

Michael Roberts ([00:09](#)):

Welcome to the Health Connective Show. I'm your host, Michael Roberts. Today we're talking to Jantzen Cole. Jantzen is the former VP of marketing at Artelon, an orthopedic company that makes ankle stabilization devices. This past summer, Stryker moved to acquire Artelon and add the product to its portfolio. We wanted to have Jantzen on to talk about his take on marketing medical devices and what it was like marketing for a smaller company. Jantzen, thank you so much for joining me today, man. I'm really looking forward to it.

Jantzen Cole ([00:41](#)):

Me too, Michael. Appreciate the, uh, the invitation and, uh, some really great questions you sent my way. So this will be a fine discussion.

Michael Roberts ([00:48](#)):

Awesome, awesome. Well, part of it was inspired by a LinkedIn post that you wrote. So the post that you wrote was specifically about how medical device companies should make the physician the hero of the story in the marketing. And there's a lot of debate that comes into like, who should be the hero or what should be the hero when it comes down to it? So I think the natural inclination is let's make the device, let's make the service, let's make the thing that we spend a whole lot of money building. Let's make that the hero and look at how we can enable you, doctor, look at how we can help you patient. With our company we've worked on with, with physicians as they're actually going through some of these processes and doing some like co-branded campaigns. And some of the different things that we've run have been very much, we'll get the brand guidelines that say "only show off the device, and then you can mention

Michael Roberts ([01:39](#)):

Dr. Smith's name down here in the bottom right corner. You get, you know, 200 pixels and that's it." Like, it's a very small amount of space. We also were able to get some companies to approve, allowing us to like actually have a picture of the doctor with a device. So it run, run something like that on Facebook. And we saw much higher click-through rates, much higher engagement, all of that kind of stuff. So I'm sure that's not a surprise to you, but can you kind of talk us through that mindset? Because I think this is a big kind of open, open discussion to have. And I think that coming from a smaller company, you have more leeway perhaps in, in what you can do versus, uh, the bigger companies that have these stricter brand guidelines. So love to hear your thoughts on all that.

Jantzen Cole ([02:17](#)):

Yeah, fascinating topic and, and truth is my answer now is really reflective of growing as a, as a marketer over the years. I mean, the, the, because as a marketer you spend so much time thinking about your product, that's effectively what you are tasked to promote and, and gain engagement on. And so when given these certain outlets to create campaigns and that sort of stuff, the defacto is always the product. Mentally. As I've matured, I also have started to recognize that while we're all generally behind a product, what moves people to a product more often than not is some type of emotion, some sort of connection. And me as a consumer, I don't connect well to inanimate objects, but I do connect well to people. So a lot of my shifts and changes began with the question, what makes me feel, what makes people feel?

Jantzen Cole ([03:12](#)):

And then answering that started to skew what I wanted to be leading in some of these campaigns. So the goal for me was to create an emotional draw to our brand. And kind of the thesis that came outta that was I just feel that human beings are gonna be more likely to create that connection than products. Uh, I certainly don't wanna leave the product completely outta the conversation, but allow the product to be a supportive tool, a useful tool that accentuates and enhances skill sets with the surgeon and the tenacity of the patient, whichever one you're really kind of leaning into and sometimes both. But that, that was kind of the tone shift that I arrived at and, and kind of shifting around the hero of the story and, and our work. And then the second piece, you know, if you really wanna get factual about it, the most highly variable parts of most med devices are the surgeon and the patient.

Jantzen Cole ([04:15](#)):

And so it is kind of true that those two are the heroes, right? Same device. I've seen it not be a very good device, but in a, in a very gifted person's hands, do fantastic. Also seen a great device in hands that are untrained or not as, not as experienced, not do so well. So also just from a truth standpoint, I felt like the truth was that, you know, a great physician with my product gives great results as long as the patient also is a great patient, is compliant, plays their part, has, has a good mentality and, and you know, those are the things that they're supposed to do. So when I started the stack rank responsibility for success, frankly I felt like we did come in third.

