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Reaching patients directly in medtech: Insights from Medtronic's Senior Director of Global Integrated Communications and Neuromodulation Naomi Rodiles

Host: Alan Hart, leader in marketing and customer strategy, Deloitte Consulting LLP

Guests: Naomi Rodiles, Senior Director of Global Integrated Communications and Neuromodulation at Medtronic

Alan Hart: Today on the show I've got Naomi Rodiles, and she is the senior director of global integrated communications and neuromodulation for Medtronic, and she's been shaping the brand perception, the reputation, and digital engagement for all the therapies under that umbrella. And on today's show, we're going to talk about neuromodulation and the therapies that they're doing at Medtronic. We'll talk about how she markets those solutions and the digital transformation that she's been on. That and much more with Naomi Rodiles.

Alan Hart (voice-over): Are you ready to go beyond the basics of marketing? I'm Alan Hart and this is Marketing Beyond, where I chat with the world's leading chief marketing officers and business innovators to share ideas that spark change and inspire you to challenge the status quo. Join us as we explore the future of marketing and its endless potential.

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Well, Naomi, welcome to the show.

Naomi Rodiles: Thank you.

Alan Hart: Well, I'm almost never the cool one in any of these conversations, but you're like a special treat because of your early job, I think, at BET's *Rap City* back in the day. Now I don't think you can get much cooler than that.

Naomi Rodiles: Is it cool or is it cringe? [laughs] No, that's super funny. *Rap City: Tha Basement* takes me way back. That was like my first real job in what would've been or what was a 10-year career as a broadcast journalist. [laughs] So, what that reminds me of is how, looking back, how cool and how amazing pop culture has been and how big of an impact it's been on my life and my interests, in addition to the power of storytelling. Even if it's with something like music television, that's always just been a big driver and interest for me. Who gets heard, who doesn't. What influences people, what doesn't. And so, that's definitely been a golden thread throughout my career.

Alan Hart: Well, from those early days to now you're at Medtronic. You're leading communications and marketing for neuromodulation. That's a big change. So help me—how'd you end up where you are?

Naomi Rodiles: I would say I've been really fortunate to be at this intersection of brand, communications, and marketing for the majority of my career. And, really, a strong focus on being a voice for those who may not have one, or know little about what could benefit them, and having a big role in that.

Alan Hart: Gotcha. Well, tell me a little bit about this neuromodulation business. I've seen a little bit. It's very cool technology, but it's also kind of complex, so maybe describe a little bit about the business.

Naomi Rodiles: Medtronic is the largest medtech company in the world. It's been around for 75 years. It's an incredible organization, very mission-driven, truly walks the talk when we think about patient-centered. We are very much interested and invested in building that direct relationship with consumers. Most of our engagement historically has been with health care providers. Neuromodulation, more specifically, which is the business where I lead integrated communications, focused on therapies that solve the issues with neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's disease or other movement disorders and epilepsy, as well as chronic pain.

Alan Hart: Gotcha. And so as we think about that, for folks that may not know what that looks like, you know, with most of those, you have some sort of tremor or unexpected motor activity. And so this implanted solution helps to control that or turn down the noise. Is that a good way to just think about it?

Naomi Rodiles: Our therapies are absolutely incredible as a whole at Medtronic, but specifically in this area of our business, is truly, truly incredible. I'll sort of zone in here, laser in here, on deep brain stimulation [DBS], which is the one that I think you are referring to.

Alan Hart: Yeah.

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Naomi Rodiles: DBS uses electrical stimulation to support management of some of the symptoms and side effects of diseases like Parkinson's or other movement disorders as well as epilepsy. Basically a pacemaker for your brain, and it is an absolute life-changing therapy.

For those who have been diagnosed with a movement disorder, for example, become eligible four years post-diagnosis. It's a really, really great option for those where the traditional medication is no longer working. It is quite incredible. Patients—I've talked to hundreds of them in my time in this role, and they always tell me, almost always universally tell me, that they wish they would've done it sooner. They wish they would've known about it, which has been a key opportunity in this role is that while some of our therapies, for example, DBS has been around 30 years. Safe, proven therapy with dramatic benefits for the patients, but yet very little known. So therapy awareness is a huge challenge, and we're setting out to fix that.

