INBOUND MARKETING IN HEALTHCARE

Constant Principles and Changing Methods

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Healthcare and hospital marketing is challenging by nature, and I wish I could tell you there was a quick-fix template for building a customer-centered promotional strategy in this industry. But with sweeping reform and policy changes, this year is different than the last – and the only constant will be change. With change, though, there are always constant principles that we can rely on, even though our marketing methods may need to be adjusted.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said "As to methods there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble."

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So here, we'll start with a few basic principles about human nature and marketing that will never change, then move towards the methods that will work best for this period of time we are operating in as healthcare marketers:

No one likes being interrupted with a hard pitch.

People like to be helped during their decision-making process, not aggressively persuaded. Marketers should act as assistant buyers.

One core human drive is to 'bond' or 'connect'.

People trust educators, and those who are secure enough to share their valuable knowledge for free with those who need help.

Customers are there for THEM – not you. Their benefit, not your profit.

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With these basic principles of human nature in mind, it's hard to believe that the last 100 years of marketing and advertising has looked like this:
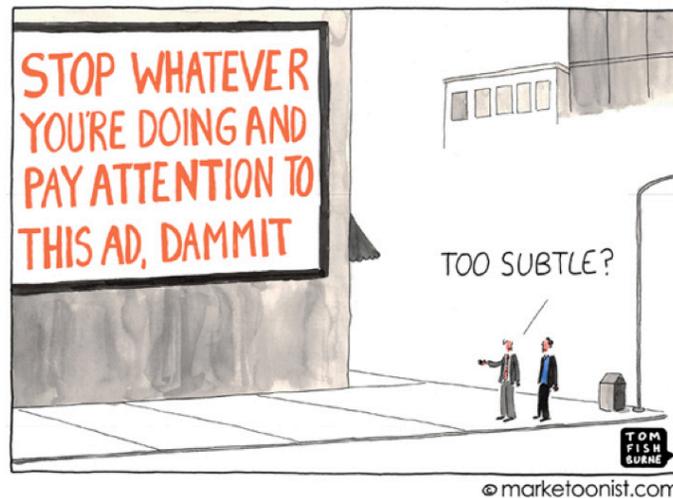
People have simply reached a breaking point, and are tired of being interrupted by invasive, noisy, desperate hard selling. So which mediums enable healthcare marketers to:

- Market to your audience with permission
- Help buyers come to a decision
- Connect with people on a personal level
- Educate and share valuable knowledge free of charge
- Be customer-focused in communication

HEALTHCARE MARKETING

with an

Inbound Marketing Plan

Inbound marketing is the best way to reach potential patients in a way that asks for their permission instead of interrupting them with messages they never asked for.

Inbound marketing defines the shift from finding more customers, to customers finding you on the web through search engines, blogs and social media. Inbound marketing embodies the idea of a person "opting in" or subscribing to receive ongoing messages from you.

With the Internet, blogs, social media, and search engines, consumers are more empowered than ever to find information on their own when they have a problem to solve. Multiple studies confirm that people report using the Internet first (85% of the time) when they need a healthcare service or product. This means that control of "the message" has shifted, and people are in control of the marketing information they receive, and the most successful healthcare companies will be the ones that can be found online.

So with that premise, here is a healthcare inbound marketing plan that can attract more prospects, build trust, convert them to customers, and foster lasting, personal relationships with them over time.

Commit to Digital and/or Inbound Marketing

Digital marketing is the future; there is no argument about that. However, I would argue further that digital is not some far off, futuristic thing that the healthcare industry should prepare for. It is a present reality that we need to adapt to now or risk irrelevance.

Digital marketing takes commitment, and an organizational shift in the way we think about marketing. Digital marketing can be done in-house or outsourced to a digital marketing agency.

The upside to outsourcing to an agency is that you'll generally pay a monthly retainer of $2,500-$5,000 with no added cost of employee benefits, AND you get a team of web experts, designers, writers, and marketers all for that flat fee per month.

Hiring an in-house marketing team of 4-5 people to execute your digital marketing strategy can cost you anywhere from $175,000-$250,000 or more per year in salaries and benefits, along with the added stress of managing more employees.

If you'd like to learn more about hiring a digital marketing agency, you can visit us here.

2 Set up a responsive, mobile website

If you don't already have a responsive website for your company which fits any mobile device or tablet, that's simply poor customer service.

