

## Season 2, Episode 2 - John Hallock podcast transcript

### [00:00:04.210] - KRISTE

Hey, welcome to How It's Done, a podcast for curious marketers. I'm Kriste Goad. I'll be your host and I'm really glad you're here.

### [00:00:15.640] - KRISTE

Welcome to the show. In this episode of How It's Done, I'm here with John Hallock, senior vice president, corporate communications at Livongo. Today, we're going to talk about John's career evolution as a communicator because he's kind of a big deal having led communications during two of the biggest healthcare technology IPOs in history.

### [00:00:36.220] - KRISTE

The first was athenahealth, which went public in 2007, and now Livongo, which went public last year. John's currently spearheading communications for Livongo's merger with Teladoc, which is one of the hottest stories going right now. You know, no big deal, just 18.5 billion dollars on the table. John, welcome to the show.

### [00:00:57.130] - JOHN

Hey, great to be here. Thanks for having me, Kriste.

### [00:00:59.500] - KRISTE

Well, thanks for taking the time. Would you kick us off telling us a little bit about yourself and your journey to Livongo?

### [00:01:06.580] - JOHN

Yeah, absolutely. So I came on at Livongo right at the very beginning of 2019, and the company at that time had been around a good number of years, had started to scale. And when I had met with Glen Tullman, who is the founder and the former CEO, but now the executive chairman, and I met with him in December of 2018 and up here in Chicago and I had known Glen as a competitor when he was running Allscripts.

### [00:01:40.150] - JOHN

So and I was at athena, and they were really our, kind of our archrival. And I had never—I had never actually met Glen in person. I had only seen him on TV and I, you know, at conferences. Jonathan Bush, the former CEO of athena, was at that conference. And so he was this rival. And he's the nicest guy—

**[00:02:01.090] - KRISTE**

It's like two rock stars, right?

**[00:02:02.920] - JOHN**

Oh, yeah. They were like too good, you know. It's kind of like Auburn and Alabama, right? [...] You needed that competitor to motivate you. And when I met with him, you know, he asked about my experience at athena and Imprivata, and he said, "Listen, we want to go public." And I said, "That's great." And I said, "What's the timetable?" And he said, "Q2. You know, of this coming year."

**[00:02:29.440] - KRISTE**

And this was December?

**[00:02:31.630] - JOHN**

This was December. And so that really—

**[00:02:34.910] - KRISTE**

Now at that time did they have—did they have an internal comms lead at that time?

**[00:02:40.900] - JOHN**

They did not. They did not. They...they, you know, they had various people at more junior levels, and so he fully realized that he needed a comprehensive corporate communications function. And not just from increasing awareness in the brand, but also in terms of getting ready to be a public company and all the work that goes into that, and then the investor relations component of that as well. So from the moment I started in January of 2019, it was an all out race, Kriste, because you had, you had a couple of...You had a couple of mandates.

**[00:03:18.890] - JOHN**

You were selecting banks and you were going through that process of getting a company ready to be public and you needed to bolster national and financial media. You needed to expand the speaking bureau and the subject matter experts, and events and speaking fall under my control at the company, and that was a critical part of expanding our awareness in using our SMEs at Livongo. Not just Glen, but Dr. Jennifer Schneider, who's fantastic, and our chief product officer and our chief data officer and chief

medical officer to really differentiate Livongo from what is a very crowded industry in digital health. Right? It's very difficult to differentiate one company from the next and how they look and feel. And so we had a short amount of time to do that before we would file and then have to be somewhat more conservative in how we communicated leading to the IPO.

**[00:04:23.080] - JOHN**

So we needed to set that stage and we put into place a very aggressive plan that we felt was going to achieve all those goals. And I—when I came on board, I had a few people that were already here that came on my team. We didn't use an outside agency, and really the reason for that was—and I've used agencies from time to time in the past—was we just didn't have the time. We just didn't have the luxury of doing a formal search and then selecting an agency and folding them in and getting them up to speed and coming up with a plan.

**[00:05:01.150] - JOHN**

You know, it was something that I kind of dusted off my old game plan and said, "All right, this is what we're going to do." I was very fortunate—

**[00:05:09.170] - KRISTE**

Did you have, like, an athena plan, sort of like in your files? You're like, "OK, I know the steps to this."

**[00:05:15.010] - JOHN**

Yeah, yeah. I mean, you have a really, really good idea of the the things that you're going to need to do. You know, the world is different in 2019 from a media standpoint than 2007.

**[00:05:28.360] - KRISTE**

Oh gosh, yeah.

**[00:05:29.860] - JOHN**

Yeah, just a little bit.

**[00:05:30.790] - KRISTE**

Understatement of the century, right?

**[00:05:33.760] - JOHN**

And so social media was a big component of what we were going to do. We targeted key reporters that we felt could not only cover us immediately as a soon-to-be public company and why we were so well positioned and why what we were doing for people with chronic conditions was so unique. But also those would be the same reporters that we want covering us right up to the IPO. And after. Then, there was a whole initiative on—

**[00:06:00.740] - KRISTE**

Can I ask—so were those reporters, mostly business reporters that you were targeting? Or a combination of business and healthcare trade?

**[00:06:08.350] - JOHN**

It was both. But on the business press side, there was...if you take, like a Maureen Farrell, she's a good example. She's a really good friend and a fantastic reporter for The Wall Street Journal. I knew we needed a story that was going to essentially set the table to get people, one in the financial media aware of Livongo, OK, and why we were unique. And given that she was the primary, you know, IPO and equities reporter for the Journal, I felt she was the person to do that and to really spend time with our management team understanding the company.

**[00:06:45.550] - JOHN**

And she's not a healthcare reporter. She's an equities reporter. And her story in March of 2019 was really the story that kind of set things off. Right? And it was a very large print and online story about our potential of going public and what that would mean for digital health. What we really wanted Livongo to represent for the industry, not just ourselves, was that there had been a lot of hype and expectations on the digital health community, an awful lot of venture capital, obviously, had been put into these companies over a number of years, but not a lot of exits. Right? And very different than, let's say, the electronic health record practice management world years before.

