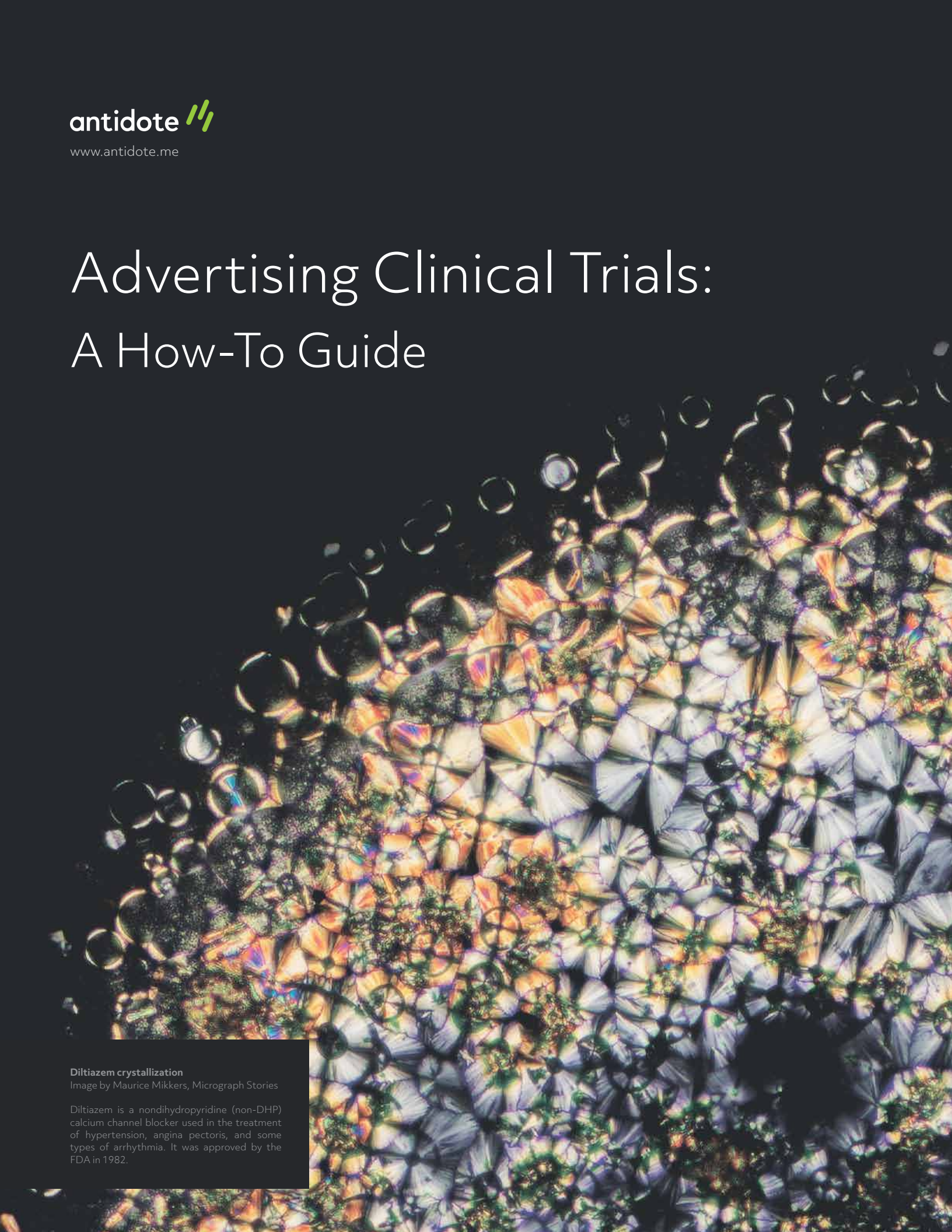


Advertising Clinical Trials: A How-To Guide

Diltiazem crystallization

Image by Maurice Mikkers, Micrograph Stories

Diltiazem is a nondihydropyridine (non-DHP) calcium channel blocker used in the treatment of hypertension, angina pectoris, and some types of arrhythmia. It was approved by the FDA in 1982.



