



How to Market your Healthcare Practice in the Digital Age

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by red barn consulting, llc

summary

The ongoing transformation of the healthcare industry in the US creates both challenges and opportunities for marketers. The rise of a more empowered healthcare consumer affects how medical marketing strategies are developed. Although traditional marketing does continue to prove its efficacy, digital channels are overtaking traditional tactics and the most successful health care organizations are adapting to this new reality.

introduction

Before the advent and expansive reach of digital technology, healthcare organizations relied primarily on traditional marketing methods such as direct marketing/direct mailing, health advocacy programs, and print advertising to reach consumers. The shift from traditional to digital marketing tactics has been ramping up since the early 21st century and the digital trend continues to accelerate annually.

There are two significant implications related to the rise of digital marketing in healthcare.

Cost – First, digital ad rates are typically less expensive than print ads. This is obviously a good thing that allows small to mid-sized health care facilities to stretch their budgets and get more for their marketing spend.

Change – Second, shifting to digital marketing tactics requires a forward thinking organization that is willing to commit to making the change. This is not always an easy and painless endeavor, and resistance to his change can present challenges to medical marketers.

consumers are becoming digital researchers

Consumers are no longer content with plainly accepting what a doctor tells them. They are doing their homework before visiting a doctor as well as researching their conditions and treatment options after visiting their doctor. They are now spending more time online researching than using any other channels.

According to a Pew Research Center study:



One in three American adults has gone online to figure out a medical condition.



72% of Internet users say they looked online for health information within the past year.



47% of Internet users search for information about doctors or other health professionals.



38% of Internet users search for information about hospitals and other medical facilities.

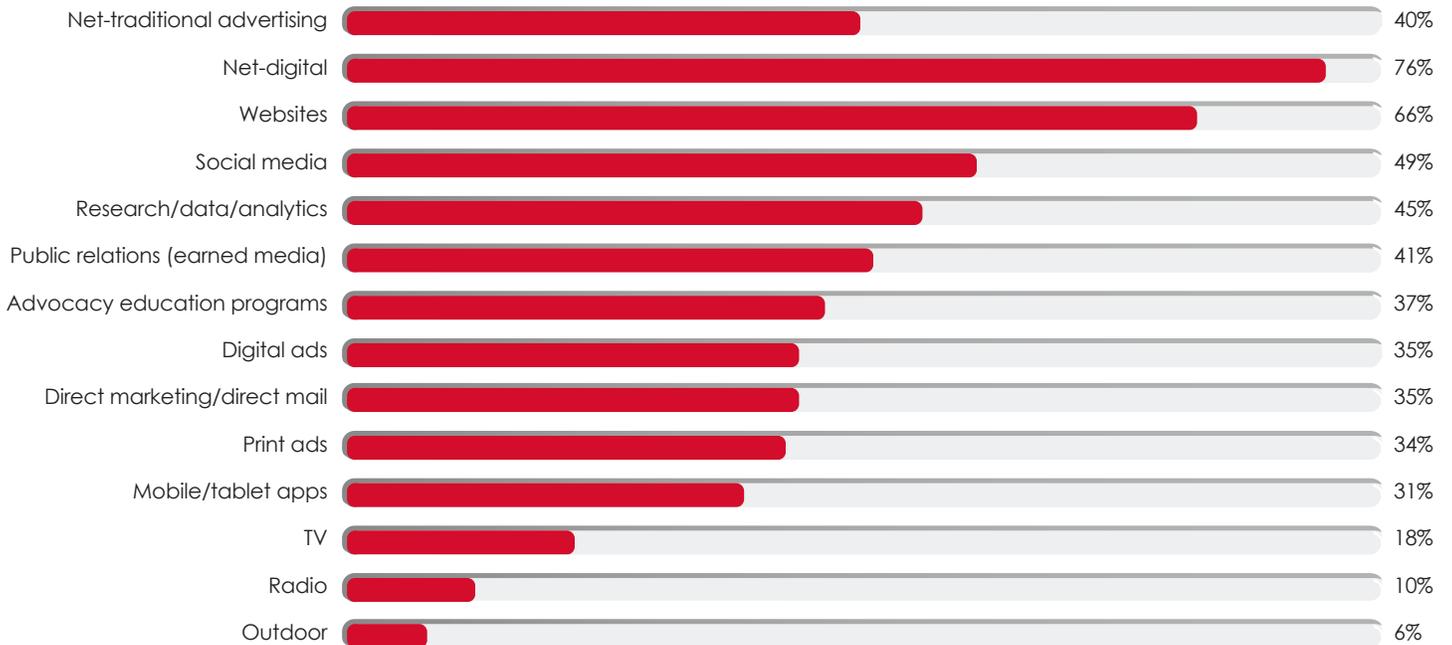
The most commonly researched topics are specific diseases or conditions; treatments or procedures; and doctors or other health professionals. From: Pew Research Center - Internet, Science & Tech

health care marketing channels

Traditional marketing methods employed by health care providers continue to provide significant returns, but the numbers are moving away from traditional methods. A 2015 report states that 40% of health care organizations reported using traditional marketing methods to reach consumers. These methods include; direct marketing/mailling, print ads, radio, and television.

