THE PATIENT JOURNEY: How Hospitals Can Increase Patient Engagement
Today’s hospitals are keenly aware of the role digital marketing plays in reaching new prospective patients. Armed with the internet, computers and mobile devices, prospective patients are embracing digital content to make informed decisions about when, where and how to manage health-related matters. And while many hospitals are adapting digital marketing as part of their overall marketing mix, most are struggling to leverage digital marketing to truly drive patient volume, engagement and satisfaction.

8 OUT OF 10

INTERNET USERS LOOK FOR HEALTH INFORMATION ONLINE, MAKING IT THE THIRD MOST POPULAR ONLINE ACTIVITY

–Pew Research Center

This guide explores how hospitals can more effectively reach patients in the beginning stages of their journey to start a two-way conversation based on content, lead nurturing and related digital assets; to ultimately drive more patient volume, brand awareness and a better overall patient experience.

Similar to a consumer looking for a product, prospective patients are heavily dependent on research and don’t simply follow a direct path to purchase – or in this case, schedule an appointment. Instead, they go through a number of steps before making a call or engaging with a provider. In fact, when met with a health concern, a significant number of people turn to online research before making a call. According to Google, “84% of patients use both online and offline sources for research.” Overwhelmingly, online is the first choice patients select when researching symptoms and conditions, with 77% turning to search engines, like Google, 76% going to hospital sites and 52% visiting health information sites.
THE PATIENT JOURNEY:
HOW HOSPITALS CAN INCREASE PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

THE EARLY STAGE OPPORTUNITY

FROM RESEARCH TO ENGAGEMENT

In order for hospitals to begin engaging prospective patients early in the process, hospitals must be found online. And in order to be found online, they must begin to create meaningful, educational content that patients find through search, social media, blog posts, articles, webinars and more.

According to Google’s report, The Digital Journey to Wellness, “before booking [an appointment], patients put time and consideration into their research... with 48% taking over 2 weeks to research before booking and 61% visiting 2+ hospital sites before converting.”

Hospitals must begin associating engagement with patients who are researching digital content related to their current health concern. This is a profoundly different marketing exercise than hospitals are accustomed to. Instead of creating hospital-centered marketing campaigns, healthcare marketers must focus on educational-focused content marketing as a first step in moving patients closer to scheduling an appointment.

Hospitals must begin associating engagement with patients who are researching digital content related to their current health concern. This is a profoundly different marketing exercise than hospitals are accustomed to.

THE PATIENT Journey

Hospitals have an opportunity to reach prospective patients much earlier in their journey.

FOR MORE IDEAS, CONTACT US AT info@donaldson-group.com • 860.658.9777
The Patient Journey: How Hospitals Can Increase Patient Engagement

Creating the Right Content

Every hospital has content associated with its service lines. Some even have content associated with specific symptoms and diseases, similar to what one might find on WebMD. This is a good start, but for hospitals to move prospective patients from research to an appointment, they need to think in terms of content marketing.

According to Marketo, content marketing is “the creation and sharing of relevant content for the purpose of solving a problem and reinforcing brand messaging through thought leadership.” Content marketing isn’t focused on your hospital, branding or newest service line offering; rather, it’s about communicating educational insights and thought leadership on specific topics, like cancer treatment, heart health and weight loss. Content should be original, caring and aimed at helping patients make more informed decisions concerning their health and well-being.

Promoting Your Content

Now that you’ve created your content, you’ll need to promote it to the right target audience. For starters, you’ll want to email both prospective patients and current, relevant patients in your database. Additionally, it’s good to leverage a mix of paid and earned media. Here are some channels to consider:

- Email marketing lists
- Social media
- Content syndication
- Paid search marketing
- Sponsored content
- Display advertising

Driving Prospective Patients to Your Website

Promoting your content is only the first step in a patient’s journey. The key to engagement begins by driving visitors to your website to tap into the content you’re promoting. According to Google, “For patients who booked appointments, digital content is key to decision making.” And hospital websites are the number one resource where patients seek content.
NURTURING PROSPECTIVE PATIENTS

In an ideal world, prospective patients who visit your website are ready to book an appointment. But, the reality is, the majority of visitors are either conducting research or comparing you to similar hospitals. Therefore, the critical next step involves maintaining an ongoing dialogue with prospective patients who show interest in your content.

