

# UNDERSTANDING THE DIGITAL PATIENT'S JOURNEY



Using Customer Mapping Techniques to  
Reach your Patients and Grow your Practice

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# INTRODUCTION

Patient retention is a hot topic in healthcare, and for good reason. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, acquiring new customers (which includes patients) is between 5-25x more expensive than retaining existing ones. But you do have to acquire new patients at some point, or else you won't have any to retain.

It's a bit of the chicken and egg thing, isn't it? OK, so healthcare providers need to understand and implement patient acquisition and retention methods—a tall order, but doable.

Oh, and did we mention that the patient side of the entire healthcare industry is shifting under our feet as we speak? This isn't an exaggeration; take a look at some of the changes in just the last few years alone:



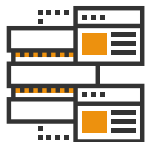
**Consumer Mindset**—When we're in a hospital waiting room, we're patients. But as we shop the variety of insurance plans, urgent care clinics, or alternative therapies, we're behaving more like consumers.



**Digital Discovery**—Prospective patients can learn a wealth about your facility before even visiting your website. Social media, directories and other online business listings can show rich media and information in search results. Your website must convert visitors, which we'll discuss later, but there is plenty of work to do before we even get to the home page.



**Communication**—This sounds crazy, but the skill of physicians is no longer enough to delight and retain patients. We must find ways to communicate with patients, both reactively and proactively, in a style that fits with their expectations.



**Big Data**—With technology so deeply integrated into every step of the patient lifecycle, we're generating more data than ever before. But what do we make of it? How do we connect the dots to deliver a superior experience?

As you're no doubt starting to see now, or have already understood (hence downloading this guide!), there are a lot of different pieces to modern patient acquisition and retention. In order for you to see how they all work together you need to map the digital patient's journey from discovery to conversion to delight. Easier said than done, but it's also the purpose of this guide.

We have a lot of ground to cover, so let's hop to it. We'll see you on the other side of your journey!



# WHAT IS PATIENT JOURNEY MAPPING?

Patient journey mapping in the healthcare industry is a data-driven, patient-centric approach to planning marketing activity, communications, and (to some degree) even delivering care. It's a way to gather the facts, discover the expectations of your patient, and marry that info in order to deliver an exemplary healthcare experience.

## What will a patient journey map do for you?

In short, patient journey maps give you a clear direction for how to improve retention and acquisition through customer satisfaction. Exceeding patient expectation benefits your health care facility twofold:

1. It increases retention rates through patient satisfaction
2. It increases new patient acquisition through evangelism

Word of mouth is still, and will always be, the best form of marketing, but should you just wait around for it to happen? Or, are there ways to encourage it, to nudge it along?



## A patient-centric mindset

The first step and most crucial step in mapping your patient's digital journey is to adopt a patient-centric mindset. With so many different options for healthcare services, shouting "We're better!" than the rest of your competitors is not an effective strategy.

At this point you have to ask yourself some hard questions:

- Why would a patient choose urgent care over our service? Cost, convenience?
- What is the patient's perception of our quality? Our cost?
- What do our current patients say about us?

## What's the end result of digital patient journey map?

What you're really looking for is a list of all the desires, hidden needs, and preferences of your patients.

On the other side, you have all the touchpoints where you can deliver on what you know about the patient and timelines for when you can deliver them. Typically this takes the form of a chart or matrix, but they can get as fancy as you'd like.



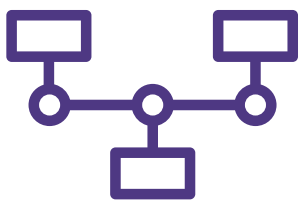
# HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED



## Personas

A patient persona is a fictional description of a person that represents a group of patients with similar demographics and motivations. Personas are built by looking at a cross section of many different actual cases within a specific niche. Your personas should target the type of clients you'd like to attract.

The purpose of creating personas is to have a reference point for creating marketing and communications pieces—if you have a detailed personas to look at, you can easily determine if your messaging will be effective for the intended persona.