Advertising Clinical Trials: A How-To Guide

Advertising clinical trials to patients who may be interested is a key part of the research process. From connecting with local doctors to using digital outreach tools, the process takes time and planning to get right. But with a mix of tools and approaches, along with plenty of testing, it is possible to reach your recruitment goals without going over budget or delaying your trial. Below you'll find all the information you need to kick off a successful clinical trial advertising campaign.

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Researching your patient population

Before you start drafting copy and choosing outreach channels, it's important to take time to thoroughly research your patient population. Your research should answer questions both about demographic details related to the condition, as well as asking questions that get to the heart of why a patient might want to participate in your trial.

To start, basic questions to research include:

- ✓ How many people in the U.S. (or in your site area) live with the condition?
- ✓ Is this condition more common in some populations than in others?
- ✓ What are the current treatments for the condition?
- ✓ What are the most common symptoms of the disease?
- ✓ Are there any comorbidities that are common in this condition?

Next, visit websites for disease nonprofits and patient advocates to start to get an idea of what day-to-day life is like with the condition, and how the your trial may help. You can also look on social media, such as the Facebook pages for disease nonprofits, and message boards to find out how patients talk about their condition with each other.

Try to answer questions like:

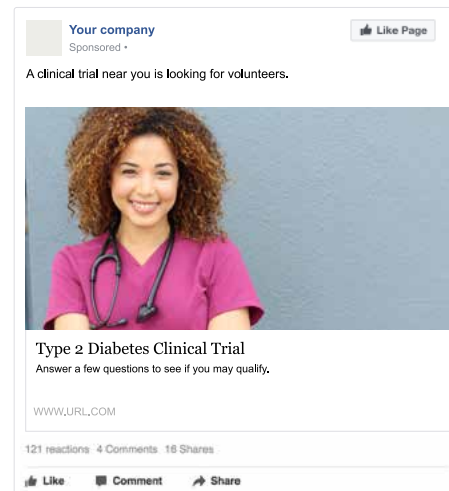
- ✓ What are the most challenging symptoms of the condition?
- ✓ What are lesser-known symptoms of the condition?
- ✓ Do patients ever discuss clinical research with each other?
- ✓ What do patients wish others understood about their condition?
- ✓ How do patients feel about the currently available treatments?
- ✓ Are the currently available treatments expensive for some patients?

Keep your research handy when you start planning out advertising channels for your campaign and drafting outreach materials.

There are several different channels you can use to reach potential participants. After conducting your patient research, you should start to have an idea of the best channels for your particular audience. There are more, but the most common advertising channels include:

Facebook

With 2 billion daily users, Facebook is one of the most powerful ways to reach patients. Even if your target population is on the older side, Facebook may still be the right fit – 62% of Americans age 65 and older use Facebook. Facebook's ad platforms allow you to target users by detailed interest and demographic information, as well as create lookalike audiences based on email lists you already have.

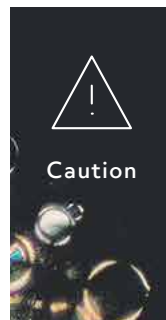


The pros of using Facebook include its wide reach and variety of ad types, including link ads, banner ads, video ads, and carousel ads. It also has robust targeting options. Downsides include Facebook's limits on targeting personal attributes in your ad copy, and the potential to reach many patients who may not be interested in your trial. It's also no secret that Facebook has received negative press lately about its privacy guidelines, which may lead users to distrust the posts they see on the site. Our guide on how to use Facebook for clinical trial patient recruitment has more tips for getting the most out of this platform.

Paid search

Google AdWords and Bing Ads, two channels for paid search, are also popular ways to reach patients. Through these ads, you can connect with patients who are searching for clinical trial opportunities, or who have other questions about their condition.

One benefit of using search ads is that they allow you to reach patients who are actively searching for clinical trial opportunities, or for treatment options for their condition. These ads can get expensive, so it's important to closely monitor clicks and conversion rates for your keywords throughout your campaign. If your keywords are too broad, for example, you may attract clicks from patients who are searching for something related to your condition, but who are not interested in clinical trials. AdWords costs can add up fast, so they may not be the best ad choice for small teams without the time to manage them carefully.