**[00:07:29.950] - JOHN**

And so Livongo was going to be looked at as the company, for good and bad, that was going to be the litmus test for the entire industry if it had a successful offering, if it demonstrated it could scale, and what that looked like. Well, that might open up the market for other companies. I think you've seen that sense with some additional IPOs and certainly has spurred additional investment. So there was a lot of pressure, I think, on Livongo to have a successful debut. And clearly, we were the largest consumer digital health IPO in history. But with that comes more scrutiny and comes more opinions on the company and you get more of a competitive dynamic.

**[00:08:15.070] - JOHN**

You have competitors that do bits and pieces of what you do. So PR and communications has always been a strategic asset for the company. Right? We're able to essentially increase the metabolic rate of the news and be the thought leadership that we're doing and do it at a cadence that our competitors have a difficult time replicating. And that arms our sales, it arms our marketing, et cetera.

**[00:08:42.970] - KRISTE**

Can you elaborate on that a little bit? Because I think there's often a lot of confusion about the difference between marketing and PR, and I think you kind of just hit on that a little bit.

**[00:08:52.990] - KRISTE**

But how do you describe to people or [...] When you step into these roles at these companies do, you have to sort of do some education around the role and the job and the value and the difference? Or have you been a fortunate one that steps into a role to companies that already understand that?

**[00:09:12.230] - JOHN**

I think it's the latter. So one of the reasons I was attracted to Livongo is, candidly, Glen and the leadership team here understand the strategic value that communications and public relations plays in a company's evolution and brand. Everyone has a marketing function. Every company. Now, some are better than others. Everybody is looking to create content that their sales teams can use to sell into prospects. What not all companies have is the ability to bolster their thought leadership and their presence in the earned media space.

**[00:09:49.330] - JOHN**

Right? And do it at a level that their competitors can't. And the content that comes out of that that gets put into the marketing engine, right? That third-party validation, that is a very unique thing if a company has that. And so Glen understood that. If you look at what he did it Allscripts years ago, I mean, that was a key part of their strategy. It was a key part of our strategy at athenahealth.

**[00:10:14.140] - JOHN**

And so, you know, that wasn't something that I had to deal with and that would have been difficult if I had come into Livongo, and you spent a good amount of your time trying to educate people as to what you're trying to do. It was less about that and more about, "Here's the plan and put it into action right away." And we do not have a large internal team. I'm very blessed to have—the team that I have is extremely hard working. They are extremely dedicated.

**[00:10:42.790] - KRISTE**

How many people—if you're able to disclose this—how many people do you have on your team?

**[00:10:47.680] - JOHN**

I have, now, four people, and at that time I had two people. So I had an individual, and he's extremely talented, his name is Jake Mazanke. He is my senior manager of corporate communications. And then I have a woman named Ashley said, who runs all of our corporate events and thought leadership speaking. And that is highly integrated. And now we've since bolstered both their teams.

**[00:11:17.350] - JOHN**

And when I came on one of the keys, I will tell you, to the success of this team is— Courtnee LeClaire is our chief marketing officer, and she is an unbelievable person and marketer, and she's a very consumer-centric marketer. She comes from Apple and Intel and Disney was the CMO for the Oakland Raiders. I mean, her mind is very different than a traditional healthcare marketer, and she was critical in not only setting the stage to let me and my team do what we needed to do, but also the branding and the look and the feel of Livongo leading into the IPO. Right?

**[00:11:56.470] - JOHN**

And since then, we've increased that. So it was really kind of a perfect storm of bringing people together from different disciplines. [...] We intentionally did not want to have a very layered team, right? Because speed and efficiency was critical.

**[00:12:14.380] - KRISTE**

You and your CMO, you pretty much locked arms from the beginning then?

**[00:12:18.190] - JOHN**

Absolutely. Absolutely. And she's an unbelievable partner. And if you look at where she's come from in her career and the kinds of brands that she's been associated with, she understands the value of PR. She understands that if you have strategic communications as part of marketing and what marketing is trying to do, that can oftentimes be the real differentiator in a company's evolution.

**[00:12:43.270] - KRISTE**

So to that point, I think there's often a lot of confusion, at a lot of companies. I'm, quite frankly, continually shocked at some of the large companies that don't even have a communications function and don't necessarily understand the difference in the different roles and the value of that. How have corporate communications at Livongo and marketing—were you having weekly meetings? You know, are you integrating your plans? Or are you just sort of keeping each other updated on what's going on?

**[00:13:16.390] - KRISTE**

Because I find that is often a breakdown, too. The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing sometimes, and they could be working at cross purposes. But outsider looking in, that's not happening at Livongo. Could you speak to that a little bit?

**[00:13:31.000] - JOHN**

Yeah, that's a great question. So, we are in constant communication and we have our traditional weekly market leadership team meetings, my team meetings, but we don't do it to the point of being risk averse. We don't do it to the point of spending more time strategizing and talking about what we want to do versus doing. There is no shortage of companies, in my experience, that have amazing aspirations of what they want to do in the media or from a marketing standpoint. There is a shortage of companies that actually go and do it.

**[00:14:06.760] - JOHN**

I call it the six-pack abs problem in PR and marketing. There's nobody that doesn't want six-pack abs. I mean, that's a no-brainer. Do you want to do the work and live a lifestyle that's going to allow you to have six-pack abs? So PR, there's no shortage of companies that say, "I have a really great story and we need to do a better job telling it," so on and so forth. But there aren't many companies that actually go and do it and put in the work day in, day out, you know, not just doing one-off stories or a little campaign here or there, but a cadence that literally overwhelms your competition is giving fresh points of views and content to your sales and partner teams to your prospects.

**[00:14:53.830] - JOHN**

And I'd be less than candid if I didn't say, "Yes. It's tiresome." It's been two years of a sprint.

**[00:15:01.450] - KRISTE**

Right. Because the media is 24/7.

**[00:15:04.800] - JOHN**

24/7. And we have all different kinds of things we can speak to at Livongo. We have the world of diabetes and hypertension and mental health. We have the corporate story and the financial story, right? And so, to your question earlier of larger companies with how they view corporate communications—most companies, they have a person that handles a press release and dealing with legal and finance and get the news out the door and they don't do much with it.