Michael Roberts ([05:00](#)):

Interesting. I think I've seen some companies that are more willing to admit that, like, yes, it does depend on the doctor. I very rarely, I don't know if I've ever heard a company go like, yeah, you know, and the patient really makes a big difference in all this too, that they actually follow through with these ideas and actually make this work outside of maybe anything that's like direct to patient, direct to consumer type of product. But yeah, there's, there's a huge variable there. You're absolutely right.

Jantzen Cole ([05:25](#)):

Another piece that's in there is who's gonna be your decision maker with your product? You want your decision maker to identify themselves in the process of your story, right? So that was the other piece of if the surgeon is truly the hero, I want him to be portrayed the hero so that people that are considering us also can envision themselves being successful with the product. And, and same thing with the patient. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> patients see other patients doing well, they aspire to be that patient and it motivates those decisions on aspiration.

Michael Roberts ([05:57](#)):

You're leaning into a couple things that we've been talking about here on the show with some different branding experts that we've talked to with some different folks. And I'm always curious to see how it plays out in the medical field specifically. 'cause I, I think that whenever we talk about doctors, whenever we talk about value analysis committees and all the different purchasing groups that are a part of it, it comes down to it has to be data driven. It has to be just fact, fact fact. And it becomes dull very quickly because it is just this spreadsheet of information that gets kind of spat at someone. But how does the emotional appeal, how has that played out and how did that play out in Artelon's success?

Jantzen Cole ([06:34](#)):

I mean, your claims are your claims, right? What you can actually claim that you are going to deliver every time. That's indicated by FDA. However, what we rarely see is the human speak behind those

claims. You know, great outcomes. That's such a medical way. And those of us that live in this world, that just feels like a very normal way to talk. But just walk down your block and use that language with your neighbor and I'll be like, I don't even know what you talk about. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But outcomes in the real world are being able to play with your kids, being able to go back to running, being able to pursue life on the terms that you want to pursue life at. And often in our medical, you know, echo chambers that we get into, we don't change the wording to where the actual end user benefit is said in a way that we would say it with our neighbors and our friends. And so it's a bit of a fine line, but I, I felt, I feel like medical language a lot of times doesn't communicate what real life is. It talks to your point, it's, it talks very data. The data is important for the claim, but then trying to describe the value of that claim to a patient and even to a surgeon, sometimes it's, we kind of have to bring ourselves back into normal conversation and, and delete this vocabulary that we, we tend to live by that's driven by compliance and you know, that sort of thing.

Michael Roberts ([07:59](#)):

Yeah. And the precaution is good, right? Like we don't want people making ridiculous claims, but yeah, at the same, same time there are humans actually involved with all this. There's so many different ways that I could run with questions here, but I'm gonna stick to some of the ones that I, that we actually <laugh> wrote up for you. 'cause I, I do think these are important. So there are a lot of companies that are hesitant to give the device a more secondary role in their marketing. So why do you think based on this, like we do see humans driving things emotionally. We do see that there are emotional factors that go into every decision despite how logical we claim to be. So why do medical companies like hesitate to give their device a secondary role? And what could compel them to reconsider some type of ab tests, focus groups? Like what would be the tipping point that would help them to lean into the human factor more?

Jantzen Cole ([08:50](#)):

It's a great question and I, I'll, I'll give my perspectives. I can't, I wouldn't be good at guessing everybody's, but I think, I think a lot of us hesitate on lack of experience. Truthfully, these patient stories, they're not that old. I think as social media has, has picked up, um, this has become a, a tactic that we're all kind of starting to wade into. And so there's not a, it's easy to kind of pause because I've never done this before and how do I go about getting from A to B, what type of equipment is needed, all the things that come with experience. The second part, frankly, from a professional standpoint is I always think about how I'm going to share the ROI of this tactic with my other executives and with my board. And, and the truth is, I think social media and, you know, these types of things make all of us nervous.