Paid search can be an effective way to attract patients actively looking for trials. But watch your keywords carefully – paid search can get expensive. Check your search terms and add irrelevant keywords to your “negative keywords” list regularly.

Display ads

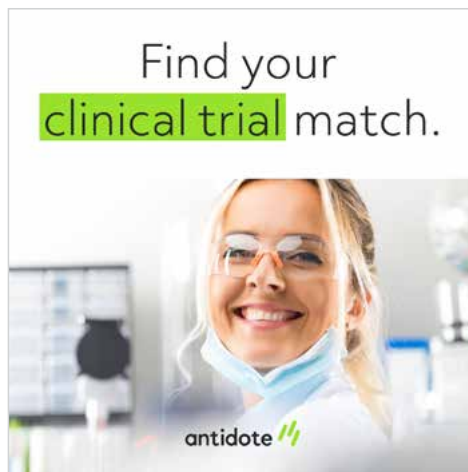
These ads are graphic banners placed on different websites patient may visit. The [Google Display Network](#) is one way to distribute your ads. There are also many other ad networks you can consider for your campaigns – this list compiles [53 different ones](#). Because some are more niche than Google, they may be right for reaching certain patient populations.



Display ads allow advertisers to use strong visuals to attract patients. Unlike in Facebook ads, there's also more flexibility in terms of speaking to patients directly, though there is often more of a limit on the length of your text. Design is important for these kinds of ads, so they may not be the right option for teams without an in-house designer or resources to work with a design.

Other social media

In addition to using the most common digital outreach methods, it may also be useful for your trial to experiment with other social media. Quora, Pinterest, and Reddit are all alternative channels to try. Learn more in our guide to [digital recruitment channels besides Facebook](#).



Print advertising

If your research revealed that the patient population you need to connect with for your trial isn't as active online as others, or if the condition you're studying is common enough that broad-based advertisements might be effective, print advertising might be a good option for you. Think about what print media your population might read. You'll want to keep it local so you can geotarget as much as possible. And, local outlets also tend to be more affordable than something that reaches a broader range of locations. If you can, it can help to ask patients themselves what print media they tend to come into contact with.

// If you relate to patients on their own terms, you'll build trust and relevancy that will make your ads a success."

Katrina Ambrose, Senior Designer, Antidote

Benefits of this method of outreach are that you can reach a large amount of people in a short period of time — and there is no opportunity for two-way engagement if you or your IRB are concerned about that. However, some see print advertising as quite expensive given that it is difficult to get too targeted with this approach. You also do not have the opportunity to tweak your copy or imagery and optimize as you go.

Radio advertising

Similar to print advertising, radio advertising might be an option if you are targeting a patient population that is not inclined to computers, or if you are attempting to reach a very broad group of people. Start by considering the stations available in your area, and what your patient population listens to. Radio ads, of course, start with copy. Write your ads in a conversational style — they'll be spoken and a formal style is not likely to grab attention. Then, find a voiceover artist and a recording studio. Work with these experts to get the tone and execution of your ad just right.

The pros of radio advertising are similar to print — you can reach a large number of people quickly, and you can avoid two-way engagement if that is a concern. However, it can be difficult to target a specific patient population, and all the work that goes into radio spots mean that it can get quite expensive as well. And, like with print, you can't change it once it's out there — there's no opportunity for optimizing after initial analysis.



Reaching doctors

According to a [CISCRP survey](#), 58% of patients looking for a trial would prefer to start their search with their physicians. But many physicians are often pressed for time, and therefore they can't be aware of every clinical trial that might be an option for every one of their patients. Advertising to doctors can be a good idea to reach those patients who are most comfortable learning about trials from their own physician.

You can reach doctors by delivering trial collateral to local practices in the area, attending local health conferences in your therapeutic area, or advertising on a number of websites created just for doctors. For example, [Medscape](#) is a news site that many physicians use to stay up to date on the latest guidelines and clinical news — it is considered the number one online professional resource for physicians. And, [social](#)

[networking platforms](#) like [Sermo](#) can provide a good opportunity to get your trial information in front of the right doctors.