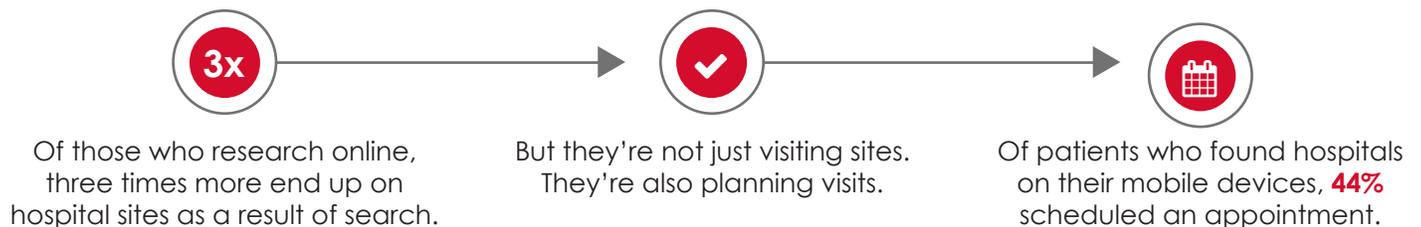
Conversely, 76% of health care providers reported that they are using digital channels to reach consumers. This number is up 4 points from 2014 when 72% of providers reported using digital channels.

Below is a breakdown of all of the marketing tactics employed by health care organizations in 2015



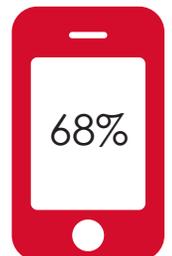
Since we know that digital advertising in health care is trending, let's turn to the experts of internet metrics. Google partnered with Compete Inc. to report on some very important statistics.

Here's what they found:



That Google statistic, coupled with the Healthcare Marketers Trend Report stating that the number of organizations utilizing mobile and tablet advertising channels was reported at 31% in 2015 which is up from 24% in 2014 makes a compelling case for mobile advertising.
From: Google – The Digital Journey to Wellness

To add fuel to the fire, Hostingfacts.com reports that Wi-Fi and mobile-connected devices will generate 68% of all internet traffic by 2017.
From: Internet Stats & Facts for 2016



What's the significance of this research? First of all, it confirms that the digital medium is a highly valued resource for patients. This has opened up a new stack of opportunities for providers to reach out to and engage with patients digitally.

how health care organizations leverage digital marketing channels



Websites

Google goes on the state that "Search drives nearly three times as many visitors to hospital sites, compared to visitors from other referral sites". This means that search engine visibility for your organizations' website is paramount. Of course, websites must be designed to render flawlessly across all devices; Desktop, Tablet, and Mobile.



Retargeted Digital Advertising

Retargeted ads are digital ads that are served to visitors of your website after they leave your site and go to another webpage. Have you ever been browsing for a new pair of shoes and then logged on to Facebook just to see an ad for the exact pair of shoes you were just looking at? Those are retargeted ads, and they work extremely well in terms of conversions.



Social Media Sites

Social Media sites provide a platform for health care organizations to share relevant content that enriches the lives of their followers. Social media is also a very viable advertising platform leveraged by the health care industry. Selling techniques like paid advertising and non-paid methods such as posting, sharing and commenting are an effective means for health care organizations to woo their customers.

77% of patients
use search engines prior to
booking appointments

83% used hospital sites

"Before the moment of conversion, patients typically search on symptoms and condition terms." –Google: The Digital Journey to Wellness



Search Engine Advertising

Consumers who search for symptoms and treatment methods online create a prime opportunity to convert those searchers with targeted digital advertising. Search advertising displays your digital advertisement based upon several customizable factors such as: Search words or phrases and geographical location. Search ads are displayed in search results and may also be displayed on relevant search partner web pages like webmd.com. So when a consumer is done doing their research, your ad will be sitting right there in the sidebar waiting for them to click.



Engaging Content

The internet is filled with medical related content and as Google has pointed out in their study, consumers are eating it up. Providing a platform for patients to learn is a valuable asset to health care organization for two main reasons:

- 1** When you provide learning experiences for patients, you build trust for your organization and increase your value in the eyes of consumers.
- 2** When you draw consumers to your educational content, this puts them directly into your pipeline and on a path to conversion.

Health Care organizations can provide engaging content for consumers in several ways including:

Blogging: Studies, wellness tips, advice, and general knowledge provide for a rich user experience and builds credibility for your organization.

On Social Media: This is a place for organizations and practices to shine with consumers. Social Media allows you to highlight your value, share relevant content with consumers, and showcase the diversity of your brand. Social media is a means by which to connect with patients intimately and build long lasting relationships. Many health care organizations provide customer service and channels of communication for their patients on social media as well.

Digital Newsletters: Like mailers, having direct contact with consumers allows you to personalize communications and deliver pertinent information regarding your services directly to the consumer. The benefit here is that digital newsletters are less expensive, easier to manage, and easier to deliver more frequently than traditional paper mailers.

conclusion

What we are seeing today is a continuation in trends that kicked into gear during the last couple of years. Digital channels are overtaking traditional marketing channels. This is actually true for all marketing sectors in the health care industry. While the efficacy of traditional marketing channels still remains high, it is clear through various studies and surveys of health care professionals that the use of digital marketing channels and specifically mobile channels is steadily rising in the health care industry. This is due to the arrival of the digital era in which consumers are more educated and seek more information during the buying decision process. When it comes to health, this trend in consumerism couldn't be more prominent and shows no signs of letting up.

While we don't recommend abandoning your traditional marketing efforts entirely, we do believe that every health care organization will benefit greatly by shifting more of a focus on digital marketing channels and specifically gearing their efforts towards mobile and tablet advertising.

about the author

Red Barn Consulting is an expert digital marketing, sales, and operations firm, specializing in banking, healthcare and financial institutes. Their expertise includes:

- Content creation designed to increase retention and woo new clients.
- HIPAA & ADA compliant content and websites
- Complete social media, digital, and content marketing services

Find more at redbarnconsultingllc.com

