



Joe Hoholick

From Chewing Gum to Cancer Treatments

The Round-About Career Path of DTC Hall of Famer



In addition to launching one of the first DTC campaigns, for the blockbuster cholesterol treatment Lipitor, Hall of Fame inductee Joe Hoholick has led a hugely successful DTC career, spanning nearly a decade – one he never imagined when he earned his degree in chemistry and took his first job researching and developing chewing gum.

BY AMANDA EHRLICH

When Joe Hoholick began his career in the 1980s, he never envisioned his path would lead to DTC marketing. With a Bachelors of Science degree in chemistry from The Pennsylvania State University, Hoholick began his journey in research and development at Warner-Lambert (now Pfizer). While on the R&D side, Hoholick “worked closely with brand management and ad agencies on developing new products” – and realized that he “really got charged up by the ad development process.”

After returning to school to earn his MBA from Rutgers, Hoholick officially transferred from the research side to the marketing side and began working as a brand manager on Clorets and Certs at Warner-Lambert’s Adams consumer-packaged-goods unit. While at Adams, Hoholick worked with several CPGs, including Clorets, Certs, Halls, Trident, and Roloids. It was while working on these products that Hoholick got to meet the first of his mentors, Bob Froehlich and Bob Tabor, of the Ted Bates Agency (now JWT).

These “two giants in the agency business,” as Hoholick calls them, “took a shine to me and I spent a lot of time with them, writing down everything they said. They gave me a 1950s book by Rosser Reeves, *Reality in Advertising*, that I still read once a year. The fundamentals of effective communication don’t change. Call me old school.”

Shifting career gears

It was while working at Adams that Joe Hoholick got

the chance to shift career paths again, being recruited by Bob Ehrlich, then of Parke-Davis, a division of Warner-Lambert (now CEO of DTC Perspectives Inc.), to work on the launch of cholesterol-lowering drug Lipitor. Ehrlich had first met Hoholick in the 1980s when Hoholick was still working with R&D developing chewing gums and Ehrlich was a product manager for Trident. When Ehrlich shifted over to Parke-Davis and pharmaceutical marketing, he needed a team to help launch Lipitor.

Ehrlich recalls that he “recognized that Joe’s unique scientific background combined with his consumer products experience made him the perfect candidate to help market Lipitor and other Parke-Davis products.” In turn, Hoholick credits Ehrlich with “saving me from a career marketing ‘functional’ candies and gums.”

Launching Lipitor at DTC’s beginning

While at Parke-Davis, Hoholick worked on marketing numerous brands, including Lipitor and Rezulin (a diabetes drug since recalled from the market). However, the launch of Lipitor stands out as his most rewarding marketing project and most positive team experience in his career to date.

In fact, Hoholick often “[uses] the Lipitor launch team as my answer/example to the oft-asked professional team-building question, ‘What was the best team you ever worked on?’ We had a brilliant VP / brand leader on Lipitor, Lynn Alexy, who was smart, tough, energetic, fair, aggressive [and] yet team-oriented. I had a great functional boss (Bob Ehrlich) who was the same. And



both leaders were focused on one goal – making Lipitor the biggest brand in the world.”

In addition to his positive team experience, Hoholick fondly recalls the excitement that came with launching Lipitor in the infancy of DTC.

“Parke-Davis at the time of the Lipitor launch was a second-tier pharma company whose product just went off-patent. Warner-Lambert rolled the dice on Lipitor to transform the company [and it did – it transformed Warner-Lambert into Pfizer]. Given this, the CEO met with me on a regular basis, asking me what more could he give me to make Lipitor a household name. The resources I got were huge. There was no good idea that I needed to sacrifice. And there was no waste in my day – no bureaucratic necessities. And we were the superstars of the company – everyone rooting for our success.”

Because of this sense of excitement surrounding Lipitor, it has become one of the campaigns with which Hoholick is most proud. “We were inventing this new marketing discipline for our company and for the industry,” Hoholick recalls. “It felt like pioneering. It was the most fun time of my career.”

A move to Pharmacia and Celebrex

Following the acquisition of Warner-Lambert by Pfizer in 2000, Hoholick left Parke-Davis for Pharmacia, where he became the senior director of marketing for Celebrex. Hoholick is extremely proud of his work with Celebrex, which he found to be “very energizing” because it “produced remarkable results in getting patients on therapy.”

It was at Pharmacia that Hoholick worked with pharmaceutical marketer Joe Shields (now at Pfizer following Pfizer’s acquisition of Wyeth this year) in the development of the “Inside RA” disease state campaign, a campaign that Hoholick believes is “best in class” and is “still proud of how it has truly helped RA patients deal with this horrible condition.”

After working at Pharmacia for a year, Hoholick had a brief stint at Wm. Wrigley Jr. Company, before shifting to Amgen, where he has remained for the past six years. As the executive director of marketing, Hoholick leads the all of the company’s DTC marketing efforts. This includes brands such as Aranesp, Enbrel and Neulasta.

The “I’m Ready” campaign for Neulasta, a drug used to aid cancer patients on chemotherapy, is a source of great pride for Hoholick. In addition to being awarded a Silver POE Award from *DTC Perspectives*, the campaign also inspired numerous cancer patients to “conquer” cancer and to write appreciation letters to Amgen (many of which Hoholick still keeps and reads).

Jay Carter, a senior vice president at AbelsonTaylor, worked with Hoholick on this Neulasta campaign and, based on this experience, is quick to refer to Hoholick as being a “patient advocate.”

“If I, or someone I loved, ever had a serious disease, I would hope it was Joe Hoholick doing the DTC for that product,” Carter said. “Joe is the kind of guy that is always the patient’s advocate first. He figured out long ago that as long as you do what’s right for the patient, you’ll do what’s right for the brand.”

Advice and reflection

Hoholick’s inclination toward patient advocacy has led him through a long and successful career in DTC. Throughout his marketing career, Hoholick has acquired the skill and know-how to be a shrewd and inspiring leader in the DTC marketing discipline. To those new to marketing, Hoholick recommends finding a “well-experienced advertising guru and mentor under them. Ask them to share with you the secret of that successful campaign that turned a category around in their past. In that story, will be a clear product strategy that positioned their product for transformation and a

‘big-selling idea’ that was born out of research insight, product truth and plain hard work. These stories of successful advertising inspire, even prescribe a way of thinking about new advertising development that maximizes success.”

And while Hoholick himself has put in countless years of “plain hard work,” he always makes time for his New York Yankees. In fact, despite all that he has accomplished in his career, Hoholick laments one thing: “I always aspired not to retire until I get into the Baseball Encyclopedia by having at least one put out in centerfield in Yankee pinstripes. Brian Cashman (the Yankees general manager) is not ringing my number a lot though,” he says.



Heartbeat Digital’s Bill Drummy presents a Hall of Fame award to Joe Hoholick.