news stories for the product
- drafting a Q&A document that will be used in the event of questions about new data
- calling medical and scientific journals to investigate publishing a peer review meeting report about an innovative new treatment
- meeting with team members to brainstorm creative ideas for a newly launched product
- developing a budget breakdown for proposed 2008 activities
- calling a patient group to discuss an upcoming disease awareness programme

Who do I get to work with?

Our clients are usually the PR Managers within Pharmaceutical companies, who in general are responsible for the communications relating to one or two products. Although they are our day to day contacts, we also work with other divisions within the company - marketing, medical and legal teams, internal communications and sales teams.

Externally, we liaise with many different people dependent on our activities for each client. These may include consultants, GPs, nurses, patients, family members and carers. In addition many activities involve working with patient organisations, professional groups or charities, and suppliers that may include visual production companies and market research agencies.

What I love about my job / best bits?

The sense of achievement from regularly trying something new – producing new pieces of work, be that press releases or proposals, holding a successful press briefing or media training session, or when you see coverage appearing for a client in a target publication that you have helped to deliver...not to mention the international travel for congresses and client meetings.

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What don't I enjoy / worst bits?

Referencing! We need to ensure that the source of any facts or figures we use can be viewed transparently, and therefore have very rigorous referencing processes for our documents. Whilst a necessary part of the job, it can be a long and tedious task and that is one of the most brain-numbing of jobs!

Proudest moment?

I have two proudest moments: The first was early on - the successful roll-out of an art exhibition, the content of which had been created by cancer patients. As well as heaps of logistics, my role included supporting the winning patients and sitting with them in the 'green room' when they were being interviewed on BBC Breakfast television – pretty exciting!

The second was launching an educational workbook to encourage doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals to improve the way they communicate with cancer patients and their families – including guidance on breaking bad news, explaining the side effects of chemo, or helping patients get back to a normal life after the all-clear. The response from patients, healthcare professionals and third parties was really heart warming.