The benefits of reaching doctors is clear: it's patients' preferred method of learning about clinical trials. The cons are that it can be very difficult to reach this group, and much of

the trial marketing they're exposed to looks and sounds the same. So, make sure you're being creative enough to differentiate yourself. And, it's often best to pair doctor outreach with more patient-facing outreach in order to maximize your efforts.

// When I'm running a campaign, I am always running tests. I'm either testing one audience segment against another, trying one copy variation against another one, or maybe one landing page against another."

David Tindell, Digital Marketing Manager, Antidote

Your patient research will also come in handy once you're ready to create targeting strategies for your outreach channels. You'll use it to help determine what keywords, interests, and websites you'll target for your campaigns.

Before you set up your campaigns, consider a few different tests you're interested in running. This will help you optimize your campaign for the best results faster than if you don't start with testing.

"When I'm running a campaign, I am always running tests," says David Tindell, Digital Marketing Manager at Antidote. "I'm either testing one audience segment against another, trying one copy variation against another one, or maybe one landing page against another."

In the beginning stages of a campaign, Tindell says that he's most focused on lowering the cost per registration of patients who take the trial prescreener. As the campaign goes on, however, he starts to focus more on metrics farther down the funnel, such as cost per consent or randomization.

"Once we've referred a significant number of patients to sites, I am much more interested in site feedback about how patients are screening, and analyzing which audience segments are most engaged with the study," he says.

If one keyword or copy variation is getting a lot of clicks, but not conversions, you may consider testing alternatives. Chances are, you'll continue to make adjustments to your targeting throughout your trial.



As your campaign goes on, adjust your test metrics to account for conversions later in the patient experience. For example, once you have data on which patients are attending site visits, start optimizing for that metric rather than just for clicks to your ads.

The imagery and design you choose for your ads are also critical to their success. You'll use your patient research again to find pictures and designs that reflect your audience and their needs.

"You should always start with getting to know your audience," says Katrina Ambrose, Senior Designer on the marketing team at Antidote. "If you relate to patients on their own terms, you'll build trust and relevancy that will make your ads a success."

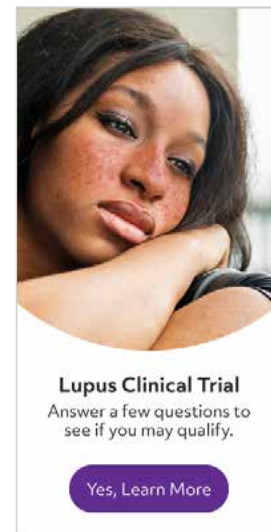
Ambrose recommends thinking about clinical trial advertising design in three parts: the verbal message, the visual message, and the call to action. The copy your ad uses, the imagery involved, and your call to action should all speak to each other and work together to create an easy-to-follow narrative for the patient.

"They should work together to reinforce each other," she says.

For Ambrose, the most important part is the call to action because it tells the patient what they should do next. "Without it, an ad is really just a nice message," Ambrose says. "A CTA should be clear and bold, and it never hurts to make it look like a button."

When choosing imagery for your ad options, make sure the photography reflects the demographics of your trial. When trying to reach more general demographics, Ambrose recommends trying illustrations. "Illustration is good at being universal," she says.

Remember when creating or selecting visuals that you have a very short amount of time to catch your audience's attention. Share imagery that empathizes with your audience and captures their experience with the condition.



Include a visibly recognizable condition in your ad imagery to help build trust and relevancy.

When you set out to write copy for your clinical trial ad, you'll again want to tap into the research you've done on the patient population you're aiming to reach. As Nancy Ryerson, Digital Marketing Manager at Antidote, explains, your research should give you a good understanding of who your patient population is and what it's like to live with the condition. Of course, it's also key to understand what language patients use, and what might motivate them to take part in research, so that you can reflect both in your copy.