## Timelines

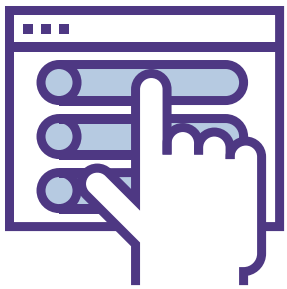
The consultation, planning and execution of an in-patient surgery vs. consultation and treatment of a urinary tract infection (UTI) are vastly different in terms of time from discovery to resolution. Be aware of the differences in timelines for various different situations and personas. This information should be readily available at your healthcare facility.



## Emotion

What is your persona feeling during their time of medical need? Fear, anger, annoyance? By understanding your patient's state of mind, you'll be better suited to craft marketing and communications that resonates with them.

Find a way to talk with physicians, nurses, or admins to truly understand the emotions of your patients—ask for examples of what words they use, their emotional state, etc.



## Touchpoints

Find and list every single piece of active and passive communication that your healthcare facility has with patients. This might start with your business listing that online users will find through searching and 'end' with a thank you note or survey you send after a procedure. Note: many patient journeys don't really "end", so you need to be mindful of that.

This is likely one of the more laborious tasks of digital patient journey mapping, but also crucial to the process. If any touch points are missed or not considered, leading to irrelevant communication, you may increase your odds of losing that patient or creating a negative experience.

With this info in hand, it's time to create your patient journey maps.



# HOW TO BUILD A PATIENT JOURNEY MAP

Now that you know the motivations and emotional states of your patients, paired with your available touchpoints and channels, you can build out their entire journey. At this point it's extremely important to note that patient journey maps are all about the patient—**do not map out your internal processes or how a patient should go through your system**. Create the journey 100% from their point of view. If there are any disconnects between their journey and what you can offer in regard to communication, you can fix that with additional marketing pieces.



## Step 1 | Define and list the different stages of the patient's journey

Break down the patient journey into specific, actionable stages. For example, most patients will browse online to research their condition long before they look for a phone number for a healthcare facility. Another example of a stage is booking an appointment.

Map out the entire process for each persona in a linear manner, one stage after the next. How granular your stages get or how high level you keep them is up to you and varies based on your needs.





## Step 2 | Determine patient goals

Now that you know every available stage of the individual's patient journey, layer on their goals to each stage. Note how different the goals are for each stage: The goal for scheduling an appointment might be something like convenience and the ability to book online 24 hours/day, while the goal for a consultation might be finding a physician they trust. In fact, the goals for each stage will likely be different from each other if you've mapped your stages correctly.

Are there any barriers (cost, implementation, processes) that might stand in their way? Be sure to bring those up.



## Step 3 | Add emotion to the goals of your personas

What is your patient feeling at each stage? Fear, embarrassment or frustration can all have an effect on the decision-making process of patients. Earlier we discussed how the skill or expertise of a physician may not be enough to convince a prospective patient to choose your facility—your online presence and communication can also play a huge role. When you understand the emotional state of your prospects and are able to deliver messages that align with their mood, you're increasing your chances of success at that stage.

Imagine sending a cheery or slightly humorous message to someone who is likely frustrated—with knowledge and planning, journey mapping allows you to avoid that!



## Step 4 | List your touch points for each stage

With a deep understanding of your patient's needs, motivations and emotions, it's time to lay out all of the touch points of your brand. Touch points are any interactions that the patient can experience at a specific stage in their journey. Note that these interactions may be branded or not. Additionally, they may occur outside of your ***owned media and digital assets***; the knowledge box in Google search results or a review on a third party site are examples of unbranded and off-site touch points available to prospective patients.

### Putting it all together

As you've likely sorted out by now, it's the combination of the pieces that make a digital patient journey map useful. There are many ways to visualize how all of the components work together. You can start with a whiteboard, dividing each persona into stages, layering in the rest of the patient influences into each stage. Once you're satisfied you've collected, listed, and organized your data into individual journeys for your personas, it's time to format them.