Alan Hart: I love it. I mean, it is such an impactful device and therapy, and I've seen a video of it. So my next question is, how do you market these solutions? Almost seeing is believing.

Naomi Rodiles: Oh, it is.

Alan Hart: But how do you think—I mean, you've been marketing mostly, I would imagine, to the medical community.

Naomi Rodiles: Mm-hmm.

Alan Hart: But now it sounds like you're blending both medical and consumers.

Naomi Rodiles: We understand—and we always have engaged—I mean, when I think about what I love so much about Medtronic is this true, core to our mission, everything we do, from the technology that we create to the very intentional way we step through development. It's always with the patient at the center. So while we are not a B2C company, that investment in a direct relationship with consumers—or patients—has always been there. Very, very much has always been there. However, you and I both know that consumers are much more savvy about their health and health care and have taken a very invested role in driving their health care choices more than ever before. So we have a really great opportunity to be part of that ecosystem of education and informing about the therapies that they can benefit from, and one of our main focuses is to become more of a consumer-facing marketing communications organization in these ways so that we can have more of an active role across other channels, not just through our amazing HCP partners, but as an industry, take a more concerted role in driving that conversation about the therapies that can help patients live on.

Alan Hart: And as you think about how marketing needs to evolve, where does it need to go?

Naomi Rodiles: I think we do a really, really great job of that relationship-focused in most of our therapies, specifically in our neuromodulation business. So building relationships, trust, all of that credibility is not a problem.

Like I said before, it's not the clinical efficacy that we're up against in terms of does it work. It's that people literally don't know our therapies exist. So we need a multichannel approach, and that means really being invested in

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engaging across many different channels, in a digital-first way, with not just our traditional customer, but with consumers and caregivers and all different generations and helping them understand deeply the benefit of making a health care decision, like getting an implantable medical device, but in a way that is more educational and informational than promotional.

When I think of that consumer, it's more about that relationship and building trust and, I don't know, more of an obligation to help people have access to the therapies that will help them than it is like a transaction.

Alan Hart: Yeah. I think, as well, I don't know if you would agree with this, but other categories of products and services that we all interact with as consumers are really defining what they expect no matter what category we're going into. And so, in this case—

Naomi Rodiles: Exactly. And we need to, frankly, catch up because this is... it's not traditionally... because you can't just go and put a, you know, Percept neurostimulator in your cart, right? [laughs] You can't do that. It is important, though, for those who are going to go and make that decision—that they're well informed and that they understand all of the benefits, the features, and what kind of experience they're going to have with the technology.

And no better people to educate than the developer and designer of the therapy.

Alan Hart: Well, you've been on this transformation journey of moving marketing, I guess, maybe towards the patient and their family. What have you learned going through that process that may benefit other people that might be on that same journey?

Naomi Rodiles: Well, I think one of the biggest learnings is what got us to this moment of understanding that we need to have a more active role in communicating with broader audiences beyond health care providers, beyond just our traditional channel of going to congresses and having an amazing sales force. You know, we're on social media, but how do we do that in a more broader, more meaningful, integrated way where there isn't just a channel where you will find information about us, but when someone goes searching for it, they'll find it. We need that same exact intentionality. Because the point that you're making is that that's what consumers expect. And so while, again, we're not making—there isn't a transaction or something to put in the cart at the end. What it is, is a very well-informed consumer that feels empowered, and we're doing our part to help them determine whether our therapies are the next best option for them.

Alan Hart: That makes sense. As you describe it, I'm thinking of... you've got the education with the providers, the physicians, etc. that you're doing, and then you're educating and informing and essentially engaging and nurturing these patients and their families. And I would imagine that when that comes together, it's a much more fruitful conversation in the provider's office too.

Naomi Rodiles: Oh my gosh. We have the most amazing health care partnerships. Our provider relationships are so incredible. They are, I mean, this is an absolute beautiful marriage, right?