Jantzen Cole ([09:43](#)):

Like we want, we know it's good, but how to quantify it as good objectively is a bit elusive. And so I think there's a pause of like, you know, it can be perceived that these events are pretty expensive. They hit the budget and you are gonna take that chunk of money and put it here and then how you gonna measure the ROI on it and someone's gonna ask me this at the annual review and I don't have a lot of experience. So out of all of that, I think a lot of us tend to revert to things that we have experience in, that we can explain and defend when we have questions and that sort of thing. And then certainly behind that they're also, look, you can look at it and be like, I like it, but I recognize a minefield of compliance and regulatory questions that I'm gonna have to walk through, and it's gonna take a long time, and I don't know if I wanna put that much energy into it. So I would tell you that was kind of my

experience of all of my hesitations, so that that may not be completely comprehensive with everyone else's, but that was mine.

Michael Roberts ([10:47](#)):

Yeah. Then let me ask the flip on that then. What did you say when all those questions came when you had to, like, what motivated you to say like, yes, this is worth it. I am gonna push through all this, this messiness and all this noise to actually do it?

Jantzen Cole ([11:01](#)):

I think for, for me, it was very specific at the time that I'm making these decisions, I'm at a little tiny startup that just doesn't have the weaponry and resources of the large, well-branded companies that I'm competing with. So I, I recognize that I was gonna have to take some risk that they didn't necessarily have to take to stand out. You know, if I played by the same playbook as the big strategics, I'd get washed out by white noise. And so I did recognize that the value of this is actually in the risk. And I'm not saying risk from a, like you're gonna get in trouble, but a risk from like, I've never done this before. I gotta figure it out and it may not be great the first time or the second time that I do it, you know, committing to going on, but I'm going to get better at it. I'm gonna create a plan, I'm gonna get to where I'm comfortable with. This was part of an overarching kind of need for, for us to stand out with such a different resource pool and such different brand recognition starting place.

Michael Roberts ([12:02](#)):

One of the things that I was probably one of the first things that I really saw you posting that really stood out to me were where I, I thought like, I don't think I've seen anybody else do that. Anybody else willing to take that, that chance where you were asking all the surgeons, what made you hesitant about using this product, about using this? I'd love to hear more on just like what kind of impact that made. And then like as you asked a surgeon that for the first time and you're making your first video, what were the things going through your head where like, am I gonna get some really negative complaints here? Because that's, that's always the, the potential there, right?

Jantzen Cole ([12:38](#)):

We did that effectively because what I wanted to do was create more engagement online. And with that I wanted to maybe get to people's objections quicker. I think the luxury I'd had, but by the time we did that, I'd been doing this job for six years or so. So I had some bit of confidence that I'd heard most of the objections and I'd had at least an idea of which ones I felt like I, we were capable of responding to and which ones were stuff that we could get to, but it was maybe gonna be worked in, into. So it gave me some confidence, but the, the idea of it was just to, the idea of of letting our doctor or saying the quiet stuff out loud, the fact is every single day, every company, every device goes into sales calls. And those sales calls inevitably have an objection, every single time.

Jantzen Cole ([13:29](#)):

And so we all know that the objections are out there. In fact, we may see each other's sales plans against each other, competitive comments and that sort of stuff. So it, it's kind of the worst kept secret in orthopedics as to how your competitors are competing against you. I just felt like I wanted to get it, get out in front of it and say, "Hey, this, this is the stuff that you, you may be hearing, you may have concerns about. In fact this doctor and this doctor and this doctor had the same concerns. I'm inviting you into that conversation because on the backside, while the concerns and the hesitations are pretty

much shared amongst all of you, we have a good consensus of people who have through experience moved past that and now go into those scenarios with confidence." And so, uh, really it was that I just wanted to take that hesitation now and go like, I'm not gonna act like there's no reason you wouldn't use us.

Jantzen Cole ([14:19](#)):

In fact, I know of 25 reasons that, that you may not use this, but where we have the opportunity, I'd like to have that conversation with you. It, not that I'll always compel you to change your mind, but at the end of the day, we both learned something. You've learned why we think that objection can be managed and I've learned why that objection might be a very important deal to you. And so I found it to be useful in both education, but I also found it frankly in social media. It, it was, you know, a bit different. I didn't see other people even attempting to be vulnerable in that, you know, and I'll, I'll use that word lightly 'cause I certainly had editing capabilities and, and that sort of stuff, but that's what I was going for.