While you can use spreadsheets if you prefer, we feel that it's best to use a medium where you can be a little more creative and include graphics. How professional you need your digital patient journey map is up to you. For a polished look, consider using customer journey mapping software like ***UX360***, or ***having a vendor*** help you strategize and execute your patient journey map.

# EXAMPLE PATIENT JOURNEYS

## Eyeglass Renewal



**Erin Eyes**  
Eyeglass Wearer



**Patient Goals**



**Emotional State**



**Touch Points**

### Research

- Renew eyeglass vs. lasik
- Reduce headaches
- Review new technology
- Replace damaged eyeglasses
- Attain approximate cost



Inquisitive, possibly frustrated

- WebMD
- Lasik websites
- Warby Parker website

### Research Healthcare Facilities

- Determine expertise/professionalism
- More specific pricing
- Understand implications of surgery
- Determine convenience



Selective, frugal, demanding

- Branded website
- Directories and review sites
- Social media

### Schedule an Appointment

- Book online
- Find a convenient time



Committed

- Branded website
- Appointment system
- Email/text confirmation and reminders

### Care

- Personalized expert advice
- Check for eye disease
- Receive prescription
- Order glasses



Nervous, resigned, excited

- Check-in/waiting room
- Physician visit
- Interaction with admin

### Delight/Feedback

- Fast shipping
- Eyeglasses meet expectations
- Cool unboxing experience
- Appropriate followup



Satisfied

- Email
- Text
- Survey on branded website
- Review site

# EXAMPLE PATIENT JOURNEYS

## Broken Finger



**Frank Findle**  
Athlete



**Patient Goals**



**Emotional State**



**Touch Points**

### Research

- Determine broken vs. jammed
- Possible outcomes
- Cost estimate
- Determine urgency
- Cost of x-rays



- WebMD
- Sports health/orthopedic websites

### Research Healthcare Facilities

- After hours availability
- Have x-ray
- Cost of office visit
- Determine expertise



- Branded website
- Directories and review sites
- Urgent care website/phone number

### Schedule an Appointment

- Book ASAP



- Branded website
- Appointment system
- Phone call
- Walk-in

### Care

- Confirmation of injury
- Determine steps moving forward
- Understand limitations/rehab
- Medical attention



- Check-in/waiting room
- Physician visit
- Interaction with admin

### Delight/Feedback

- Activities to speed rehab
- Knowledge of what not to do



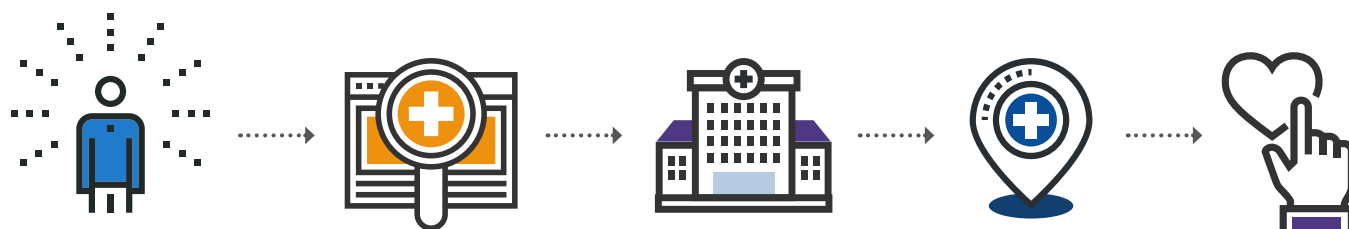
- Email
- Phone call
- Post
- Review websites

# TIPS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PATIENT JOURNEY MAPS

Every patient is unique and has a unique set of problems, but the outline of their digital journeys toward a health solution are surprisingly similar. This is pretty much the order of events from start to finish:

1. Awareness
2. Research
3. Research Healthcare Facilities
4. Schedule an Appointment
5. Delight/Feedback

Let's zoom in and expand on each section. Please note that your marketing and communication efforts will have more effect in some areas, so we'll spend more time on those.