**[00:15:32.550] - JOHN**

They say, "OK, we got the news out onto the next thing." And then they're shocked and surprised that there wasn't a lot of pick up or they didn't get the message resonating the way they wanted. So media relations, the act of talking to a reporter I think has dissipated in my 20 years of PR .

**[00:15:56.400] - KRISTE**

Well, and reporters are harder to get on the phone, you know, if we're talking about getting someone on the phone, quite frankly.

**[00:16:02.430] - KRISTE**

But I would love it if you could dive into that a little bit more, because obviously when you're working on that initial story that you talked about earlier with The Wall Street Journal, you really have to do a lot of work on the back end saying, "OK, what are the key elements of this story? What are the things that we need to help this reporter understand about us? Who do we need to make available? How can we help appropriately communicate why we're different?"

**[00:16:32.380] - KRISTE**

And then you also have to make sure, you know, I think a lot of times if you're leading corp comms and media relations at a company, you could do all that work. But then if you don't have the executives willing and ready to dive in—like, say, the reporter's available, and they only have this one window—to make sure that they know that we have to do everything we can to be available.

**[00:16:56.700] - KRISTE**

How do you go about creating those storylines? Literally, kind of how much work is involved? Because I think a lot of people misunderstand that in kind of framing up the stories. And then are you constantly—you and your team—are constantly sort of pitching reporters to keep that cadence going? I know there's a lot of questions sort of in there, but—

**[00:17:16.980] - JOHN**

Let me take one of them. So, listen, having contacts with reporters, whether it's at the financial business press level or trade level, is critical. I mean, that's not to be understated. So, if you don't have relationships with reporters or influencers, it doesn't matter how well-thought-out, how articulate your comms messaging platform is or isn't. Right? Because they are the conduit to telling a story. So I've always been a believer in that.

**[00:17:49.110] - JOHN**

To your other question, yeah. You need to sit down with your team and say these are the two, three or four things that we absolutely want to get across in the media, and here's why. And obviously they need



to be aligned with the strategy of the company. And then the time between that and executing has to be as short as possible. Right? And what ends up happening is a lot of companies go through this first phase and they spend a lot of fossil time and everybody feels good, and the PowerPoint probably looks really beautiful and it's 25 pages and it's awesome.

**[00:18:25.950] - JOHN**

And then they got to put it into practice and that's where there often is a drop off. In the case of Livongo, there was no time to spend months coming up with some elaborate plan. The plan was very strategic and very targeted to our end goals in, let's say, 30, 60, 90, six months, a year. Right? And we would be filling in the holes as we go.

**[00:18:54.870] - JOHN**

But the thing that I told Glen, and he understood this, and Dr. Jennifer Schneider and our CEO Zane Burke, they had to be 1,000% bought in—into the time and the commitment to execute it. Otherwise it doesn't work. And so that would probably be the guidance I would give any corporate comms person that's looking to take a job or in a job that you need to really have the commitment of your executive team to execute that. And if you don't, it's going to be really challenging.

**[00:19:32.160] - KRISTE**

That kind of speaks to what you said at the top of the podcast, about what was so appealing to you about Livongo is, it was clear that there was that understanding, and it was clear that the leadership was bought in and understand the importance. I don't know if you've been at companies before where that wasn't the case.

**[00:19:51.360] - KRISTE**

And as a comms person, [...] you're hindered in your own success if there is not that partnership at the top, and no matter how good you may be, in my opinion, the CEO really has to be bought in no matter how many other subject matter experts exist in the company. I feel pretty strongly that a lot of reporters—you can offer them up a lot of different people in the company, but sometimes if you're going to the highest level at The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, whatever, they want the CEO most of the time. [...] Would you agree with that?

**[00:20:36.080] - JOHN**

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And I have been [...] very fortunate in that either one, I fell into an opportunity, like with athena years and years ago where I was blessed to have a very charismatic CEO and a very strong executive team that was committed to PR, certainly with Livongo and Glen, and then with Omar Hussain and Imprivata, or Clay Ritchey there.

**[00:21:07.760] - JOHN**

But I have had an experience where you work at a company that, like we were saying earlier, that wants PR, they want they want corporate comm, but they really don't want to do what it takes probably to get it done. And/or it was a check-the-box activity. OK, we've got a PR/comms person, we're good, you know. And that wasn't particularly fun for me, and I would go home on a on a Friday night and kind of sit there and think to myself, "Boy, did I really did I really get anything done this week? Did I move the ball?" I wrote a lot of things. I came up with strategies. But again, if you don't have the executive team or the CEO that really wants to—

**[00:21:49.520] - JOHN**

Let me give you an example, Kriste. Between early March of this year and the end of June here at Livongo, we did over 290 media and investor meetings and calls.

**[00:22:02.750] - KRISTE**

Wow.

**[00:22:04.390] - JOHN**

That is just the—that is exhausting to even say.

**[00:22:08.750] - KRISTE**

I mean, just the scheduling of that is hours and hours of time.

**[00:22:11.990] - JOHN**

Just the scheduling. That's right. But that shows you that the dedication that Livongo has as a team to educating, whether it's investors, media, influencers, prospects, clients, as to what we are, how we're different, how we're helping them. And that's a huge commitment. That on top of the fact, if you look at from a speaking standpoint, we did—

**[00:22:39.630] - KRISTE**

Right because you guys are everywhere speaking in addition to the media, right?

**[00:22:43.670] - JOHN**

Right. And people think, you know, is it just Glen or Jenny? No, it's a whole team of folks that we use from thought leadership standpoint. And we did 77 speaking engagements in 2019, and we've already done, I want to say, over 50 this year.

**[00:23:02.700] - KRISTE**

This year. I noticed you've been doing a lot of Zoom webinars in those kinds of things since the pandemic. Like you guys have not slowed down a bit.

**[00:23:11.720] - JOHN**

No. Well we made a conscious decision to actually take it to another gear, and here's why. So if we looked at our pre-COVID, if we looked at our speaking schedule for the year, you know, you've got the big ones, the CNBCs, the Fortune, the Forbes events, like the Financial Times, those kinds of things, you know, you would be traveling to those. Right? And that's actually a lot because that makes scheduling even more challenging.