Of people who were able to navigate a local business website on their mobile devices, 44% called or contacted them. About 1/3 of patients used tablets or mobile devices on a daily basis for health research and/or to book appointments.

Your prospects shouldn't have to pinch their smartphone with their fingers to zoom in on your website.

Information should be formatted with responsive design, so that wherever they view it, they are easily able to make an appointment or call in.
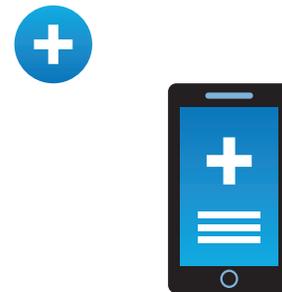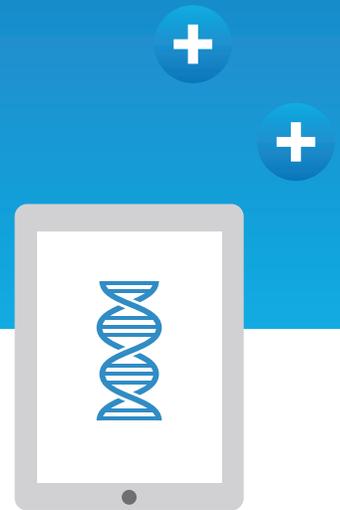
> **About 1/3 of patients used tablets or mobile devices on a daily basis**

3 Be active on social media, but in the right way

Social media in healthcare is popular, because it offers direct access to your target audience for little cost (yet that has changed more recently).

Companies are able to tweet, post, connect, and share with their local audience to build credibility and online relationships with people they might never meet otherwise. Although I encourage healthcare professionals to participate on social in a big way, it needs to be done the right way.

Some hospitals do social media marketing the same way advertising has been done the last century – one way dialogue. These platforms were created for dialogue. Of course, the concerns about policy and patient privacy are incredibly sensitive.

See this post about social media myths, where we address HIPPA concerns.
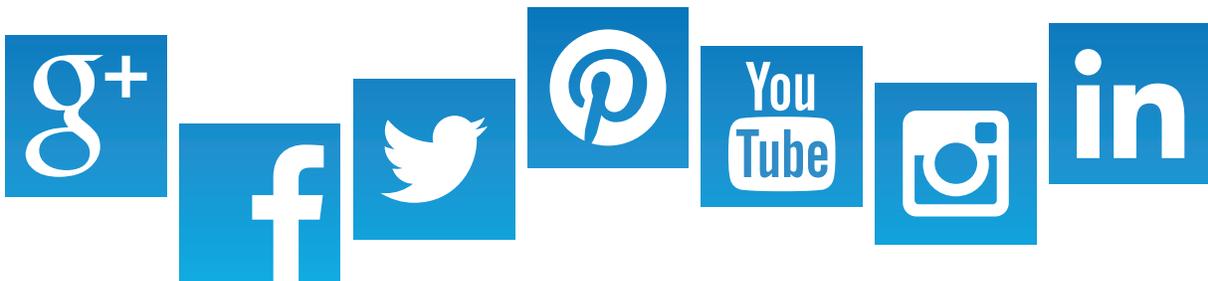
4 Blog, blog, and blog

Keeping and regularly updating your blog is critically important for several reasons. Writing blog article increases traffic to your website because Google indexes every individual page on your website, and each blog counts as a page.

The more blogs you write, the more Google recognizes you as a credible source in the industry you write about. Just make sure to include relevant keywords, meta descriptions, backlinks, header titles, and optimized images.

Blogs also build trust and credibility with your audience, because when someone learns about their condition and problem through you, they are more likely to make an appointment with you in order to find the solution.

pulse marketing seo healthcare blog tips

This point deserves an entire book, but I will try to keep it as short as possible!

When someone finds your helpful blog article through a search engine and lands on your page, there needs to be additional content they can download like an ebook, whitepaper, infographic, or slideshare if they want to learn more.

In order to take people to this content, they need to download it by filling out a form on a landing page to send you their contact information.

This contact information is then loaded into your contacts database (our favorite is HubSpot), and triggers marketing automation, which delivers relevant, personal messages through email to those patients who downloaded your content. This is the permission we discussed earlier. They'll never get a piece of content or a marketing message they aren't interested in.

At this point, the process becomes an automated marketing closed-loop system where you're continuously attracting prospects, converting them into leads, closing leads into customers, and delighting them into promoters.

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