Nurturing is the process of building relationships with qualified prospects by providing the right content at the right time in order for them to reach out for a more direct interaction. To get started, we recommend a 3-step nurturing process:

1. **AWARENESS STAGE**
   - Promoting your content and driving visitors to your website kicks off the awareness stage. To nurture the prospective patients, it’s essential to get them to provide basic information, like their name, email address and phone number, by completing a form. Once a visitor completes the form, they receive access to the content.
   - Concurrently, their submission automatically moves them into the next stage of the process.

2. **CONSIDERATION STAGE**
   - Definition allocated to symptom. Committed to researching available approaches to treatment.

3. **DECISION STAGE**
   - Decided on a treatment approach. Compiling a shortlist of hospitals/ doctors.
THE PATIENT JOURNEY: HOW HOSPITALS CAN INCREASE PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

2 CONSIDERATION STAGE

In the consideration stage, the prospective patient is generally interested in comparing hospitals. They’re likely comparing your procedures and doctors against those of other hospitals in your region and/or specialty area. To provide the right content, start by compiling existing material that highlights your benefits and procedures, as well as hospital-specific information that sets you apart. Here are some ideas:

- Interesting doctor bios
- Procedure overview videos
- Client testimonials
- Case studies
- Comparison sheets
- Recent company press releases/awards

Once again, prospects will be asked to provide information, typically a little more in depth than what was provided during the awareness stage, and then delivered the content. Their submission automatically moves them into the last stage of the process.

3 DECISION STAGE

The last stage is generally when patients are looking to make a decision to move forward with a more serious engagement or connection. To help them take the next step, you want to offer a complimentary seminar, consultation or webinar. And while each hospital is vastly different, as are the prospective patients you’re engaging, a strong offer that encourages the patient to become more intimate with the hospital is a step closer to them becoming a patient.

USING A MARKETING PLATFORM

To effectively integrate your marketing efforts, it’s highly recommended that hospitals use a marketing platform such as HubSpot, Pardot, Marketo or ActOn... or others.

Prior to marketing platforms, marketers would need to “duct tape” their digital efforts together because all the tools required to produce an effective campaign lived in separate, disparate entities that didn’t work together very well. It often took a team of highly skilled technologists, designers and writers to pull together a successful campaign.

A marketing platform allows hospitals to attract prospective patients using built-in tools, like email, blogging, SEO and landing pages. They also come with marketing automation so you can easily setup nurturing campaigns to convert prospective patients. At the heart of the platform is lead management, allowing you a smarter way to manage, segment and see the whole picture for every patient.

Most platforms easily integrate with Salesforce and other platforms. Or, you can build custom integrations based on your hospital’s specific needs.

FOR MORE IDEAS, CONTACT US AT info@donaldson-group.com 860.658.9777
BUILDING AND GROWING
HEALTHY BRANDS

What happens when great creative meets outcomes-focused digital marketing?

SUCCESS!

We’re a marketing agency focused on building and creatively expressing healthy brands across the digital landscape. Each client engagement begins with a clear understanding of the company’s brand so we can help it succeed. Using a focused strategy, unique content and visual design, we actively market our clients’ offerings, using integrated marketing tactics. The result: more relevant leads, increased sales and a full understanding of pertinent marketing data to foster continuous improvement.

For more information:
www.donaldson-group.com
info@donaldson-group.com
1.860.658.9777

Sources:
Google (September 2012)
Pew Research Center (January 2013)
http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/01/15/health-online-2013/
Marketo, Inc. (2012)
Creating Content that Sells: Content Marketing for Demand Generation [eBook]