It's not to replace anything that's happening in the clinician's office, but to the point you're making, it's that consumers are going in and having these conversations prepared. It's really interesting because I constantly hear

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from our health care partners, “Why aren’t you doing more? This is so exciting! Why is it taking so long for you to do this? Because this is what it we need.” We need people to understand, to be better informed about their options. And they feel very strongly, industry has a role in doing that beyond what we do through them or with them in partnership with them.

Alan Hart: Well, one of the things we like to do is get to know you even a little bit better. We know what an early career job choice was, but my favorite question to ask everyone that comes on the show—has there been an experience of your past that defines and makes up who you are today?

Naomi Rodiles: I knew at a very young age that I wanted to be a journalist. This is back in the day when, I mean, I remember being seven or eight years old watching Katie Couric and Bryant Gumble on *The Today Show*, and I was like, oh my gosh. I love this, I love knowing what’s going on in the world.

I really had such an interest in people and their stories. And one of the things that I noticed early on is that there weren’t a lot of people that looked anything like me on TV at that time or really the source of the news. And so I thought, wow, there’s probably so many communities—as I got older—not at seven or eight years old—but as I progressed in my quest to be a journalist, I knew that I could be a voice of a community that didn’t have one, and that really, really interested me. And that is a hundred percent why I became a journalist, and it’s why I am still so motivated to do the work that I do today because I get to be an advocate for patients who often lost their voice or don’t have a voice or didn’t even know our therapies were an option for them. So I take a lot of pride in that.

Alan Hart: Well it’s hard to imagine what you might tell that younger Naomi, but if you were to look back, what advice would you give young Naomi?

Naomi Rodiles: Probably something around burnout. You know, hard work absolutely pays off, but not at the expense of your personal health, your mental health, your personal time. Standing in your power, being OK to say no, not having to take it all on.

Alan Hart: What’s a topic you’re trying to learn more about today, yourself?

Naomi Rodiles: Definitely AI. I’ve really embraced it. I definitely think it’s here. And it’s absolutely, especially in the work that I do, an asset. It is a hundred percent going to be a game changer for content at scale, content efficiency. It’s going to help us sort of superpower storytelling, and if we can find a way—in a very highly regulated environment that I navigate as a marketing communications leader—if we can find a way to use AI to scale and drive content that is going to be a game changer for us.

Alan Hart: I agree. I agree with that. And what are you curious about in the world today?

Naomi Rodiles: I’m also curious about AI for equity. So, this is a total aside: Health equity, educational equity, and access, those are really, really true, core to me, who I am. There’s this startup, Actualize Impact, that is just doing such cool work in building LLMs [large language models] for educational organizations to help them expand access. I’m like, this is awesome! If they can unlock that, this is—we’re going to have a really much better world. So, yeah. Very cool.

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Alan Hart: I think that getting the information in the hands of everyone that needs it is hugely powerful.

Naomi Rodiles: Yes, exactly.

Alan Hart: As you think about opportunities facing marketers or potential threats, what do you see on the horizon?

Naomi Rodiles: I think the threat is resisting change. It is somewhat cliché to say change is inevitable, but change is growth. Change is power. Change is transformation. Change is good. It's hard work. It is absolutely difficult to navigate and adapt, especially in large, complex, highly matrixed organizations like the one I work in. But being at the forefront—or not even—even playing catch up in a world that we know is just going to continue to evolve and change? That's exciting. I mean, that is opportunity. And I think that maybe it's human nature, just this resistance to change, you know, speaking on AI, flipping what it can't do or what it could be from the negative to the positive is actually what I think we need more people to do. And instead of the resistance, how can we embrace this and use it for good?

Alan Hart: Well, last question. We're at CES. We're doing this recording, and as you think about what you've seen so far—it's still early days—at the conference, what trend are you seeing you think will change people's behavior this year in 2026?

Naomi Rodiles: The one thing at CES that I think will be a game changer is AI finally transitioning to being helpful in everyday life. So from tools or flashy demos to actual useful behavior change driving AI use cases.

Alan Hart: Naomi, thank you for coming on the show. I appreciate it.

Naomi Rodiles: Yeah, thank you.

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