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AGENCY · DECISION LOG · KOL CHOREOGRAPHY

# Why we stopped a launch the week before it shipped

How a comparative claim got pulled, reanchored at Level 1, and shipped six weeks later — with the KOLs in the room.

## CLIENT SITUATION

A surgical navigation company on the verge of shipping a campaign that made a comparative clinical claim about competitor systems. Marketing ready. Creative approved. Regulatory had signed off conditionally. The KOL panel had not been consulted on the comparative claim.



## The decision we walked into

### THE QUESTION WE ASKED

Which level of the Trust Hierarchy was being asked to carry the comparative claim — and could it actually carry it?

### THE OPTION WE RULED OUT

Ship the campaign with the comparative claim carried at Level 5 (brand voice) supported by Level 2 (publication).  
Estimated outcome: regulatory delay, pulled creative, KOLs distancing themselves on social. Worst case: an eighteen-month advocate-trust deficit that no future campaign recovers from quickly.



## What we picked, and why

### THE OPTION WE PICKED

Pull the campaign two weeks before launch. Reanchor the comparative claim at Level 1 (peer KOL) supported by Level 2 (publication) — meaning a named KOL from the panel had to be willing to make the comparative claim on the record. The work that followed: two KOL conversations, one publication co-author re-engaged, one revised messaging house. Six-week launch slip.

### WHY

A comparative clinical claim cannot survive at Level 5. The brand making the claim alone is a regulatory action waiting to happen and a KOL distancing event waiting to happen. The Trust Hierarchy framework (Ch 8) maps each claim type to the level that can carry it.

Delay the launch six weeks; lose six weeks of campaign. Ship the launch as-is; lose the next eighteen months of advocate trust.



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## What this teaches

The hardest moment in healthcare marketing is the conversation where a launch gets pulled the week before it ships. It is also the most valuable conversation. KOLs do not retract endorsements quickly, but they distance themselves from claims they did not help shape.

Pre-launch trust-hierarchy review — every claim mapped to its required carrier — is the cheapest insurance the system offers.