Focused to Flourish: How Verve Therapeutics Used a Niche Strategy to Take on Cardiovascular Disease

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From its founding in 2019, Verve Therapeutics has had one overarching mission: to protect the world from cardiovascular disease. However, their journey to get there has consisted of a much more narrow, progressive approach than this expansive vision.

Upon launching, Verve opted against introducing their technology for the 12.5M heart attack patients in the US market. Instead, the company chose to target a smaller population of approximately 1.3M.

Who exactly were the patients? Sufferers of the lesser-known disease heterozygous familial hypercholesterolemia (HeFH).

Honing in on “Smaller” Opportunities to Accelerate Market Acceptance

While niche disease markets are much smaller, so are their barriers to competition. Verve's go-to-market strategy focussed on identifying underserved submarkets as a more rapid means to an end: penetrating the cardiovascular disease market.
The same is true in terms of their pre-launch awareness-building strategies.

Pre-launch Verve gained initial support by frequenting niche industry conferences. For instance, the founder of Verve, Sekar Kathiresan, served as a speaker at a 2018 Precision Health Meeting for Advances in Genome Biology and Technology (AGBT). AGBT's first meeting was held one year earlier, in 2017, marking this event as up-and-coming rather than well-established.

With less competition and a unique offering, Verve quickly raised awareness and funding for its technology. In 2019, the startup officially announced its launch via a press release featuring the news that it had already secured $58.5M from investors to accelerate research and development within this niche.

Post-launch, Verve ramped up its community-building efforts on local, national, and global levels, immediately generating a mass amount of traction. In the three months after its launch, Verve's employees sought to secure brand advocates by frequently attending multiple events - from large-scale industry conferences to healthcare podcasts, online webinars, presentations at middle schools, small lipid events, and more. Each covered a different avenue exploring the transformative power of their gene editing technology.

Although teenagers were not looking to invest in biotech, the benefit of Verve's approach was clear: The more conversations happening about your technology, the better. Startups should not only aim to collaborate with top industry organizations. Striving too high and ignoring the initial foundation-building steps is one way to extinguish conversations before they even exist.

To fuel brand discussions around each opportunity, Verve leveraged a mix of internal and external content across online channels. Twitter posts shared critical, to-the-point positioning to enable medical decision-makers and investors to recognize the fundamental gaps their technology would have quickly. In addition, a mass amount of press covered was secured to communicate the ultimate patient value.

Verve's 2019 Strategy for 2022 Success

Identifying smaller market avenues has paid off three years later for the once-young startup.

On January 10, 2022, Verve announced that their lead program, VERVE-101, would roll out phase 1 clinical trials to treat their first HeFH patient. With more than $215.5M in funding, this once-small company is now just the opposite.

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Biotechnology companies need to be pickier about the presented opportunities, especially those with no local relevance. From go-to-market targets to events and press coverage, biotechnology companies need to leverage strategic market research and community-building efforts to build excitement around their technology. Smaller markets and opportunities can prove to be a vital piece of a company's long-term success.

With the pandemic accelerating the number of virtual opportunities with fewer barriers to entry, now is the time to act. Find organizations, publications, and events that align with your brand to start building your supporter network organically. The benefits of acting outweigh the risks of waiting.

- Content by the BDMT Global Team

If you are interested in potential partnerships and long-term relationships with the companies mentioned in this article or others in the U.S. and/or S. Korea, contact Suzy at sim@bdmtglobal.com.

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