Michael Roberts ([15:01](#)):

Just to get tactical on that for a second. You had these different doctors that you could get these objections from, the things that they overcame to be able to jump into that. How did you know which doctors had those objections? What was the relationship like with those doctors? Was that through the salesperson? Was that somebody you knew, you know, deeply? How did that work out?

Jantzen Cole ([15:20](#)):

I think most of the ones that we used, I had at least by this point, um, had some sort of relationship with, often I had some awareness of a very specific story for each one of them because the other part was, you know, in a well run campaign, I would've had multiple objections and run and, and we did okay. But, so I kind of wanted a variety. I didn't wanna be the same objection, that sort of stuff. But yeah, I, I mean it was that it was some experience with each one and that and had some sort of idea that now that they were, they were doing well and they were happy and content, but truthfully we never had a single customer who we just walked in and they were just like, hallelujah, I'm glad you brought that in today. I'm so excited. Like every single person had questions and they had pauses and they were like, wow, I need to understand this a little bit better.

Jantzen Cole ([16:09](#)):

So it's not hard to find people to share those objections. It, even your good customers had an objection. Sometimes it's, you know, it's been a while and you have to go, Hey, do you even remember why you didn't like me the first time we met each other? But yeah, I mean I think we, we had a great relationship with our salespeople so I could, I could go to any of my salespeople and go, Hey, here's what I'm trying to do. You got any ideas? Somebody who's kind of done a bit of a, you know, 180 on these things, and we had several names.

Michael Roberts ([16:38](#)):

Nice, nice. So you came from this, you know, obviously Artelon was a smaller company and you, you mentioned trying to compete with Biggers, the bigger companies. You've mentioned risk taking a few different times as something that like helped you stand out. Is that the main thing to go to for smaller companies? Like how can they take advantage of their position in the market? What can they do to try different initiatives to be able to stand out?

Jantzen Cole ([17:02](#)):

I understand what I, what I mean when I say the word risk, but I don't want to scare people away. I maybe the other way is one of the luxuries of being a small company, and this won't fit for everybody, but one of the luxuries I experienced at Artelon is I had seven years of effectively thinking about like one thing. And when you get to the strategics, the people in my role at strategics have 8,000 SKUs they're keeping track of. And so it is a very different job for a startup and for a strategic. And so recognizing that there's a lot more horsepower for strategics, but there's a lot less individual focus at the strategics. So that is a key advantage you've gotta recognize and really lean into. And with that you have the ability to be a little more dialed in with your day.

Jantzen Cole ([17:46](#)):

You don't have as much chopping it up. So focus is, is thing number one. You've gotta really kind of really appreciate. But going back to risk with focus, I was able to kind of create like, okay, here's 80% of my like tactics and they're well refined and I know exactly what's gonna, I know I have a plan for them, I know how to report on them. And then I needed about 20%, this is rough, but I had about 20% in my mind and I, you know, shared this with my CEO, shared it with my board. I need 20% to be experimental with, 'cause that 20% is what I need to do to stand out. I've gotta grab attention, I've gotta raise brand awareness. And part of doing that is doing things that have different texture than the big strategic. We'll have, you know, maybe it's risk, but maybe it's just stuff they haven't thought of.

Jantzen Cole ([18:36](#)):

Or maybe it's stuff that they are gonna have a lot more layers of company to go through to get approved. And sometimes we're willing to do things that may not work out. 'cause one are, you know, once again like not having as big a brand, you have a little more forgetfulness of <laugh>, you know, the campaigns that didn't go well than if you are a big strategic and you have, you know, 200,000 followers on social media that you, you are yeah. Remembered you know, more clearly. So, you know, I think there's luxuries in being small and focused and then allow that allows you to be a little more experimental and your mistakes maybe are kind of forgotten a little bit easier.

