Merit Winners

It’s Better Here—Physician Recruitment Strategy
Kate Stebbings, ABC, Sharon Stevens, APR, and Kristina Benson
Communication Solutions Inc.
Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada

BACKGROUND / There are not enough trained physicians in North America to meet the demand for services. U.S. analysts predict a shortage of up to 200,000 physicians by 2020. In Canada, analysts project a shortage of 2,200 physicians each year.

In British Columbia, six regional health authorities are responsible for providing health care. Finding enough doctors to provide needed services has become increasingly difficult, and in some cases hospitals have closed or reduced services due to a lack of physicians. Interior Health, one of these health authorities, operates 45 hospitals and health centres with more than 1,200 physicians. Interior Health will need at least 915 new physicians by 2012 in order to maintain current operations.

NEED/OPPORTUNITY / STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE/NEED
Interior Health needed a physician recruitment brand to recruit enough physicians to meet current and projected service demands for its 720,000 residents.

THE OPPORTUNITY
Interior Health needed to create a physician-focused recruitment brand that would effectively promote the advantages of living and working in the Southern Interior of British Columbia. The brand needed to differentiate from recruitment efforts by other hospitals and health authorities by presenting its brand promise through a unique brand “personality” in order to gain attention from physicians. The brand needed to create an emotional connection by speaking to physician concerns about fatigue and work overload. It also needed to promise something better.

INTENDED AUDIENCE(S) / PRIMARY AUDIENCE
The primary audience consisted of Canadian physicians at all stages of their careers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE RESEARCH</th>
<th>IMPLICATION FOR BRAND DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics:</td>
<td>Key messages must address the interests of a younger population and those looking to reduce their workload, as well as a female audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian physicians are aging (with an average age of 51.3 years), and more female physicians are entering the profession (53 percent are female).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lifestyle values: Physicians have a strong focus on leisure time and personal interests. Fifty-five percent of graduating doctors choose a “lifestyle-friendly” specialty, over the 9 percent who choose a “lucrative specialty.” — *Journal of the American Medical Association*

Motivations: The primary reason for physician relocation is lifestyle. According to the Canadian Medical Association, income alone is not sufficient. Features that attract physicians include educational/cultural opportunities for children, employment opportunities for spouses and more time away from work.

Trust: Physicians trust peer opinions. Half of respondents turned to peers first when investigating job opportunities, and 57 percent stated peers were the most helpful sources of job information.

Job search preferences: Physicians have a preference for the latest technology when searching for new positions. Forty-five percent of physicians begin job searches online, and 40 percent read recruitment ads in professional journals. — *New England Journal of Medicine*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE RESEARCH</th>
<th>IMPLICATION FOR BRAND DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifestyle values:</strong> Physicians have a strong focus on leisure time and personal interests. Fifty-five percent of graduating doctors choose a “lifestyle-friendly” specialty, over the 9 percent who choose a “lucrative specialty.” — <em>Journal of the American Medical Association</em></td>
<td>▶ Create a brand that emphasizes lifestyle, not practice details or compensation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivations:</strong> The primary reason for physician relocation is lifestyle. According to the Canadian Medical Association, income alone is not sufficient. Features that attract physicians include educational/cultural opportunities for children, employment opportunities for spouses and more time away from work.</td>
<td>▶ Include key messages about work-life balance, community involvement and family lifestyle advantages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust:</strong> Physicians trust peer opinions. Half of respondents turned to peers first when investigating job opportunities, and 57 percent stated peers were the most helpful sources of job information.</td>
<td>▶ Shift away from the health authority as a voice and toward a peer voice to support a position of trust and personal relevance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job search preferences:</strong> Physicians have a preference for the latest technology when searching for new positions. Forty-five percent of physicians begin job searches online, and 40 percent read recruitment ads in professional journals. — <em>New England Journal of Medicine</em></td>
<td>▶ Create and promote a web site that supports work-life balance and is information rich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Promote the web site through print journals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SECONDARY AUDIENCE**

