

What are healthcare marketers doing to capture and delight customers?

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by [Andrea J. Simon](#)

On Dec 4, 2014, *Hospital Impact* published my blog, "[Healthcare Marketing: Capitalize on Power of Mutual Attraction](#)." It was the first in a series focusing on the fast-moving changes taking place in healthcare marketing as the old world of "push it out" has turned into the new world of "catch them fast," or more aptly, "engage them." In the past, it was what you said about yourself and your services that were important. Now it is less about what you say about you than what others say about you: in blogs, on Twitter and Facebook, and throughout social media.



In this blog, I want to talk about what healthcare providers--hospitals, clinics, physicians--are doing to capture those consumers.

[More:]

What are healthcare marketers doing to reach those audiences most anxious to take charge?

In research conducted by the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions ([discussed in my second blog](#)), market segments were identified that were the most likely to search for healthcare information online. These segments were named "out and about" (those who seek out and use alternative, non-Western medicine, often without the knowledge of their clinicians); "online and onboard" (use online tools and mobile applications to assess providers, compare treatment options and provider competence); and "shop and savers" (refuse to pay more than necessary in any non-emergency scenario).

While often called "Inbound Marketing" or "Content Marketing," the new world of marketing is all about the realization that people are searching for solutions, answers and ideas to deal with their challenges. Often, and perhaps by habit, they begin their search by heading to Google or looking for blog writers that they trust, creating an online forum, or heading to Wikipedia for information. This is their discovery phase, and then they stick around to learn more.

What does this consumer search mean for healthcare organizations?

With this increasing ability to gather information and decide for themselves, consumers are not as trusting as their parents were. In qualitative research that our marketing firm, [Simon Associates Management](#), conducted with patients of various healthcare organizations, we heard these recurring questions:

- » Whom do I trust?
- » Can I trust this doctor?
- » Is he or she advising me as to what's best for me or for them?
- » I have a larger deductible now. How shall I spend my money?
- » I don't pay attention to their advertising; I find out for myself.

So what is the job of healthcare marketers? To build that trust again.

Along those lines, we at SAMC are currently conducting research about how healthcare marketers are starting to adapt to these changes with new marketing strategies and tactics. We also set out to see what others were finding. One [study by Ogilvy/ Common Health World Wide](#) revealed the 2013-2014 trends exceptionally well.

They sent out their survey to 9,241 U.S. healthcare professionals; a total of 202 completed it in March and April 2014. Here are the results I found to be of particular interest:

Consumer Marketing Tactics		
2014 Results from Ogilvy/CommonHealth World Wide		
	% Using Channel	
	2014	2013
Websites	74.3%	67.8%
Social Media	55.4%	46.5%
Research/Data/ Analytics	51.5%	53.0%
Public Relations	51.0%	44.6%
Advocacy Programs	50.0%	44.6%
Digital Ads	46.0%	37.6%
Print Ads	44.6%	42.6%
Direct Marketing	42.6%	38.1%
Mobile/Tablet Apps	31.7%	22.8%
TV	20.8%	20.8%
Radio	14.9%	11.9%
Outdoors	8.4%	6.9%

Healthcare companies--from pharmaceuticals to medical device manufacturers--were really on board with today's urgent need to move into social media, websites and other new methods for reaching consumers, providers and payers. The array of methods to engage consumers were centered on online, direct-to-you strategies and ways to build credibility through others, such as PR or social media.

However, as the report's author, Kate Cronin, global managing director of Ogilvy CommonHealth Public Relations, writes: "Over the past year, the industry made some inroads to meet patient needs better. But more work is needed. For example, nearly three-quarters of the respondents said the industry still lags behind patients in digital engagement. And only 4 in 10 believe healthcare companies are adequately prepared to embrace social media. We know that people are already digitally connected to healthcare information. While healthcare companies claim to be patient-centric, the reality is that few operate this way, according to 78 percent of respondents."

Yes, healthcare marketers realize that change is essential. But will they now embrace that change?

In reality, healthcare companies do believe that the biggest opportunities lie in customer behavioral change, evidenced by the fact that more than half (54.7 percent) of those interviewed thought customer behavioral change was going to be one of their major challenges of the upcoming year. Good news!

So then, you have a choice. Do you want to stick to the past and hope your old-style advertising methods can somehow build your brands and service lines, or are you ready to adapt to the changing marketplace of today? What we think is the coming reality is that regardless of what we think consumers, formerly known as patients, are going to take us someplace new and co-create it with us. Hang on and enjoy the ride!

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