When writing ad copy, Ryerson reminds us that most Americans read at an 8th grade reading level, so it's important to keep your writing clean and simple. You'll also want to vary your copy based on the platform you're using — each platform has different character limits and different rules about how you can talk about trials or talk to patients, so do your best to keep your copy is aligned with those.

Make sure you're keeping IRB review in mind, too. Your copy cannot be coercive or make any claims about how the study drug might help patients.



Tips

- ✓ Keep copy at an 8th grade reading level – the average for most Americans
- ✓ Talk about the condition using the same language patients use
- ✓ Vary your copy based on the platform you're using
- ✓ Follow FDA guidelines to ensure smooth IRB submissions

Existing patient groups, such as nonprofit organizations, online health portals, or even patient advocates and influencers, might be interested in helping you spread the word about potential new treatments and clinical trial opportunities in their condition area. Make sure you don't overlook these groups.

Finding the right groups takes a bit of research, so be sure to do thorough internet research beforehand to determine whether a group or individual focuses on research, whether they have assisted with trial promotion before, and what their general stance on clinical trials is. It may also be useful to figure out the organization's mission, and whether supporting research would help them achieve it. Keep in mind that many of these groups may be interested in some form of payment for each patient that they help connect you to.

Beyond organizations, there might be individual patient advocates who might be willing to help you advertise for your trial. You can find these folks by practicing social listening — watching relevant hashtags and seeing who is most active. You can also use tools like Symplur to see who has the biggest reach and is active on certain hashtags. When you approach these influencers, remember that some payment may need to be offered for their services in this area.



How to work with a recruitment company

If you have a small staff at your site, or if you're just looking for more recruitment support, you may consider seeking out a [clinical trial recruitment company](#) for help.

Recruitment agencies offer a range of services, from digital patient acquisition, to database access and EHR matching. When talking with potential vendors, there are [a few different questions](#) you can ask to help ensure they're the right fit for your trial:

- What methods does the company use to recruit patients?
- What is the company's payment model (subscription, pay per patient contact info, pay per randomization, etc.)?
- Does the company offer additional services, such as prescreener development?
- Will the company also screen patients over the phone?
- For what condition areas has the company recruited in the past?
- How does the company deal with high costs and other challenges during a campaign?
- What outreach materials from previous trials can the company share?

Once you've identified a company you're interested in working with, establish a regular reporting schedule so your team can stay up to date on how the campaign is going. Recruitment companies can also share helpful feedback with sites and sponsors if patients are failing a prescreener on certain questions based on the study protocol.

Regulations and IRB submission

As you put together outreach materials for your trial, your Institutional Review Board (IRB) is also important to keep in mind. Every IRB is different, but your materials should adhere to a few different rules set out by the FDA.

According to the FDA, clinical trial advertising cannot:

- Be coercive in nature
- State or imply that the drug/procedure device is safe or effective, or superior to other treatments
- Emphasize patient payment for participation (though you can mention it)
- Advertise “free medical care”
- Market the clinical trial as a “new treatment” or “new medication,” as it has not yet been approved by the FDA

Here are a few examples of copy that likely would not be approved by your IRB, one that may, and one that is a safe bet:



“Improve your asthma symptoms. Join our clinical trial.”



“Severe asthma is challenging. Consider a clinical trial and help asthma research.”



“A clinical trial for asthma is looking for volunteers in New York City.”

While you should keep FDA regulations in mind while crafting copy, it's also smart to include a range of copy variations in your IRB submission packet so you have options to test when you start running campaigns. Once your materials have been approved by your IRB, there's generally no turning back, so consider what tests you might like to run on different messaging before you finalize your submission.



Tips

IRB Submission Do's and Don'ts

- ✓ Do include a variety of copy options for testing
- ✓ Do use simple, clear language
- ✓ Do mention the site location, purpose of research, condition under study, and other useful details

- ✗ Don't include language that may be considered coercive
- ✗ Don't make promises that the treatment will be effective
- ✗ Don't use special fonts or bolding when referring to payments patients may receive

The future of clinical trial advertising

A few key trends may dictate the future of clinical trial patient recruitment and advertising. The first is patient involvement. More and more, patients want to be involved in all aspects of their healthcare — including in the development of research protocols and the recruitment of patients like them for clinical trials. What does this mean for the clinical trial advertiser? If you ever find yourself putting together an ad campaign without consulting patients living with the condition you are recruiting for, you need to rethink your approach. As patient centricity becomes less of a buzzword and more of a reality, the need to involve patients in every aspect of medicine will become more and more clear.