The secondary audience included community recruitment partners such as city administrators and stakeholder physicians who liaise with a candidate referred by Interior Health and entice physicians to move to their community. These partners also help profile community lifestyle advantages in marketing efforts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE INSIGHTS</th>
<th>IMPLICATION FOR BRAND DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment expectations:</strong> Community recruitment partners expect that Interior Health will supply enough physicians to fully service each of the 77 communities within the region.</td>
<td>▶ Use the brand to support an atmosphere of shared responsibility for recruitment. Allow recruitment partners to imagine how the brand promise could be delivered in the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partners as community champions:</strong> Community administrators and physicians are most aware of the advantages of living in each location and are the primary advocates for the community.</td>
<td>▶ Provide an opportunity for each community to “own” the brand and profile community lifestyle benefits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES / GOALS
The communication goal was to develop a physician recruitment brand that differentiated Interior Health from competing brands, clearly addressed a known audience “desire,” presented a brand promise that could be delivered and offered a brand presentation that could be used across multiple mediums in order to support cost-effective recruitment strategies.

OBJECTIVES
Objective No. 1: Generate inquiries from physicians interested in working in Interior Health communities.
Goal: 100 enquiries within six months

Objective No. 2: Drive web site visits. The physician recruitment brand was presented in multiple media—each with the consistent key message telling candidates to “visit the web site to find out more.” The web site then offered one way to measure brand “reach.”
Goals: There are 30 web site visits per day.
Half of web site visits are from new viewers.
One-quarter of web search terms include “better here.”

Objective No. 3: Demonstrate cost-effective recruitment practices. Interior Health had previously paid recruitment headhunters up to CDN$40,000 per physician hire.
Goal: Generate 20 hires within the CDN$36,000 allocated to this brand development.

Objective No. 4: Gain stakeholder support. Interior Health relies on the support of physicians and community partners to recruit and retain physicians.
Goal: Consult recruitment stakeholders to gain feedback, revisions and support for the brand.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW / THE BRAND AND KEY MESSAGE
Extensive audience research convinced Communication Solutions that the physician recruitment brand needed to clearly emphasize the lifestyle benefits of working in Interior Health communities. The team’s creative approach was to develop the brand “Better Here,” which was accessed through www.betterhere.ca and supported the key message “Life’s Better Here.”

BRAND POSITION RATIONALE
The rationale for this brand position included:

¬ Life actually is better for physicians in Interior Health. The brand promise is deliverable because of the outstanding lifestyle and ease of access to recreation options in all Interior Health communities.
The idea of “better here” supports the interests identified in the audience research—more time for family, easier access to recreation and a rich cultural life. Because physicians will interpret “better here” differently, the brand is flexible enough to be relevant to all. Each community within Interior Health can highlight why it is “better here” since the advantages vary from community to community. The brand promise stands out against other physician recruitment brands that emphasize job details.

MANDATORY BRAND REQUIREMENTS
The Interior Health physician recruitment brand met the following criteria:
- It is short, bold and easy to remember—and the URL is easy to say and spell.
- The brand promise supports an emotional connection with the audience.
- The brand promise is credible; it can be delivered.
- The brand is flexible and engages the audience’s varying interests.

## BRAND STRATEGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRAND STRATEGY</th>
<th>TACTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sell the benefits, not the features:</td>
<td>Physicians can work in almost any community in Canada. Compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>arrangements are generous and competitive. Physicians will rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relocate based on compensation, but they will relocate for life-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>style benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative presentation of brand:</td>
<td>Medical journals are full of advertisements showing small lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and recreation images with lots of text about the job details (most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>commonly seen as black text on a white background).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast a wide net:</td>
<td>Research on physician recruitment advertising showed the more detailed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the list of qualifications in a physician recruitment ad, the fewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the responses it garnered (Mason &amp; Belt, 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the right medium for the right</td>
<td>Physicians commonly use online tools for job searches. Print ads with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purpose:</td>
<td>minimal detail could focus on driving candidates to the web site for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>detailed information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promote work-life balance/lifestyle benefits: “Life’s Better Here—find out why” and “Work and play… all in the same day.”

Create fresh, high-impact brand presentation materials with minimal copy, unique lifestyle images, peer testimonials and creative brand presentation.

Minimize copy about required qualifications and emphasize the call to action: Contact us to find out why it’s “better here.”

Use small but high-impact print advertisements to drive physicians to a searchable, information-rich web site. Emphasize the web site: Visit www.betterhere.ca and find out why… it’s “Better Here”!
Use peers to help recruit: Research showed that peers are the most commonly accessed and trusted physician recruitment resource.

Support stakeholder engagement: Community recruitment partners wanted an opportunity to profile the lifestyle advantages of their community and to differentiate the opportunities there.