**[00:23:37.790] - JOHN**

But when things went virtual, we thought, "Gosh, this is going to be challenging with Zoom and it being virtual. And it actually, oddly enough, has made us more efficient in that it's easier for me to go get Bertha Coombs at CNBC to do something, because you know what? She has to do it on her computer. Right, versus going someplace to do it. Same with my executive. And so we actually went to another level in that.

**[00:24:05.360] - JOHN**

And now the reason we do that is we know that if one of our executives is doing a keynote fireside, we're going to get the video content. We're going to get our news story content. Right? And then we're going to get the social that goes with that, and all that content, all that fuel goes into the marketing engine. Right?

**[00:24:25.370] - KRISTE**

And you have a marketing team that understands what to do with that content.

**[00:24:30.590] - JOHN**

That's right, and that's where—to your earlier question—that's where having the coordination with my counterparts in the marketing team is critical in that as that fuel keeps coming in. I've been at companies where you have, to use that analogy, you've got a beautiful car in the driveway and no fuel, but sometimes you have barrels of fuel and no car. So either scenario is not going to be fun.

**[00:24:58.310] - JOHN**

[...] The PR is a major, major source of content, and that's why it's important that the kind of content we're getting is aligned with our strategic goals. It's not PR for PR sake.

**[00:25:10.970] - KRISTE**

Right, and tell me about that handoff. You know, once you get those videos and those media hits, is it your team that packages it up and then says, "Here you go, marketing, here's all the hits we got, here's all the content we have. Go do your thing." How does that handoff happen?

**[00:25:27.700] - JOHN**

It's a little bit of that. I mean, it's probably more disciplined than that, but not everything we do, for instance, is applicable to market. For instance, if we're doing a CNBC interview around earnings, probably not something we're going to use from a marketing standpoint. But, a lot of the work we do on our blog around our clinical studies or our data insights, for instance, last week we did a little campaign on looking at all the blood pressure readings in the country, correlating that to COVID-19 outbreaks.

**[00:26:04.450] - KRISTE**

I saw that. That was impressive.

**[00:26:06.280] - JOHN**

That's right. So we did that because—

**[00:26:07.960] - KRISTE**

That's like really leveraging that data for PR, right?

**[00:26:11.090] - JOHN**

That's right. So marketing knows that's coming. They know to get that in front of sales. They know that the thing we want prospecting clients to know is one, you want them asking, "How'd you get that data? That's pretty cool." Right? Well, let me tell you how we got that data, right. It opens up a conversation. And then you also want influencers, reporters and others to say, "Wow, that's really fascinating. I'm going to cover that. And by the way, are you able to get other data points and sources on this issue or that issue." You now become a resource for that reporter or that influencer and that's really, to your earlier question of how you get good contacts and relationships with reporters. You become a resource for them.

**[00:26:54.190] - JOHN**

And a lot of the stuff that you and I are talking about is like Media Relations 101, and I'm always shocked at how our industry has gotten away from some of those fundamental things I was taught as a young, young guy coming out of college of media relations and understanding where the reporter's coming from, what they're trying to accomplish in their job, what you're trying to accomplish, as opposed to saying,

"Hey, we're following Kriste on Twitter and this is what she's tweeting about, and I think—" Well, have you actually talked to her? Have you asked her what she's working on? Have you tried to get an understanding where she's at in your coverage, what her editor might be looking for her to write, and then and then meeting her there?

**[00:27:43.330] - KRISTE**

Right.

**[00:27:43.670] - JOHN**

As opposed to saying, "Write about this." And so—

**[00:27:47.410] - KRISTE**

Well, let me ask you this—

**[00:27:47.990] - JOHN**

I was fortunate. Yeah, go ahead.

**[00:27:49.840] - KRISTE**

Well, so let's use last week's, you know, the data that you're talking about relative to blood pressure and COVID. Was that something that the company was doing and you said, "Oh, that's great. That's a media story."? Or were you like, "Hey, guys, what can we do? What data can we generate, you know, to tie back to COVID to be relevant, and a relevant part of this story?" Because—

**[00:28:15.190] - JOHN**

It was the latter. Yeah. So we have a data science team and they are, as you can imagine, extremely bright people. And I have found whether it's Livongo or athena, we had we had individuals like that back then, but we just didn't call them data scientists. They were just the really smart people down the hall that had a lot of data. A good comms person is constantly story mining in their organization to find out what might be interesting coming out of their company.

**[00:28:47.260] - JOHN**

And so we work, and in fact, we do use a contractor, an individual that I worked with for years at athena, and he's a fantastic writer and he helps us with the bandwidth on driving that blog and that platform. But it's talking with the data scientists and the clinical team, and oftentimes they're sitting on information and data that is extremely compelling. It's then our job to package it up.

**[00:29:14.440] - KRISTE**

Right. They're not sitting there every day going, "Oh, this would be great media story." And so—

**[00:29:19.780] - JOHN**

No, they're not. They're not.

**[00:29:19.780] - KRISTE**

I think you hit on something super important. The comms team as well as the marketing team, you know, you do kind of have to walk the halls, as they say, a little harder to do right now, but, you know, knock on doors, ask people. You've got to build those relationships internally, just like you're talking about building relationships with reporters, because it's a constant kind of marrying of what are people interested in and then what are the stories that we need to uncover within our own company to even be able to tell those stories externally?

**[00:29:51.790] - JOHN**

Yeah, I mean, it all falls into what I would call issues response. You know, even once you build that muscle memory in a company, that ability to get the data out and put it and frame it in a way that's digestible to the market, as things come up in the world, you're able to speak to those things because your team has the ability to react faster. But if you don't do the hard work, if you don't build that function internally, it makes it really difficult to conduct any kind of proactive issues response efforts, I think.

**[00:30:31.110] - JOHN**

But, you know, we learned that athena years ago. We had an initiative called Pay Review where we ranked—

**[00:30:38.670] - KRISTE**

I remember that, too.

**[00:30:39.690] - JOHN**

Yeah. Yeah. We ranked all the health insurers. At the time, doctors were getting sliced and diced in cost and quality, and they were very upset and they were upset at the health plan market for doing that. And we wanted to be an advocate for the doctor, and we also wanted people to understand what athenahealth did as compared to software companies.

