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How to Modernize Your Content Marketing Strategy

Content marketing has emerged as a leading strategy in building brand awareness, increasing revenue, and earning customer loyalty in a variety of industries. As content marketing makes its presence felt in health care, marketers need to know how to use this versatile tool to drive patient engagement and population health, while demonstrating its value through sound ROI measurement.

CONTENT MARKETING ON THE RISE

While content marketing has been prevalent for years in retail, finance, and other business-to-consumer sectors, healthcare marketers are just beginning to adopt this contemporary alternative to traditional advertising. In fact, the Content Marketing Institute found that 43 percent of healthcare marketers increased their content marketing budget in 2012, versus 54 percent of industries overall. Similarly, health care spends 23 percent of its marketing budgets on content, while other marketers spend 31 percent. Along with limited time and resources to develop content, the challenge of remaining HIPAA compliant continues to hamstring healthcare marketers.

To help modernize your approach and maximize your investment in content marketing, True North Custom takes a look at three proven techniques.



MODERN TECHNOLOGY: ANALYTICS TO TARGET, MARKET, AND MEASURE WITH PRECISION

To plan, execute, and assess the value of marketing strategy requires a clear understanding of your consumers' needs and interests. Data analytics delivers visibility into these areas along with identifying your best prospects and the channels most likely to reach and resonate with them. Customer relationship management (CRM) can also assist with quantifying the impact of a campaign, allowing marketers to adjust or abandon what isn't working and identify lessons learned to use them for the next initiative.

Like content marketing, data analytics is on the rise. Salesforce's 2014 State of Marketing survey reveals that marketers plan to increase spending on data and analytics

MORE THAN 60 PERCENT OF HEALTH SYSTEMS WITH \$1B IN REVENUE AND MORE THAN 40 PERCENT WITH \$500M TO \$1B IN REVENUE HAVE DEPLOYED HOSPITAL GRADE CRM SYSTEMS TO TARGET AND MEASURE THEIR CONTENT MARKETING PROGRAMS.

more than any other area in the coming year. "Collecting, measuring, and using behavior-based data" ranks in the top three marketing priorities among those surveyed. A research study by Gartner also predicts an uptick in spending on analytics, noting that accelerating real-time data analysis and response is a key strategy for about a third of marketers. Another Gartner survey finds that more than half of marketers plan to increase spending on CRM in 2014—and health care is no exception.

According to a 2013 study by the Topline Strategy Group titled "The Changing Landscape of Hospital Marketing," more than 60 percent of health systems with \$1B in revenue and more than 40 percent with \$500M to \$1B in revenue have deployed hospital grade CRM systems.

A 2014 study by the Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development found that the use of sophisticated technology, like CRM systems, to manage a healthcare organization's interactions with current and future



customers is “becoming routine,” with half of senior-level marketers now focused on managing CRM databases.

This wealth of health-related data, including diagnosis groups, EMR data, demographics, and survey responses, as well as response to specific marketing campaigns, will continue to lend itself to more personalized marketing and clear proof of performance. This will become increasingly important when patient well-being is monetized for the provider. Finding out exactly which content, on which platforms, has the desired effects on specific groups of patients will help marketers craft their messages. A structured process for turning data into insights and action is a must for healthcare marketers in the modern environment.

MODERN TECHNIQUES: MULTIPLE DELIVERY CHANNELS



When marketers talk about “platforms,” they may mean a Facebook post or a retail price-comparison app. It’s true that content via multiple platforms is still trending. Salesforce’s study of 2,500 marketers reveals strong adherence to numerous platforms, including email, newsletters, SMS, and social media. A PricewaterhouseCoopers study, “Social Media ‘Likes’ Healthcare,” notes that consumers surveyed were using social media for health-related matters—but they weren’t flocking to hospital-based websites. Instead, patients were researching consumer reviews, supporting health-related causes, and sharing stories about their experiences with doctors and hospitals on open forums not affiliated with a hospital brand.

Eighty percent of young consumers were willing to share information about their health through social media, while about half of consumers between ages 45 and 64 were interested in engaging in health-related activity online. More than 40 percent said social media affected how they managed their health, selected foods and exercise plans, and sought second opinions about their conditions. Lower-income consumers, in particular, felt extremely comfortable with social media.

Convenience informs both topic and channel choice. Consumers increasingly want to access their health data on their favored platform with minimum hassle. General education about mobile wellness applications and patient portals make a great fit for promoting the hospital’s own

apps and online patient interfaces, which could then provide outreach for initiatives in population health management.

