



## MARKETING STAR



# Sandra Holtzman: Founder and President of Holtzman Communications, LLC

[By Kenneth Davis]

When Sandra Holtzman decided to start her own company, she had a successful career as an award-winning creative director and copywriter. Even though things were going extremely well in her career, she felt that something she couldn't quite pinpoint was missing.

"It wasn't that I wasn't happy," she said. "It was a little nudging in the background...everything was going right, so why am I not thrilled?"

Ten years ago, she established Holtzman Communications, LLC, an integrated advertising, marketing, interactive, and public-relations firm. The firm provided the component that she felt had been missing in her previous work.

"And when I finally started my own company, that was it," she said. "It was like I had an entrepreneurial streak that I couldn't even articulate...and I've never looked back."

Holtzman said the people in her firm have backgrounds in all forms of marketing in all sectors, but her primary focus is on pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and high-tech, emerging, and converging technologies.

"And we use a lot of 21st century marketing techniques to better get our clients noticed in a more efficient and focused way," said Holtzman, who is one of the country's preeminent experts in pharmaceutical marketing.

Holtzman Communications works in the areas of branding, interactive marketing, multicultural marketing, open-mind research, public relations and investor relations, corporate communications, and strategic development, among many others.

The firm's clients range from startups to Fortune 500 companies. Some of its well-known clients include Pfizer Health

Solutions, Inc., the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and MaRS, the Medical and Related Sciences Centre, in Toronto.

Holtzman said her company's approach to working with its clients is the same with established companies as it is with startups.

"Because the bottom line with any company is they need to be branded," she explained. "And they need to get it out as efficiently as possible and as targeted as possible to their audiences. So a startup company may be more limited in funds, and they may not know what they need, but the end goal is exactly the same."

**Q. What are your hobbies and interests?**

A. I bowl. I'm on a league, and I've been doing that for a few years. I like to play Scrabble. I like to hike; I've hiked in the Alps. I like being outdoors, fine cuisine, and I like wine.

**Q. What's in your CD player?**

A. Old stuff—a little bit of Johnny Cash, a little bit of electronic music, some disco, and a little Madonna.

**Q. What's your favorite TV show?**

A. *It was either Med Ad News or Wine Spectator.*

**Q. What's your favorite TV show?**

A. *Reruns of Sex and the City.*

**Q. Who's your role model?**

A. I don't really know. The first person that comes to mind is Oprah. I don't even know if she is a role model. It's because she's gone from nowhere to somewhere, and she's maintained her identity and, to a certain degree, her humbleness, and that's a big deal.

She said that as President of Holtzman Communications, she's responsible for relationships between clients and the company and for making sure everything is running smoothly, as well as making sure the people on her team know what they're doing and are moving the product or process along.

"And some of the other things I do are more hands-on, where I'll actually be doing some writing in some cases," Holtzman said. "Or consulting with art directors about different things, and a little bit of business development."

She said that some of the things that distinguish her firm from a number of other marketing firms are its emphasis on creativity, its practice of working collaboratively with clients, and the extensive marketing experience that her people have.

Holtzman discussed the qualities she believes a person should have in order to be successful in the marketing field:

"Persistence, creativity, and just in terms of problem solving, honesty. You really have to listen to people—good communication skills. You have to listen to people so you can give them what they want and so you can hear them."

She added that a good marketing person also provides input and feedback to clients and doesn't just take orders.

"So my goal, and what I think other people should do, is there's got to be a midpoint where you give the client what they need to be



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happy, but you also try and guide them into a position that will deliver the results that will really be best for them," Holtzman said.

"In other words, you're not just a yes man; you can push back. When I first went on at Pfizer, the gentleman that I worked with, who's been my client for 10 years now, said, 'I don't want an order-taker; I don't want someone standing there with a pencil and paper saying, "Oh, you want a sales sheet? Will that be two sides or four sides?"' He said, 'I want you to think about what you're doing, what I'm asking you to do, and give me a push back and give me suggestions.' So what you really need to do is work with your client as a team because they're trusting you."

In addition to running her firm, Holtzman is the co-chair of the New York chapter of the Licensing Executives Society. She's also the marketing columnist for *Lab to Wall Street*, a webzine that focuses on the life sciences. Moreover, she recently had her first book published. The title of the book is *Lies Startups Tell Themselves to Avoid Marketing*, and she co-wrote it with Jean Kondek, who is the founder of Black Dog Marketing Services.

Holtzman attended the Bronx High School of Science, a specialized high school at which admittance decisions are determined by an entrance exam. She then majored in English and film at Lehman College, which is part of the City University of New York, graduating in 1973. Always an overachiever, she attended the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College and New York University simultaneously, pursuing two different master's degrees—one in English and the other in cinema studies.

"So Middlebury met for four summers for the English degree," Holtzman said. "So I figured I'd go to Middlebury during the summer and NYU for cinema studies in the winter. But after the first year, it was too much, so I just wound up completing the film degree."

After receiving her master's in cinema studies from NYU in 1976, Holtzman headed out into the job market and landed her first job at *The New York Times* as a transcriptionist of reporters' stories.

"This was before computers," she said, "and reporters would call in stories from all over the world. We'd tape them, we'd type them up, and we were allowed two mistakes a year in print. I had one and almost lost my job. It was very demanding, and you weren't just a pair of hands; you had to be intelligent."

Holtzman remained at *The New York Times* for a year and a half and then worked in the editorial department of *Playboy* magazine for a few months. She then got a job as a publicity assistant at Warner Bros. and was part of the publicity launch for Stanley Kubrick's horror classic *The Shining*. In addition to her publicity work, Holtzman also worked in the recording room in the telecommunications area at Warner Bros.

"So I'm pretty versed in telecom, and I'm good with communications—physical communications like Teletype and stuff like that," she said.

After leaving Warner Bros., Holtzman experienced several other highlights in the publicity field, and one of them was being

part of the launch team for the Acura car. She later joined pharmaceutical advertising agency Kallir, Philips, Ross, Inc., as a senior copywriter and eventually joined Sudler & Hennessy, another pharmaceutical agency. After that, she freelanced briefly for Wyeth Pharmaceuticals and then worked for The Hal Lewis Group, Inc., in Philadelphia. She then did freelance work for a number of different companies before establishing Holtzman Communications in 1997.

Holtzman Communications has won several awards for its work—most recently, a Gold RX Club Award Show award for a direct-to-consumer website, [www.duacgel.com](http://www.duacgel.com).

The firm is headquartered in Manhattan, but Holtzman said the company is virtual.

"Pfizer is less than two miles from me, and I don't see them that often," she said. "Everything is done over the telephone and the Internet, so I literally have clients that I've never met."

Holtzman was born and raised in Manhattan.

### ON THE NET

Holtzman Communications, LLC  
[www.holtzmancom.com](http://www.holtzmancom.com)

New York University  
[www.nyu.edu](http://www.nyu.edu)

Pfizer Health Solutions, Inc  
[www.pfizerhealthsolutions.com](http://www.pfizerhealthsolutions.com)

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