**[00:31:04.200] - JOHN**

So we released this data and we measured how well or poorly a payer did in paying a doctor on time. And the doctor was like, "This is great. You know, somebody understands the pain that myself and my staff go through." And then prospects could say, "Well, how did you get that data?" Great. Thanks for asking. Our sales folks to use it. The media loved it, obviously. And then they would ask the question, "I didn't know it was so difficult for a doctor to get paid. Why is that?" And that's the question we wanted. And that allowed us to inject our point of view and why what athena was doing was unique. That's the same thing we do here at Livongo around the notion of disease management is not new. That's not a new thing. The notion that—

**[00:31:58.190] - KRISTE**

That's where I first got into healthcare. I was internal, you know, led corp comms at a company called Healthways. It was the leader in disease management at the time. Doesn't even exist anymore. But that was back in the early 2000s, and it's still...it's evolved a lot, obviously. But the concept you're still having to educate people all the time.

**[00:32:18.900] - JOHN**

Right. Think about it. So the nice thing about... I think the correlation between athena and Livongo is that the problem they were trying to solve was not new. Right? Medical groups trying to get paid and be more efficient—not a new problem. Lots of companies that would try to help them do that. Employers and health plans trying to rein in costs around diabetes, hypertension or other chronic diseases—not a new thing. It's the way in which you go about addressing that problem that both athena and Livongo have unique ways of doing that, right?

**[00:32:57.590] - JOHN**

And so the key from a comms standpoint is finding ways to talk about that and get people talking about and thinking about things differently. So data plays a big key.

**[00:33:10.070] - KRISTE**

Yeah, and even more so today. People understand, you know, data a lot more, too, I think. So I want to go back to have you talk a little bit more.

**[00:33:21.260] - KRISTE**

So once you have those stories, you've got the buy in, what's your philosophy on pitching the media? How much pitching—you know, I'm using kind of air quotes—"pitching" are you and your team doing on a daily basis?

**[00:33:34.340] - KRISTE**

Do you have sort of—do you have a guiding philosophy? And do you have sort of a formula that works? Because I think a lot of people don't know how to do this—

**[00:33:44.960] - JOHN**

I'm going to make it really simple. And believe it or not, when I have a story that we're starting to develop or craft or a database campaign, I probably already know the reporter that I want to have write it and why. And I either pick up— what's that?

**[00:34:06.190] - KRISTE**

You zero in on here's the one reporter I want to pitch this story to because it's so perfect for this person.

**[00:34:14.270] - JOHN**

Yeah, I know that that individual is going to not only like it, but I think they'll do the story justice. I think they'll be genuine in their coverage. Now, I also know that there's going to be secondary coverage, but that's the person I want to cover it and I'll either text him or call him on the phone. That's where those relationships come in. I mean, you don't come out of college, or two or three years out of college, and have this awesome Rolodex of reporters. You build relationships with a reporter because you've delivered stories to them or been a resource to them for a long period of time. Right?

**[00:34:50.250] - KRISTE**

Right and they trust you. They know you're not going to, like, waste their time, right?

**[00:34:54.740] - JOHN**

That's right. So that that would be my advice to young people coming into this industry, is you got to work on your writing, got to be a good writer. You've got to be a writer that can write for different disciplines. You need to really focus on relationships with reporters and influencers, understanding the anatomy of a story, how a story comes to be, the role you play in it (or don't play in it—sometimes that's important to know), and then then you can figure out, "What do I do with this coverage when I get it?" But you really [...] I just think, and I haven't been in the agency world in a long, long time, but that is the thing I think young people should be focused on.

**[00:35:49.460] - KRISTE**

I think that is the greatest advice. Everything you've just outlined.

**[00:35:54.290] - KRISTE**



And I, you know, I've said for years also, "Not everybody is good at media relations." You know? I think that sometimes you do have young professionals coming out of a PR program but they don't—

**[00:36:07.170] - JOHN**

Let me say this—

**[00:36:07.930] - KRISTE**

They're not good at media relations. [...] Is it a skill you can learn? Absolutely. Is it innate in everybody? Absolutely not.

**[00:36:17.670] - JOHN**

Well, that's what I never understood about the agency world, to be candid with you. So, listen, here's what happens in agencies. I worked at some big ones. People can't pitch the media, they can't write very well, so they become account managers and they try to manage the account and the client. Right? I think that [...] typically the people that can do those core competencies very well probably can do the account management and the client relations pretty well, too.

**[00:36:43.940] - JOHN**

And those people usually go on to do something else. And then that other person manages the billing and manages the client relationship and the weekly meetings and the follow up, scope, work-in-progress report, et cetera, which does me zero good. That's why for agency people, it's great to have a weekly report. I want to really see what's in that report and what's in that report should be the media relations, the results and what you have in the queue.

**[00:37:11.840] - JOHN**

That's actually, I don't care what it looks like and how pretty it is and the bullets and so on and so forth. I care that you're actually getting coverage. You're getting the kind of coverage I want. You're creating the content I want, and you're getting it in the places I want it gone. And so that has always been my challenge with agencies. So the agencies that I have used and would continue to use, and it's a very, very small list, are individuals that do just that.

**[00:37:41.910] - KRISTE**

Right. And currently, you do or do not have agencies that you're working with?

**[00:37:48.720] - JOHN**

We do not. We have one contractor that helps us from a writing standpoint a bit on the blog. But we don't. We have built a really strong internal team, like I mentioned earlier, and it's designed to be sleek and and fast and, you know, if we need more bandwidth, we get it. I do think if you really want to tell a story, and you coming from the agency world for all these years, you know full well that if you don't have an internal person that gets it, quote unquote—

**[00:38:27.150] - KRISTE**

You're sunk.

**[00:38:28.640] - JOHN**

You're done. And so in fairness to the agency world, you can go and sign, you know, fill-in-the-blank, big giant company X and their great new business. And they have this just bureaucratic internal comms division and like, you know, so it is a little bit of—

**[00:38:49.710] - KRISTE**

I don't know what you're talking about.

**[00:38:50.730] - JOHN**

To be fair. Right. And that's fair, too. So, you know, before you go out and get an agency, again, this is advice to internal folks.