Role in Project and level of involvement/responsibility
The senior consultant at Communication Solutions completed the audience research and developed the “Better Here” brand strategy. The senior consultant also led the creative team in developing the print ads, display materials and the web site, and created the web navigation content and worked on search engine optimization.

Implementation and challenges / implementation timeline
Audience research began in April 2008, and the proposed brand, “Better Here,” was approved without revision at the end of May 2008. The web site www.betterhere.ca was launched in May 2008 and was immediately promoted through multiple media. The time period for this work plan was 1 April – 31 December 2008.

Budget
The budget for brand research, strategy and creative development, including web site, print and display booth creative development and implementation, was CDN$36,000.

Challenges
Measuring early success. Interior Health’s leader of physician recruitment needed to demonstrate early success to support the brand investment without a budget for evaluation.

Solution: Creative Solutions used Google Analytics to monitor web site traffic and use of search terms. Because no recruitment brand previously existed, this information could be used to infer brand recognition and recall. In-house staff members were trained to measure the source of contact (print advertisement, online banner, job fair, word of mouth, etc.) to help evaluate marketing effectiveness.

Using public health care dollars for marketing. Interior Health is publicly funded and must demonstrate effective use of taxpayer resources, especially since funding is intended for the provision of health services.

Solution: Creative Solutions maximized the use of cost-effective electronic promotion tools (web ads, e-mail blasts, HTML e-mail promotions) to extend the reach of this brand, and trained Interior Health staff to manage web content. The communication team also provided key messages and a communication plan to support media or stakeholder inquiries regarding the effective use of health care funds.
**MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION** / All measures were collected from 15 May – 15 December 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective No. 1: Generate inquiries</th>
<th>Within the first six months, “Better Here” branded marketing tools generated 440 inquiries from physicians about positions within Interior Health.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Objective No. 2: Drive traffic to the “Better Here” web site | As measured through www.betterhere.ca, the “Better Here” brand and marketing activities generated the following:  
  - 8,700 unique web visitors with over 51 visits per day  
  - An average of three minutes spent on the site per visit and an average of seven page views per visit  
  - A total of 77.3 percent of web site visits from first-time viewers  
  - A total of 39 percent of web searches that included the term “better here” |
| Objective No. 3: Demonstrate cost-effective recruitment practices | The first six months of the “Better Here” branded marketing campaign resulted in 70 new hires—at an investment of CDN$35,000.  
Although many factors affect a physician’s decision to move, these new-hire results reflect that the “Better Here” brand fulfills the brand promise and is based on sound research regarding physicians’ interests and motivations. “I was flipping through a magazine, and the ‘better here’ ad caught my eye. I know it’s better there, and I want to make the move over to your area.”—physician candidate |
| Objective No. 4: Build stakeholder support | The following qualitative feedback demonstrated the support for the “Better Here” brand from community recruitment partners, physicians and community administrators.  
“We love it…it is ‘better here’ in Ashcroft and I love the chance to tell people why.”—community administrator  
“The overall design of the web site is slick. I liked the graphics and layout. This would target me nicely, and I’d be all over it.”—emergency physician  
“I quite like this. It’s less about Interior Health and the work, and more about the community, the area and the lifestyle.”—physician recruitment partner |

**OTHER SUCCESSES**

On 4 December 2008 the minister of health for British Columbia issued a news release congratulating Interior Health on the success of the “Better Here” brand. This news release resulted in 17 media interviews and positioned Interior Health as a provincial leader in physician recruitment.

“The ‘Better Here’ brand and web site are getting noticeable attention across the province. Other health authorities are commenting on the effectiveness of the brand and are now trying to catch up.”—leader, physician recruitment, Interior Health

“I heard last week about Interior Health’s physician recruitment web site. It is putting pressure on some health authorities to match or exceed it. Says you folks are on the right track!”—chief financial officer, Interior Health
Advertising sales representatives and physician recruiters noted the brand’s unique creative approach and sent the following unsolicited feedback:

“Great ad! This is going to appeal to quite a few doctors, I can tell you!”—Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences

“This is a great advertisement; you’ll probably get a lot of response!”—Canadian Medical Association Journal

“…your physician advertisement received great feedback from the doctors…especially Dr. ’X’ who loved the quote on the top of the page.”—physician recruiter (competitor)