The future of clinical trial advertising

Past

Print and radio advertising

Present

Digital advertising

Future

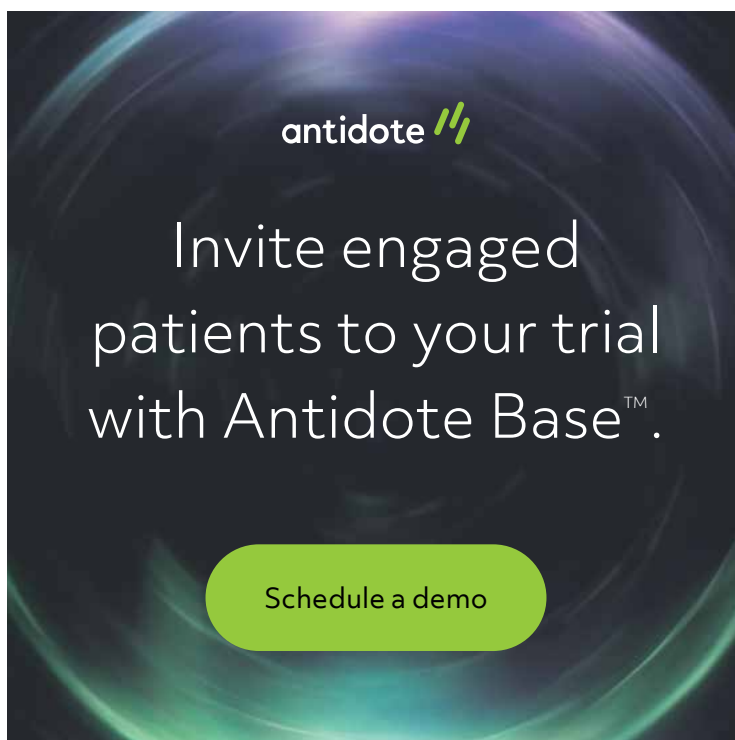
Patient involvement and flexible eligibility criteria


Secondly, technology is here to stay. Digital health is on the rise, and online marketing is only getting smarter. Of course, doctor recommendation will likely continue to be a preferred method of learning about research, but make sure that your recruitment ad strategy contains elements of online outreach. Even if your patient population research reveals that print or radio ads will best reach your intended audience, remember that most patients have caregivers, and many caregivers are searching for research opportunities online, even if patients themselves are not. Take advantage of technology to maximize your reach in the most targeted way possible.

Lastly, we're seeing a call for clinical trials with more flexible eligibility criteria. For example, just last year, AstraZeneca adjusted a trial's endpoints and number of patients after a competitor's drug for small cell lung cancer failed in a clinical trial. This approach to research, while ultimately better in terms of outcomes, will require more nimble advertising. You'll need to be prepared to quickly pivot as needed in order to reach new sets of patients if and when eligibility criteria is revised. The best advice is to make a plan, but don't be afraid to stray from it if you need to.

Whether your patient population is one that is active online, or loves reading the Sunday paper, clinical trial advertising can help you reach them. What's most important is to know your patients — so start researching, talk to organizations and individuals, and allow their input to influence your clinical trial ad copy, design, and targeting decisions.

If you're looking for more help connecting with patients, get in touch with us about our newest tool for clinical trial sites. Antidote Base allows sites to hand-pick patients that are right for your trial. Schedule a free demo with us to learn more.

A promotional graphic for Antidote Base. It features a dark background with a glowing, ethereal green and blue circular light effect. The Antidote logo is at the top. The main text is centered and reads: "Invite engaged patients to your trial with Antidote Base™". At the bottom, there is a bright green rounded rectangular button with the text "Schedule a demo".

antidote 

Invite engaged
patients to your trial
with Antidote Base™.

Schedule a demo