**[00:39:00.240] - KRISTE**

Yeah. Bring it on.

**[00:39:01.620] - JOHN**

Get your house in order. Make sure you can do what you need to do. And then if you need additional bandwidth, either hire internally or go get an agency, maybe some folks you've worked with before that you know can come in and be pretty crackerjack and get things done pretty quick.

**[00:39:17.100] - KRISTE**

Right, and I think that you're getting on a really important point here, especially, you know, as someone on the agency side, a lot of lessons have been learned through the years and even, you know, continue to be learned to this day. On the one hand, I don't want to have to turn away a client. I don't want to have to turn the business.

**[00:39:36.870] - KRISTE**

But, you know, I have learned that you're better off turning away a client and turning away business from a PR media standpoint if you can see that they don't have that internal person, they don't have the buy in, they don't really understand what's involved, and quite frankly, a lot of times they don't really have a story.

**[00:39:57.870] - KRISTE**

They think they have a story, but they don't really have a story, and/or internal thought leaders with the heft to be able to tell that story and get the kinds of results that they are saying they want.

**[00:40:14.040] - KRISTE**

So I think it's a challenge and it is hard to walk away from, you know, that business sometimes. But I continue to learn that that's probably a better thing to do than to find yourself in a situation where it's a no win situation and you're going to fail.

**[00:40:31.770] - KRISTE**

And, you know, I think that that is sort of the duty of the agency, too, you know, if you get people coming to you and to be very honest with them and say, "Hey, OK, I want to help you, but here's what has to happen."

**[00:40:47.040] - KRISTE**

And if there isn't that strong internal team, then you have to be able to be willing to open the door to me to come in and mine for those stories and tell the hard—tell you the truth, you know? Because if I'm not going to tell you the truth, who is right?

**[00:41:04.110] - JOHN**

That's right. And listen, I agree with you, Amen. And I think if you're going to bring on an agency, the internal person has to have very good relationships with the executive team. They have to quarterback the efforts of the agency. And if they can't do that for agency, they're probably not able to do that themselves internally. Right? They're kind of part of the cog. And so—

**[00:41:33.330] - KRISTE**

Good point.

**[00:41:34.950] - JOHN**

And no one's to blame on that. I mean, it depends on the culture of a company and it depends on how fast they want to go and so on and so forth.

**[00:41:43.860] - KRISTE**

What other advice do you have for us agency folks?

**[00:41:47.670] - JOHN**

No, I think that's it. Listen, like I said, I have a handful of folks that I used at athena, I used at Imprivata. And, you know, oftentimes I'll use an agency if there's a very specific thing going on or some task, and either they have a level of expertise... For instance, right now, we used a firm with the merger, right? There's a very real reason why you would do that.

**[00:42:20.030] - KRISTE**

Right.

**[00:42:21.320] - JOHN**

But that agency, that firm doesn't pretend to be something they're not. They are [...] specifically that's what they do. And so [...] it's hard, it's hard for larger agencies because they're either so big and they require different smaller agencies and they try to be everything to everyone. I have always worked with more the smaller boutique agencies where you get really, really talented people that are going to put a lot more into the account and learning the company in the business.

**[00:42:56.810] - KRISTE**

Well, but then [...] I find that that's also sometimes a disconnect at companies. If the people internally, whether it's in marketing or communications, they really need to understand exactly what you're communicating right now, which is there's probably not a one size fits all, one agency that's great at everything, you know? I think you're kidding yourself to think that.

**[00:43:25.260] - KRISTE**

So having the the relationships and the understanding and the experience to be able to say, "Who would be a really great partner for this?" And also trying to make that case internally as well. You know, it's just like you've got your investor relations.

**[00:43:41.000] - KRISTE**

So again, you're leading corporate communications, which includes PR, media, investor relations and internal communications?

**[00:43:52.250] - JOHN**

So investor relations has been a unique thing. So I was handling IR pre-IPO.

**[00:44:00.510] - KRISTE**

OK.

**[00:44:00.940] - JOHN**

And then we brought somebody on and then I kind of took it back and then we decided to have another person do it. So, you know that—

**[00:44:12.650] - KRISTE**

Because that's a very different discipline. You know, you're talking to, you're speaking to analysts rather than reporters, but it's the same kind of relationship.

**[00:44:22.790] - JOHN**

I love the analysts, they're very similar. Listen, I got my my start in IR at athena, mainly because we didn't have an IR function. We had to do it. Some of my best contacts, some of my people that I consider the closest are some of these analysts that they are like reporters.

**[00:44:41.360] - JOHN**

They are looking to cover the trends, the themes, the things in the market that are going to really be a positive or a negative driver in a company.

**[00:44:53.930] - KRISTE**

And they've got to write their reports.

**[00:44:54.410] - JOHN**

That's right. So it's really the same discipline. It's, you know, obviously you're having a discussion around numbers, but I think if you're going to be a corporate comms person, you absolutely need to have a mastery of investor relations and understand, if nothing else, whether you're controlling it or you're working with a counterpart that does. If nothing else, from a disclosure regulatory standpoint.

**[00:45:18.890] - JOHN**

But why, you know, some campaigns you're doing or things you're saying could have an impact in IR. And if you can integrate those like we have at Livongo, yeah. Remember, we were trying, Kriste, to—Livongo is a technology company that happens to be in healthcare. So when we were going public, you had groups of technology investors that maybe they're not either interested or don't fully understand healthcare. You had healthcare investors that really weren't technology folks, so you had to bridge that, and PR plays a critical role because obviously they read our coverage. They read how we're being discussed.

**[00:46:02.390] - KRISTE**

The first thing they're going to do is Google you.

**[00:46:04.700] - JOHN**

That's right.

**[00:46:05.480] - KRISTE**

Yeah.

**[00:46:06.140] - JOHN**

That's right. So then the messaging there needs to be in the filings and in how you're talking about yourself and then in your investor presentation. So it's all tied together, and I've seen a lot of companies kind of have them siloed. And, you know, I have opinions on that. But I think when they're integrated, you can really optimize both, especially if you're obviously a public company because you want to know what both hands are doing. Right?

