



Consumerism Is Here: The Art & Science of Acquiring New Patients

Acquiring new patients in today's environment is more competitive and tougher than ever. Healthcare consumerism is here and here to stay, and it takes focused efforts on different fronts to be successful. To achieve success, there is both an art and a science to be aware of when it comes to getting the right message in front of potential patients. First let's look at how we got to healthcare consumerism.

Healthcare consumerism by Wiki definition is a movement that advocates patient involvement in their own healthcare decisions. It is a change from the old "doctor says/patient does" to more of a position of patients making the choice of who they will receive care from based on their research and the media they consume during this research.

There are multiple drivers for healthcare consumerism. From a consumer perspective, more financial responsibility is being forced on them by their insurance plans. Second, technology advancements now allow patients access to a great deal more information (good and bad), making them much more savvy in the selection of their healthcare providers.

On the provider's side of the fence, the shift toward lower operating margins due to decreased reimbursements and increased operating costs, along with the push by payers to implement more cost-effective care delivery models is creating opportunity for healthcare providers and facilities to compete like never before.

Like it or not, all of these factors have pushed healthcare to a tipping point, changing the way consumers shop for this service to be more like most other consumer products and services ranging from diapers to Doritos® to cars and cell phones. Healthcare providers and facilities need to begin altering their strategy for building referral pipelines and now have an opportunity for augmenting traditional referral feeders with direct-to-consumer programs.

Now that we understand what got us here, let's talk about what we can do.

Providers and facilities are at a crossroads. Some see this as a burden, while some have chosen to recognize the opportunity. What's the opportunity, you ask? To define your unique value proposition in the marketplace and build a comprehensive and cohesive strategy to emotionally connect with prospective patients and those in their circle of influence. This sort of connection will make the consumer want to seek you out for care for their specific injury or condition, providing you with new patients and additional procedures and income.



What does this ultimately deliver? With patients, it's credibility, trust and a belief that what you are offering can't be obtained through another provider or facility. In building this connection, you will see a surge in new patients, market share, top line revenue and bottom line profits.

The million-dollar question is "Where do we start?" As we mentioned at the beginning, using consumerism to get new patients is both an art and a science.

Building an impactful brand is an absolute art that takes hard work and planning. Before we understand the art of building a brand, we must first understand what a brand is NOT. A brand is not a logo (the Nike swoosh), it is not a product (a cup of Starbucks coffee) and it is not a company (like Disney).

A brand is simply a promise to your consumer that implants an emotional response to your company, and, most important, it delivers *the most meaningful benefit* that resonates with your target audience. This benefit resonates so deep with the consumer that they choose to affiliate with your brand. Ultimately the real pinnacle of a successful brand is your customers become advocates of your brand. When this level of success is achieved, they start selling it to others for you.

A brand that consistently delivers its promise will create trust; that trust promotes loyalty, and loyalty leads to advocates.

Your brand must be five things:

1. **Believable** - It can't over-promise and under-deliver.
2. **Consistent** - It needs to be delivered consistently everywhere the consumer comes in contact with it. If it's not consistent, it will be confusing to the consumer and not believable.
3. **Unique** - It has to be unique as possible to catch the consumer's eye.
4. **Enduring** - It needs to be capable of enduring long-term. It can't be based solely on something like technology. Technology can be a part of it, but technology is constantly changing. It needs to be emotional and aspirational enough to have staying power.
5. **Meaningful** - It must resonate with your external audience. Remember, it must be a benefit to the consumer, *not* a feature.

The common mistake so many companies make is building a brand incrementally. Building incrementally often happens as a result of pursuing growth while not working off a common strategy or blueprint. With no blueprint, certain brand components don't match others, and the end result is a delivery of mixed messaging to the marketplace, consumer confusion and a disjointed brand.



A tried-and-true process for creating a brand blueprint is instrumental in ensuring that your message is consistent and unique and connects with your consumers. This blueprint becomes the basis for all communications going forward, creating consistent messaging across all media platforms, leading to increased consumer engagement and lead conversion.

So how does one achieve brand consistency? It starts with defining the brand the right way and putting a stake in the ground about who you are as a company and what your true value proposition is to consumers. A company must define five things during the brand process to create their blueprint for success:

1. **Target Audience** – Who are we talking to, and what is their mindset?
2. **Brand Name** – What attributes must your name have and/or convey? In many cases this has already been established and that is okay.
3. **Brand Personality** – If your brand was a person, how would you describe him or her? Is he or she likable? Professional? Fun? Tech savvy?
4. **Product/Competitive Set** – What do we offer? Who do we compete against?
5. **Single Most Compelling Benefit** – What is our single biggest benefit that will mean something to the external audience? Is it truly meaningful?

The idea here is to understand what our target consumer is thinking and wanting, define the most relevant benefits that our brand delivers and will resonate with these consumers, and create messaging that has a likeable personality. If the above is achieved, driving engagement and buying behavior, along with sales, will come.

Now that we have the art of creating the brand, let's shift gears and talk about the science of getting your message out to acquire new patients. Often providers and/or facilities unintentionally make the mistake of working without an overall media strategy and a way to measure impact. The most common path taken is scattershot at best. Build a basic website that is static, buy a magazine ad here, a billboard there, start a Facebook page that the practice manager is responsible for . . . the list goes on and on. If the time has been taken to build your brand blueprint correctly, then you can start to use third-party data to learn what media your targets consume. By combining both demographic and psychographic data about your consumer, you can start to understand their media consumption habits and begin to build an effective communication and media strategy.