## Awareness

The patient becomes aware that he or she is experiencing some sort of problem. Physical or emotional pain are the most common motivations for awareness, although occasionally they must be informed by a friend, family member, or coworker that they may have a health issue that needs attention.

## Research

With a vague understanding of their problem, patients begin using the Internet to research the details. The length of this research process varies by problem and also by the person—it may last an hour or several months.

They begin by searching broad terms like “headaches” and will usually get a search result from one of the following websites:

- *Wikipedia*
- *WebMD*
- *The Mayo Clinic*

After browsing these resources (or similar) they will attain a more detailed understanding of their own problem. This leads to more detailed searches, and some will even go as far as to self-diagnose.

From a marketing perspective, these websites have so much authority (in terms of SEO) that it’s next to impossible to outrank them for **broad keywords**, and you shouldn’t be trying to ‘outrank’ these resources in terms of search results—your time, effort and resources will better be spent elsewhere.

## Researching Healthcare Facilities

At this point, the patient will begin the search for finding a healthcare provider to help them address their issue.

**Heads up—This is the area where your digital marketing activities can have the biggest impact on patient acquisition.**

Remember the broad “head terms” we discussed earlier? The ones Wikipedia and WebMD will always outrank you for? While you should still have those on the service pages of your site if they apply to your business, you may be able to drive organic traffic to your specialty pages (or blog) by targeting **long-tail keywords** in your niche.

Producing and organizing quality content with SEO best practices is an investment that takes time and expertise, but the market supports it. According to an estimate from Google, there are approximately 175 million searches related to health per day!

People who arrive at your site through long-tail searches are fantastic web visitors because they qualified themselves through a search for something you specialize in. Take advantage of their visit by maintaining an **easily navigable website** that is designed for conversion, because you know they’ll end up on your About page at some point! And we can’t stress this enough: be absolutely sure **your website** provides an **excellent mobile experience**, as 62% of smartphone owners have used their phone in the past year to look up a health condition, according to **Pew Research Center**.

Another way that visitors end up on your site is through **business listings and directories** like Google My Business, Yelp, or various other medical-specific directories. These are in between your website and the patient’s initial search. You can increase your chances of being found by implementing local SEO best practices, providing plenty of high-quality photos of your facility and staff, and making sure every physician profile is fully filled out and written with compelling copy.



## Scheduling an Appointment

Congratulations! This step is the payoff to all the hard work you've put into mapping your patients digital journey. Once an appointment is made, you get to hand off the digital portion of the journey to your staff and let them wow you patient with care and customer service.

Keep in mind: Of the people who researched your healthcare facility online, about 20% of them would prefer to book their appointment digitally, so make sure you provide that as an option.

## Delight/Feedback

As you're no doubt aware, patient retention is just as vital as acquisition. What are you doing to delight your patients and keep your brand top of mind for their health concerns? One simple thing you can do to encourage proactive health management is to meet your patients halfway by using the channels they prefer.

For example, over half of Americans are comfortable having a video visit with their doctor—perhaps not appropriate for the initial visit, but great for following up. By using their preferred means of communication, you're removing a bit of friction to the task of scheduling an office visit, therefore increasing responsible and proactive personal health.





## ABOUT LYNTONWEB

We hope you enjoyed this guide to understanding the digital patient's journey. In a digital world filled with so many different options for patients, it's absolutely essential to treat the patient acquisition and retention process with careful planning and execution. Patient journey mapping is essential to get into the mindset of your clients, to understand what they're thinking or feeling at each different stage of their decision-making process. By pairing this with your various communications systems and channels, you'll be able to communicate with enhanced relevance.

LyntonWeb is a web design and inbound marketing firm located primarily in Houston, Texas. We specialize in WordPress and the HubSpot inbound marketing platform to create patient-focused websites and marketing tailored to support your practice's goals. If you're trying to engage patients, insurers or medical professionals, we can help you provide digital solutions for the modern healthcare industry.

**TALK WITH AN EXPERT**  
about your **inbound, web** and **tech goals.**

**GET STARTED TODAY**