Michael Roberts ([19:11](#)):

That 80/20 breakdown that you're talking about there is that time and budget, or like how were you kind of thinking about that?

Jantzen Cole ([19:18](#)):

Probably more time than budget. 'cause honestly some of the ideas I had, I didn't, I didn't even know what they were gonna cost at first. I needed to kind of like have an idea and go, okay, let's, how would we do this? How would we play that out? And truthfully, a lot of the more aggressive things or less standard things we did were not expensive. And that's kind of what made 'em compelling. It wasn't the high polish, it wasn't like it had been through 13 committees for approval. And I think, I think that, you know, the cost part frankly in a lot of ways was, was a non-factor. But it was time because the challenge with being creative is you don't really have a template to work off of and you gotta kind of put something together. To me, the biggest challenge with the creative stuff is as a marketing med device marketing industry, there's not really a safe place for the leaders to just get feedback from each other.

Jantzen Cole ([20:08](#)):

'cause we're all competitive. And, and so there's not a, you know, like the doctors that we work with, they have these society meetings and they go and they collaborate and they talk and they share and they motivate each other. There's not a true marketing place for me to go like, man, I got this crazy idea. I need to call my, am I crazy? What am I looking at here? And you know, what would you do in this scenario? And so with lack of that, and I I say that we all maybe had two or three friends, we do that. But there's a time factor to your creativity that, that even though it's, it may end up being only this and this and this, it, it may consume 20% of your time. Just to kind of like round out that idea.

Michael Roberts ([20:46](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. It's funny 'cause one of the pieces that you'd put on LinkedIn at one point you had a, a post and you said something like, our biggest competitor is not the other companies, the biggest competitor is this. And it was a path with all these, you know, twisted roots all like all throughout. So I was doing some trail running. This is one of my favorite things about living in Tennessee now is like, hey, I can go running, I can go biking, I can do it. So I'm out on a trail at one point and I'm going down this hill and that flips through my head and I'm like, I am not gonna be the guy that now needs an Artelon for a product because I screwed up my ankle. This, it helped me very be very intent on where I was at and very focused on the fact that, you know, it's possible to get injured out here. I should be careful. So definitely memorable. I appreciate that.

Jantzen Cole ([21:31](#)):

Yeah. Thank you

Michael Roberts ([21:33](#)):

<laugh>. Absolutely. So what can larger companies learn here? Because that is a, a group of our audience. I think there's some very inspiring things that can happen for younger companies that are out there. They're trying to figure out their place, trying to figure out how to get a foothold. What do the big companies do with this as the competitive landscape out there?

Jantzen Cole ([21:51](#)):

So this was hard to answer, 'cause truth is like they're super talented people and big, big strategics, they're super talented people in small. It's not so much that one is smarter than the other. They certainly have different jobs. However, I think part of how strategics are built, it does rob them of some of their creativity. And I mean that in the sense that, in most of the infrastructure you get into a silo and your job in marketing is this product line. And then you have someone here that does your medical education and someone here does your graphics. And so it becomes very compartmentalized. And so your mind is really only to think straight ahead with this and this. And by doing that, the individual marketers don't have as many different places to start to play with their creativity that may flow into one or the other.

Jantzen Cole ([22:41](#)):

And so that, that lack of diversity in your day job, I think at times constrains the creativity and maybe the influence of marketing at the big strategics. Now what they gain in that is they gain great efficiency and that is their way to try and kind of keep people very focused and very deep in, in certain channels. But the challenge with that is marketing has so many different medias that it rolls through. When you start to lose touch or, or real influence with some of these others, then you lose some of your creative options when, when you don't have that. The second piece, you know, I would, I would comment on is,

is just the traditional way we hire in marketing, we're usually looking for product manager experience or if we're gonna get real crazy, we'll bring in a successful salesperson that wants to come off the grid, right?

