

P4 Showcase

Your guide to using and choosing an advertising agency

Raising standards

The European Association of Communications Agencies Health Communications Council

As the chair of the European Association of Communications Agencies Health Communications Council (EACA's HCC), I am often asked about my motivations and how I find the time and energy for trade association work. The EACA is not about creating a healthcare agency cartel, nor is it about developing secret anti-competitive practices. It is about discussing how we can join forces and collectively raise health communications standards.

I would be lying if I said this is an easy task. As in any trade association, bringing together the key players is one thing; getting all of them to stop wearing their agency hats and to agree on priorities and a common agenda is another. However, after a couple of lengthy discussions, we decided the HCC should be a trade body, a trust mark and deliver thought leadership.

Although health agencies spend most of their time interacting with pharma clients, we feel neither side always understands the other's expectations. Our great strength is that the Council brings together all the best established European networks of health communication agencies and the representatives who sit on the Council are all top managers of European operations, who have spent most of their careers working for the pharmaceutical industry. We have the knowledge and experience to find effective ways of raising awareness about the value agencies bring to the business and the role they can play to help handle the health challenges European countries are currently facing.

The EACA

The European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) was founded in 1959.

It is a Brussels-based trade organisation that promotes legal, decent, honest, truthful and responsible advertising and marketing communications within a self-regulatory environment. It encourages the highest professional and ethical standards in agencies.

In setting up its Health Communications Council (HCC), it recognises both the importance of health issues in our modern society and the very specific demands and parameters involved in developing communication strategies to address them.

At European level, the pharma industry is suspected of engaging in restrictive business practices and abuses of dominant market positions. It is also accused of spending far too much money on drug marketing and not nearly enough on R&D. No matter how many times pharma repeats that the last thing it wants is to introduce the US model of direct-to-consumer advertising, many don't believe it.

This all stems from the fact that business and health coexist uneasily and many see the quest to increase

The HCC

The aims of the Health Communications Council (HCC) are:

To raise industry standards

The Council aims to define, develop and promote the highest possible standards in health communications across Europe

To build true partnerships

The Council fosters recognition of the crucial role of health communications agencies in enabling the flow of information in an environment of partnership and trust

To connect all stakeholders

The Council works with both government bodies and the pharmaceutical industry to improve the exchange of information between stakeholders in a constantly changing environment.

To keep healthcare high on the European agenda

The Council aims to improve pan-European communications on healthcare in the context of an expanding Europe.

profits as contrary to quality care. I tend to think that good health is good business and that business drives innovation and efficiency in healthcare.

We have already started meeting key representatives in pharma and have agreed that the agency-client relationships should not only be punctuated by briefs, but by common discussions on the future of the industry. We are not suggesting that we should be consulted on all matters, but we should be working together on developing a new business model with a focus on new delivery models and e-marketing. We have also agreed to work on improving the industry's

image, develop joint health literacy projects and to discuss how better to inform patients and achieve greater concordance.

The HCC is also committed to developing initiatives that answer the rapidly changing needs of our healthcare environment. For example, within the context of the European Commission's Obesity Platform, our Council offered to develop a public information campaign to encourage adolescents, aged from 11-14 years, to view living a healthier lifestyle as a cool thing to do.

I believe these new projects and partnerships will allow us to raise professional standards. Raising standards is not an empty phrase and is particularly crucial in our field, as the campaigns we develop can have a major impact on people's health and lives. In concrete terms, it means that our agencies should be improving the quality of the services they deliver constantly.

I believe that the Council members' commitment to excellence is tangible - through their ability to deliver both global and local solutions, to integrate creative services and healthcare experience and to maximise multichannel marketing in order to effect meaningful and long-term change in patient behaviour. In other words, we - both as a group and as individuals - want to carry on bringing added value to our clients and partners in a changing environment.

This Council represents a new experience for all of us and we are still in a learning mode. However, we have defined who we are and what we want to achieve and have developed a set of communications tools.

These tools demonstrate our will to promote healthy communication across Europe and put forward both our healthcare expertise and creative skills.

HCC spokespeople**Gloria Gibbons**

Regional president, Ogilvy Healthworld Europe
+44 207 108 6016

Max Jackson

HCC vice-chairman
President, Sudler & Hennessey EMEA
+44 207 307 7853

Michel Nakache

HCC chairman
Worldwide managing partner & chairman EMEA/APAC
EURO RSCG LIFE
+33 1 58 47 99 37

Alain Sarraf

President Europe
Publicis Healthcare Communication Group
+33 1 44 95 99 01

Stephen Wheatley

CEO, GSW/Junction 11
+44 207 611 8000

The Author

Michel Nakache is the chairman of the EACA Health Communications Council and worldwide managing partner and chairman for EMEA /APAC with Euro RSCG Life Worldwide.