

Navigating Choppy Waters

Three Resilient Marketing Tactics for Biotechnology Companies amid Market Turmoil

Daniel Lofaso

The biotechnology market is enduring historically low access to venture capital (VC), private equity (PE), mergers and acquisitions (M&A), and initial public offerings (IPOs). As a result, biotechnology companies must chase after the fleeting funding opportunities out there today (1). By prioritizing the right marketing strategies immediately, companies can maximize available VC, PE, and M&A opportunities, enabling them to establish long-term success and focus on science.

According to Santollani, the bulk of biotechnology costs go to research and development (R&D), employee compensation, scientific advisory boards (SABs), contract research organizations (CROs), rent, and legal services (2). But that assessment did not discuss marketing as a budgetary consideration, which is an important topic to many biotechnology companies. For organizations that don't sell products, allocating a percentage of revenue to marketing does not apply. However, for those that do, I recommend that 8–10% of a company's budget be dedicated to marketing, as consistent with Gartner's 2023 report that lists budget constraints among today's market challenges (3). Companies can apply the resilient marketing tactics herein to get the most from their money and to leverage that marketing budget to the fullest.

UNDERSTAND YOUR BUYER PERSONA

As an agency owner who speaks to many founder-led and emerging



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biotechnology companies, I encounter many strategic approaches to marketing and answer questions regarding the next steps to take. For example, Shrishti Singh, a postdoctoral researcher at George Mason University, started her own diagnostic biotechnology company. She consulted me for marketing-cost analysis and recommendations. Her previous efforts focused on product-market-fit analysis.

To obtain funding, her university required her to interview more than 100 people for customer research. Through those conversations, Singh identified a minimal viable product (MVP) and an ideal customer persona (ICP) (4). Although she believed her process to be backward when compared with how many companies are launched, I commended her approach.

Research conducted through simple audience interviews can enable companies to save time, money, and resources. Information gathered from such interviews tells you what your target audience likes based on objective, value-driven findings. That removes the

compulsion to rely on a “gut feeling” by drawing on tangible data instead. This also can be done on a small scale: 10–15 interviews might provide enough research on your MVP to ensure that it is desired by prospective customers and available at a budget-friendly price. Singh asked open-ended questions to glean the most information possible and construct a sense of the ICP's day-to-day work as it related to her MVP. Consider asking questions similar to the following examples:

- How would you describe the day-to-day activities at your current job?
- What problems or pain points do you experience in your role?
- What imaging instruments do you commonly work with or manage, and do they have any drawbacks?
- What knowledge is required to work with those instruments? How would you describe the ease of training to use them?
- How receptive is your workplace to adopting new techniques, and what is the process of adoption?

WORK WITH SUPPLIERS ON INNOVATIVE MARKETING TACTICS

According to Gartner, labor costs account for about 24% of a biotechnology organization's budget (3). Although companies argue that top-tier scientific talent is their lifeblood and cannot be squeezed, vendor relationships with marketers often can be outsourced to help reduce costs.

Few biotechnology companies require in-house specialists for public relations, graphic design, marketing, or website development, but many benefit from campaigns that use them. Outsourced marketing partners can provide project-based or retainer work with expertise that would be prohibitive for an in-house team on a budget.

For example, when my organization conducts research for a client, we seek content marketing opportunities that both are related to a client's products and services and have a high search volume. Upon reverse engineering a major competitor's best content using search-engine optimization (SEO), we discovered a resource for cell-culture dishes and sizes that drove an estimated 7,500 visits per month and provided a natural source of backlink acquisition. We used that to inspire our client's content marketing strategy. Creating and developing such a resource constitutes an advanced SEO and content marketing tactic that promotes brand awareness, and drives traffic. In this case, it also targeted bottom-of-the-funnel searchers who wished to purchase cell-culture dishes.

Finding Biotechnology Marketing Specialists: Biotech-focused incubators and accelerators provide a great resource for finding marketing agencies or consultants. Such programs often provide access to a network of vetted vendors and service providers that are well versed in the marketing needs of early stage biotechnology companies. For example, I joined the Alchemist Accelerator mentorship program to provide marketing expertise to biotechnology company founders. Academic collaborations also can provide meaningful resources to help biotechnology companies find vendors. Universities often have connections to specialized suppliers and research partners, as well.

Companies with biotechnology experience usually have better understanding than general marketing agencies of buyer personas, business goals, and scientific emphasis. But such specialized experience is expensive, so it's important to weigh your business requirements against your need for specialization.

SHOWCASE YOUR INVESTMENT DECK

As you seek to secure funding and capture the attention of potential investors through strategic marketing, your toolkit should include an investment slide deck that provides an illustrative narrative to highlight the strength of your investment proposition. Use that deck to outline the reasons that your company provides an enticing investment opportunity. Include a comprehensive fact sheet that discusses the scope of investment potential. Inform potential investors of your unique capacity to address prevailing challenges and present a roadmap to monetization, including plans for partnerships, mergers, and commercialization. Finally, assess whether your investors seek expertise or extensive data.

You can leverage such investor-centric focal points to extend outreach for your website. That site serves as a central hub for presenting your corporate narrative and investment pitch. Establish a dedicated investors' page that demonstrates the viability of your biotechnology venture clearly and outlines its path to success. Finally, consider making your investment deck available for visitors to download and enable investors to initiate further engagement directly from that page.

Appeal to Investors with Web Presence: Your website is a pivotal marketing tool even beyond its dedicated investors' page. The site can provide accurate information about your scientific endeavors that investors will rely on to make informed decisions. Pages highlighting your leadership team, scientific pursuits, clinical trials, pipeline progress, press releases, and contact details should be infused with content tailored to investors. Links to clinical trials, access to press releases,

and in-depth pipeline information cater to investors who seek a deeper understanding of your company's operations.

Consider integrating text with graphics or animations to simplify intricate scientific concepts and make them easily scannable and digestible. Approach graphics knowing that investors often need a basic understanding of your scientific capabilities, how they translate into practical solutions, and their potential market implications.

MARKETING ENABLES YOU TO FOCUS ON SCIENCE

For many biotechnology companies, budgetary prioritizations for top talent, R&D, legal services, rent, and SAB result in underresourced marketing budgets. However, public exposure to your scientific discoveries can fuel the relationships needed to drive funding or M&A talks. The organization with the loudest microphone often gets the most opportunities.

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Corresponding author **Daniel Lofaso** is founder and chief executive officer of Digital Elevator, a cutting-edge marketing agency specializing in biotech; dan@thedigitalelevator.com.

To share this in PDF or professionally printed form, contact Lisa Payne: lpayne@mossbergco.com, reprints@mossbergco.com; 1-219-561-2036.