Jantzen Cole ([23:29](#)):

So it's that maybe an engineer every once in a while it has good personality, but that's the general prototype to get into marketing. I'm finding in the last five years, you know, marketing and med device has changed more in the last five years than it did in the 25 years prior to that. And there's so much digital coming on that we have such an opportunity to bring diverse backgrounds into these roles, understanding that yeah, you may have to teach 'em which ligaments and you know, bones are here and there, but film students, graphic designers, journalists, you know, these, these people that come from different places, but the core skillset they have is the ability to tell a story in a different medium. I think by and large, we've, we've not done a good job of seeing that as a huge talent pool. It's available to us. And I, you know, the companies that kind of jump onto that are gonna really take med device marketing into kind of the next generation of things, which you already start to see some companies moving in that direction. But I, I just find those places to be fascinating talent pools and you just gotta teach them the details, but the, their ability to tell a story different ways is, is the talent that you can't really put a prize tag on

Michael Roberts ([24:41](#)):

It. It is remarkably different. So I have a son who's now in high school, junior in high school and just watching the types of stories that resonate with him versus the type of stuff that I, I watch, you know, and, and not only just subject matter being different, but the outlets that they choose. So I have a, a high schooler son and then I have a daughter that's just starting high school and sometimes they watch more YouTube or reels or whatever short form or whatever fits on their phone very easily, you know, and it's like, man, I did not spend much time with that even though I have the same device and even though I have the same access. And so yeah, like understanding how people are building stories for each of those different platforms and what's resonating and especially with different audiences and all that, it's just, just fascinating stuff for sure.

Jantzen Cole ([25:26](#)):

Yeah. You know, the intimidating part is how quickly we're getting shorter and shorter with these, you know, what is digestible content, what used to be able to, you know, 20 minute, 10 minute five, I mean, we're getting pushed into like, you need to get your message clear in a minute, in 30 seconds, that would be even better, you know, and that hook the first, second and a half to kind of gravitation, like there's, you have to be so deliberate about the components of these things. And that's the part where I've learned a lot from people around me because there's just a lot of nuance details to being effective today because of the, the way that we're all just completely overwhelmed with media and attention at all times. So

Michael Roberts ([26:12](#)):

Yeah, what also fascinates me like in that soundbite world is when you do connect and people do that kind of massive consumption and they binge the series, they binge the album, they binge it's like having, you know, those experiences available on kind of like both ends of the spectrum and it's, it's a lot, there's a lot for, for people to keep up with right now. It's very exciting stuff. Obviously I could keep



peppering you with questions. Any like parting thoughts you would give to marketers in this space right now as, as we are just continuing on with just rapid changes every which way, way?

Jantzen Cole ([26:43](#)):

You know, I mean I think, I think I'm just so bullish on our, our position. I think the, the leadership role that we have right now, if you're willing to kind of get creative and, and kind of move in some places you're not necessarily comfortable with, I think the sky's the limit. Look left and right at other industries, you know, retail, automobiles, tech and see how masterful they are with, with their marketing and their engagement. Um, I think that is the gauntlet that's been laid before us to make medical device that interesting, that compelling, that eye catching, and the fact are there's talent out there and the talent even within our, our peers is there. We just have to kind of move into those directions. So to open that up a bit. So I'm super excited about the next 10 to 15 years, but I think there's a lot of learning that has to be happening even for like old gray bearded people like me. Like we, I've gotta go back to school and I've gotta really be humble and, and ask questions and be open to being taught by maybe people that are, you know, my kids' age.

Michael Roberts ([27:44](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Jantzen, thanks so much for coming on, man. This is very exciting stuff. Really, really glad to have you on here.

Jantzen Cole ([27:50](#)):

Appreciate you, Mike.

Michael Roberts ([27:54](#)):

In our interview, Jantzen shared his thoughts about why physicians and patients should be the center of medical device marketing rather than the device itself. To hear more of Jantzen's thoughts on marketing and what his next adventure might entail, you can find him on LinkedIn. Thank you to our listeners for joining us for this episode. For more on the Health Connective show, please visit [hc.show](#) for previous episodes and Health Connective as a company.