In health care, the cross-platform model has a few nuances specific to the industry. First, when consumers want information, accessibility, or personal data quickly, they usually have a specific need or question or action in mind. News about a hospital’s qualifications or amenities is less immediate and useful, no matter what platform it appears on. By contrast, platforms should be chosen to find consumers where they are and meet their needs conveniently. Additionally, as healthcare consumers tend to be older, print materials should make up a versatile and robust share of the platform mix.

A lushly illustrated recipe in a hospital’s print magazine, a blood pressure app for iPhone that uploads test results to a patient’s electronic patient portal, or an online quiz entitled “Is My Parent Safe at Home?” that allows users to submit a question to a geriatric specialist, are all examples of content marketing across multiple platforms that use each platform’s strengths. Each example makes the patient’s life a little easier, and each provides opportunities for the healthcare organization to position itself as a valuable contributor to the patient’s well-being.

MODERN TOPICS: WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT HEALTH CARE TODAY?



Extensive research by PricewaterhouseCoopers indicates a few trending concerns in health care over the coming months. Among the most relevant for consumer-facing marketing are value and convenience. “Consumers are no longer passive patients, but rather engaged...customers wielding new tools and better information to comparison shop.”

“With transparency,” say the authors of “Social Media ‘Likes’ Healthcare,” “patient expectations rise.” As insurers press patients to comparison shop, patients will look to health systems that make the comparison process easy. And as hospital pricing becomes more transparent, driven by the Federal government’s release of Medicare payment data, as well as local initiatives, customers turn to content that educates them about how to sort through the information and find the best deals for procedures. They will search out tools to help them make savvy financial decisions with regard to their health. Topics



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about comparison-shopping for procedures, saving money at the pharmacy, and using insurance wisely will appeal. More generally, the “healthy lifestyles on a budget” theme will also offer opportunities to educate consumers about eating and fitness, while promoting hospital programs.

“Marketers are realizing that content is the lifeblood of every interaction,” says True North Custom Chief Marketing Officer Jason Skinner. “By delivering educational content that focuses on the recipient’s lifestyle, interests, and well-being, healthcare organizations serve as trusted advisors for their local community and gain competitive advantage in a crowded market.”

Research by True North Custom reveals consumers far prefer content that reflects personal interests to information about hospitals or health systems. A typical healthcare consumer, a working mother balancing career and family, expects her content to be directly meaningful.

“She needs help managing her household and staying healthy on a tight timeline and budget,” says Skinner. “Help her solve these problems, and your hospital will be the trusted advisor when it’s time to make healthcare decisions.”

Additionally, the growing number of healthcare consumers providing at least some care for dependents from multiple generations—think “sandwich generation”—means that “caring for the caregiver,” work-life balance, and planning for long-term care will be topics of increasing interest.

According to the Content Marketing Institute, about 39 percent of consumer-facing marketers have a documented content strategy. In health care, such a strategy might mean accomplishing the organization’s aims in terms of patient engagement or population health management. With healthcare organizations increasingly focused on population health, reducing readmissions, and demonstrating quality, content that is for and about the patient—exercise plans, “how-tos” for effective conversations with the doctor, lists of local resources for an aging parent—have the potential to align patient and organizational goals in a meaningful, effective manner.

Rhoda Weiss, PhD, past president of AHA Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development, calls marketers the new “health educators, disease preventers, patient engagers, cross-cultural conveners, community connectors,

hope conveyors, and life savers.” In other words, to be effective, content must actually contribute to the patient’s health—just like a physician visit, it should enhance the patient’s well-being.

Stories constitute a persuasive genre that’s viable on multiple platforms: YouTube, websites, and long-form social media, such as blogs, make great venues for stories. Attractive print publications also lend themselves well to illustrated tales of patient success, nursing heroism, and physician ingenuity.

Increasingly, patients will seek content that responds to them directly, depending on the platform. Some platforms will require very rapid response: for example, more than three-fourths of consumers in one survey reported they expect responses to actions taken over social media, such as appointment requests, within a day.

Finally, platform and content must complement each other. Patients’ “most likely health habits” on social media give plenty of insight into topics they’re interested in: seeking second opinions (in-depth discussions about symptoms and disease progress); coping with pain and chronic illness (targeted lifestyle instructions and advice for their conditions); diet, exercise, and stress management (again, lifestyle advice). Actionable, interactive content fits well with apps, while more detailed material for reflection and future referral might be appropriately presented as a long-form article in a hospital magazine.

Need help modernizing your content marketing strategy? A dedicated marketing partner like True North Custom can help healthcare organizations understand their patients and potential patients, select the best mix of content and platform to engage these patients, and measure and refine their efforts.

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