**[00:46:39.660] - KRISTE**

Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. No doubt.

**[00:46:44.250] - KRISTE**

John, talk to us about the intensity and what goes into, and sort of, have you just been on 24/7 mode again when you're announcing an \$18.5 billion merger acquisition with Teladoc and Livongo? I mean, Teladoc's been out there in the media just front and center for a while. But then with COVID, you know, it's like everything kicked into high gear, and then you guys come out with this in the middle of the pandemic.

**[00:47:17.680] - KRISTE**

How big of a deal was that? Well, I mean, we know it's a big deal, right? But how big of a deal is it and a lift from the corp comm standpoint?

**[00:47:25.960] - JOHN**

It's a lot. It's a lot. I don't want to sugarcoat it. It's a lot of work. I didn't get much sleep three or four days before, you know, before we announced that. And, you know, in a deal of that size, not a lot of people know, right? So that's—

**[00:47:43.960] - KRISTE**

Right. You've got a really small circle internally, right?

**[00:47:46.030] - JOHN**

Right. So, you're doing a lot of work and there's probably more components to a deal like that than we have time to talk about in terms of what needs to get done, but—

**[00:47:57.200] - KRISTE**

Because you can't really pull your team in.

**[00:48:00.440] - JOHN**

That's right.

**[00:48:00.950] - KRISTE**

And you've got to pull them in maybe a day or two before or maybe a week or whatever the case may be.

**[00:48:05.800] - JOHN**

That's right. That's right. So the good news is this: we had created a dynamic at Livongo of such speed that, believe it or not, we had already been going 100 miles an hour and what we were already doing. So, yeah, this this was not something that, it was certainly unique, but the metabolic rate wasn't unusual to us.

**[00:48:35.190] - KRISTE**

It was like business as usual for your team.

**[00:48:37.440] - JOHN**

I wouldn't call it business as usual, but—

**[00:48:39.440] - KRISTE**

Well, I mean, it's like, "Oh yeah, I've got it, we can do this." And everybody probably just like—

**[00:48:44.280] - JOHN**

We can do this. Right. But we can do this and—

**[00:48:46.320] - KRISTE**

We'll do it. We'll pull some all nighters. We're on it.

**[00:48:50.180] - JOHN**

It's like a football team. If you've ever been to the Super Bowl, yeah, it can be pretty daunting. You know, the media interviews and then two weeks of that craziness. But if you have, it makes it easier for the team that has so, you know, understanding that there was going to be a lot of work and then there was going to be a lot of work around educating the investment community, the media, employees, partners, clients.

**[00:49:15.890] - JOHN**

You know, there's like phase one of getting the news out the door in that first day. And then there's an awful lot of work and cadence that comes after that. Yeah, it's it's been a very busy but exciting, I'll call it a month and a half.

**[00:49:35.210] - KRISTE**

So what's next on that front?

**[00:49:37.590] - JOHN**

Oh, I think we'll just keep—we continue to file the necessary updates on the merger and like we've said, we look to get it finalized in Q4. I think what you saw there were, as you mentioned, two of the the leading companies respective to what they do in the market come together. And you saw three, four, five years of evolution in virtual care be truncated down into six months, and I think there's absolutely been a sea change in terms of how consumers view virtual care, engaging with healthcare virtually. You obviously saw a massive spike during COVID in terms of virtual visits, and that will come down, but it's not going to ever go to where it was, right at that three, four, five percent. And so now hospitals are going to have to change the way they think about engaging their populations. Doctors are going to have to think about how they change a bit.



**[00:50:49.410] - JOHN**

I don't think it's going to be as big a heavy lift as it was maybe in the electronic health record days where you're asking doctors to make a major workflow shift. I think we're past that. But if you think about it now for what this new company will be able to do, which is essentially change the entire experience for a consumer and how they engage healthcare. So I'm excited about that because candidly, I've been I've been talking about the same story for 20 years and I'd like to actually see some of it come to fruition.

**[00:51:22.610] - KRISTE**

You're like, "Oh my God, I think actually happen."

**[00:51:24.690] - JOHN**

It might actually happen. This is great.

**[00:51:26.640] - KRISTE**

That would be amazing.

**[00:51:28.750] - JOHN**

Yeah. So it's very exciting.

**[00:51:30.540] - KRISTE**

So what does this mean for you? Or can you even say at this point if Livongo then becomes part of Teladoc? How does that typically work or is it something you really don't know yet in terms of your next days, you know?

**[00:51:47.970] - JOHN**

I think it's all being figured out in terms of leadership structure and, you know, we'll update folks as that happens. But I think from a from a macro standpoint, the new company is extremely well-positioned. There's very strong leadership on both sides.

**[00:52:04.680] - KRISTE**

Oh, yeah. For sure.

**[00:52:05.490] - JOHN**

And so we're figuring that out. Yeah. And that's part of the process of a merger like this, is the different communication milestones of updating internal folks and external focus of what's going on, so I'll probably leave it there. Stay tuned for updates all around.

**[00:52:24.360] - KRISTE**

Oh, we'll be watching. And the whole time I would be like, "Oh my gosh, his team's getting zero sleep or vacation." But that's OK.

**[00:52:32.940] - JOHN**

At least we have the NFL back, right? So you have like that one day a week reprieve mentally.

**[00:52:38.490] - KRISTE**

I know. I was very happy to see that be the case, and I was very happy to see the Tennessee Titans win the other night, so...

**[00:52:46.760] - JOHN**

Well, I'm now officially a Tampa Bay fan. I've had to make a switch.

**[00:52:50.760] - KRISTE**

You kind of have to be, right?

**[00:52:52.200] - JOHN**

Yeah. I'll go back to being a Pats fan when Belichick probably retires so—

**[00:52:55.920] - KRISTE**

I'm pretty excited about the Pats' new quarterback because he's an Auburn guy. War Eagle.

**[00:53:01.500] - JOHN**

Yeah. Listen, we'll see how that works out. You and I could have a whole another podcast on my opinions on the Patriots, and how things were handled. But listen, I think it's going to be interesting, interesting season for sure.