How do you build a media strategy that is effective? The answer is threefold. First, you must establish a monthly budget for marketing and advertising spend.

It is important to note that there is a substantial difference in marketing and advertising. Marketing in healthcare is mostly rooted in "boots on the ground" efforts, including peer-to-peer interaction, community events, local sponsorships, etc. Advertising is ideally focused on using media channels to get your brand



message and offering out in the public to generate measurable impact, specifically new revenue-producing events for your practice or facility.

Knowing your advertising budget is crucial in choosing the right channels that are going to give you the greatest bang for your buck. A common mistake here is spreading your message too thin by choosing too many different channels and making no significant impact on any of them. Each channel you choose has a minimum budget you must spend to make an impact. If you do not have enough budget to make the appropriate splash in that channel then your money is wasted. The right media budget strategy is to know what amount you have and choose the channels wisely so that your budget can buy the right amount to drive meaningful impact. As sales come in and revenue goes up, your budget can grow and you can make choices to add other media channels for increased messaging.

Second, you must choose your media channels wisely.

We use the analogy of “fishing where the fish are.” What we mean by that is you want to put your message in media channels and time slots that your target consumer is using. This is where the third-party data comes in to tell you where to fish. The saying “birds of a feather flock together” has never rung truer when it comes to this step in the campaign-development process. People who are of like age and gender and think alike tend to consume the same types of media and read the same types of material. This allows you to choose the proper medial channels for your spend.

Once you choose the right channels that your budget allows, and you put out the right brand message, your campaign will start achieving the goals that were set out. But the science only begins here. As the campaign matures, it will start producing its own proprietary data that can be examined to make media decisions to optimize the campaign for peak performance.

The third part of the equation is track, measure and tweak.

Each interaction with our brand causes a data point. Each data point is a chance to learn something about our brand and our consumer, and how to get better in delivering relevant content to this consumer.

Tracking what is going on with the brand is essential to not only getting better and closing more sales, but in fact, in many cases, it is key to surviving the long term. Data-driven decisions are the only way to successfully keep your brand and company moving in the right direction.

Sticking with the fish analogy, this proprietary data allows you to determine which ponds (media channels and times) are producing the most fish. You must track and measure impact at all times to ensure goals are being met.



Remember, media not only includes traditional channels like TV, billboard and radio, but everything online, such as paid search (PPC), SEO, social, blogs/content development, banners, etc. Even with online media, the time of day, week and month can be important to getting your message to the right people.

Once you determine where the most and largest fish are being caught (qualified lead volume), you then begin to use that data to optimize your results by reallocating media spend into the best media channels and times to maximize results and understand which type of messaging produces more leads.

Media and message optimizing is a fundamental key to squeezing the maximum effort out of your campaign and budget. Advertising is *never* a “set it and forget it” effort. Conditions are always changing, and when you take your eye off the ball by not mining the data your campaign produces, then it is likely that you will eventually fail. You can even fail if you did everything right from the beginning. Fueling this scenario is a lack of understanding of tracking results and setting up proper tracking methods to allow for the impact to be measured—a virtual death sentence to any chance of understanding what is working and why and whether a positive ROI is being realized from the dollars being spent in all channels.

In the digital age, data is king (science), and you must make data-driven decisions for continued refinement of all aspects to optimize results.

When the art and science both come together, you will have a brand that is successful. But what does that mean? What are the benefits of a successful brand?

1. **Audience Knowledge** – Successful brands have a thorough understanding of the demographics of their target market, what their interests are and how they communicate.
2. **Uniqueness** – Successful brands are distinctive and a perceived point of difference or value proposition.
3. **Consistency** – Successful brands are consistent with their brand message and their quality of service. A consistent brand message reduces confusion of who you are and what benefits your brand offers. And *no one* wants to deal with a company they can't rely on for consistent service or product. With so many industries being saturated with competitors, inconsistency is often enough of a reason for consumers to take their business elsewhere.
4. **Competitive** – Successful brands give you a competitive edge in today's business world. Working tirelessly toward building and optimizing your brand will make it go beyond consumer expectations. The end result is a brand that is continually on the cutting edge of its industry and drives results.
5. **Exposure** – Successful brands use science and data to reach consumers through multiple channels. Obviously larger companies have a small advantage gaining exposure because they usually have a bigger marketing budget. However, the Internet and social media have narrowed the gap between small companies and large ones. There are more tools than ever before, which offer any company a chance at establishing their brand. By developing a presence on the right media channels any brand is able to reach their consumer. You just have to know how and always be tracking and measuring.



6. Predictable patient pipeline that you fully control – Successful brands and branding augments your traditional patient acquisition strategies and gives you a tool that you can fully control and own.

7. Increased sales – Successful brands increase awareness, leads, procedures and bottom-line profits. After all, the end goal in opening a business is making a profit.

Building a cohesive, comprehensive brand is the key to any successful company and it is no different in healthcare these days. Cohesive in that it is consistent and relevant at every point it touches the consumer, and comprehensive in that it is inclusive of all media channels that these consumers affiliate with.

A perfect message designed for a specific consumer target that is *not* put into the right media channel is *never* heard, and a *wrong* message put in the right media will *never* work. Consumerism is here to stay. Those companies that embrace this fact and create and promote their brand strategically will always win.