**[00:53:15.330] - KRISTE**

It will, it will. No doubt. OK, well, before we wrap up, and I so appreciate your time, this has been fascinating and I hope we'll get a chance to talk again, but I got a burning question for you, John. So there's a few really awesome pictures of you and Glen and others when you guys did your IPO there at the Nasdaq. And there's one in particular that you and I shared prior to the podcast, and I'm just wondering,—I'm going to include this picture in our podcast page when we publish this thing—but caption the photo for us. Tell us a little bit about the experience of being on that, being on the trading floor as a communicator.

**[00:54:06.020] - JOHN**

Is this the one with Glen and I?

**[00:54:08.190] - KRISTE**

Yeah. You and Glen.

**[00:54:09.570] - JOHN**

Yeah.

**[00:54:10.190] - KRISTE**

A bunch of people around, obviously. But you guys look pretty darn happy.

**[00:54:13.700] - JOHN**

It's a crazy day. It's a crazy number of days leading into it. You know, you've got the media, you've got what you're doing with the banks. You've got, in the case of us and most companies, you've got employees, partners, investors, other people associate the company in New York. Courtnee, who I mentioned earlier, she's running the whole kind of experience for them. And then in our case, you had engagement of all of our employees in remote locations. You know, we had celebrations in each office.

**[00:54:50.580] - JOHN**

I will tell you tactically from a PR perspective, it's actually easier to do the IPO last year than it was years ago because CNBC is actually right there in the Nasdaq now and they have far more media capabilities and studios at the Nasdaq. Yeah, we did, I don't have the exact number, but some ridiculous number of media interviews in the span of an hour. You know, because you have people going outside for pictures, so you're grabbing your execs and you've got CNBC going live with Bertha Coombs.

**[00:55:30.780] - JOHN**

People are having a great time. They're experiencing it. You know, it's exciting. From from my perspective, you're trying to keep the trains running and get things done. And it was a great day. It was tiring. I was able to get some sleep on the plane ride home.

**[00:55:50.390] - JOHN**

But hey, listen, Glen says it best, like the IPO is an exciting day. It's a huge brand event. But then you go back to work the next day and you now have a couple of thousand new bosses.

**[00:56:03.360] - KRISTE**

Man, Glen never stops, does he? He's like—

**[00:56:06.110] - JOHN**

No, no, he doesn't. Listen, I have a new appreciation for why the man was so difficult to compete against for almost a decade, and—

**[00:56:16.200] - KRISTE**

He doesn't ever get tired of it, does he?

**[00:56:18.930] - JOHN**

He doesn't. And he's a world-class entrepreneur. He he's a great mentor. I've learned a tremendous amount from him, not just about business, but about life.

**[00:56:33.030] - KRISTE**

He seems like a great guy.

**[00:56:35.010] - JOHN**

Yeah, he is. And he's very thoughtful. Yeah, he's demanding, but I think anybody that's at his level, and has done what he's done, they demand a lot from you and they hold you accountable to integrity. You do what you say you were going to do and if you don't—

**[00:56:53.760] - KRISTE**

They make you better.

**[00:56:54.480] - JOHN**

Yeah, they do. They do. So it's been great, and I'm excited for what's next with the new company and the industry at large. You know, I think we've all, you've been in healthcare as well, I mean, we've all been kind of talking about some form or fashion of this for so long. It would be nice to see some of it actually come to fruition.

**[00:57:19.000] - KRISTE**

I'm going to remain cautiously optimistic, yet hopeful. You're right. I mean, sometimes, you know, it's like, OK, the time has come. And I think we're kind of at one of those tipping point, you know, kind of moments in time.

**[00:57:33.500] - JOHN**

Yeah. Listen, it's unfortunate it took a pandemic for us to see a change.

**[00:57:37.900] - KRISTE**

There's been a lot of silver linings from the pandemic, you know? I think a lot of people are feeling that way. I'm having those conversations with people, but there's been a lot of a lot of good things and a lot of things that I think we needed, quite frankly. So maybe this is one of them. It'd be great.

**[00:57:54.820] - JOHN**

It would be, and I think healthcare is that one industry that we all kind of sit back and scratch your head and say, gosh, if you look at commerce, if you look at content and how those have all changed, and then an industry the size of healthcare and the impact it has on our economy, that it hasn't made that switch to that degree is mind boggling. But let's hope that telemedicine or virtual care will actually play, and I think it I think it absolutely will.

**[00:58:31.570] - KRISTE**

Yeah. I do, too.

**[00:58:32.530] - JOHN**

A huge role in how care is delivered in the experience that we start to get, especially for people with chronic conditions, people that have no choice but to engage the healthcare system.

**[00:58:42.760] - KRISTE**

Right. Well I mean, if we see that the whole world can start to do business over Zoom, then surely that tells us something about the promise of telemedicine for healthcare, right?

**[00:58:56.320] - JOHN**

That's right. That's right. Well, this has been great.

**[00:59:00.220] - KRISTE**

It has been great. Thank you. John, some people might want to get in touch with you. Can you tell our listeners maybe how to find Livongo, maybe how to get in touch with you?

**[00:59:08.840] - JOHN**

Sure. Well you can find Livongo at [www.livongo.com](http://www.livongo.com), and feel free to email me at [John.Hallock@livongo.com](mailto:John.Hallock@livongo.com).

**[00:59:20.890] - KRISTE**

Awesome.

**[00:59:21.430] - JOHN**

Happy to correspond with anybody.

**[00:59:24.700] - KRISTE**

Awesome. Well that wraps us up for this episode of How It's Done. My guest today has been John Hallock, senior vice president, corporate communications at Livongo. Thank you, John. I really appreciate you being on the show and taking a deeper dive into your career. It's fascinating. I love watching what you're doing. I'm so glad that we were able to meet, I don't know, a couple of years ago now here in Nashville. So I'll continue to watch and admire you as you continue on your journey. And good luck with everything.

**[00:59:56.800] - JOHN**

Thank you so much, Kriste. Same to you.

**[00:59:59.050] - KRISTE**

OK, take care. Be well. Bye bye.

**[01:00:02.140] - KRISTE**

That's it for now. Thanks so much for listening. We're looking forward to keeping great conversations coming your way as we grow this podcast. There's even more great content from our conversations on

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