

# Healthcare Marketing in Nonprofit Organizations

## 1. Introduction to Healthcare Marketing in Nonprofit Organizations

Healthcare organizations, for-profit or not, face growing competition and, with the rise of social media, easier ways for patients to tell others about the service they received. Overcoming this increasingly competitive market and showing the organizations' values to the communities they serve is an area of special interest to healthcare marketers. One route for reform for the U.S. healthcare system is the improved integration of nonprofits into the system. Nonprofit marketing, especially that of healthcare organizations, has been a growing topic of research for the past few years. Most of these discussions focus on the motivations behind these organizations' marketing, but very few discuss the marketing strategies actually being used.

In order for a community to fully engage with the programs and services a healthcare organization has to offer, they must communicate in a successful manner. Healthcare providers need to emphasize the social and mission-related goals instead of differentiating between for-profits and nonprofits. Nonprofits' prime aim is not profit maximization but rather the advancement of their causes. The definition of market orientation for nonprofits is concentrated more on the following: the desire to live up to stakeholders' perceptions of efficacy, market research, and other tools all over the organization. One factor that can tamper with a nonprofit's ability to deliver service is public opinion because the public can affect things such as whether or not duties can be executed. A lot of healthcare organizations house a spot in their mission statement that gives a clause stating that they want to serve the poor and the underserved. These management practices are critical because patient goodwill is a key determinant for continued service, the bottom line for many nonprofit hospitals.

## **2. Understanding the Unique Challenges and Opportunities in Healthcare Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations**

Nonprofit healthcare marketers operate under a unique set of challenges and opportunities that are not typical for businesses marketing in either the nonprofit or the healthcare sectors. Healthcare is regulated by strict laws and standards that present significant hurdles in communicating with target audiences. The part of the healthcare provisioning sector operating as nonprofit organizations is largely dependent on earning tax exemptions and continuing to earn charitable contributions from the public either through cash donations or volunteer efforts. In addition to being constrained by limited resources behind the need for innovation in order to gain infusions in such an aggressively competitive market, nonprofit organizations must also include individuals not in their target markets. This need is mandated as a result of provisions for reinvestment of profits into the communities served. In the eyes of these specific communities are where the unique opportunities of nonprofit marketing activities lie. The act of aligning with the current or desired community health needs can qualify and reinforce an organization's corporate social responsibility. Additionally, nonprofit health organizations have increased opportunities for communications via partnerships and collaborations at the state level. As demand develops for the severe and widespread service, marketers and nonprofit or healthcare systems are traditionally looking to broader mass marketing strategies. The difference in the nonprofit sector, however, is the need to break through "social clutter," engaging the public on an emotional level in order to motivate the levels of volunteerism and other support that nonprofits must have to be operating. The concept of storytelling meets this need while also showcasing the deeds that nonprofits are doing. This content marketing strategy has the message that they are aligned with the mission of the organization. Understanding the outreach opportunities is not in and of itself enough. Any outreach must also be navigated with the mission in mind as a representative of a hospital marketer. Given the nature of the healthcare sector and regulations, a hospital is particularly limited in communicating an all-encompassing approach to every segment. The reasons for taking this approach are for planning and alignment with regulatory constraints as well as sentiments, and the altruism generally associated with our nonprofit hospital.

### **3. Strategic Planning and Implementation in Healthcare Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations**

#### **Strategic Planning and Implementation**

A well-developed strategic marketing plan is essential to a non-profit organization's ability to meet the needs of the community while achieving the organization's goals. Several steps are essential to developing a comprehensive marketing plan. For a marketing plan to be effective, it should begin with an overview of the organization and identify the organization's mission, its community's health status, and the socially responsible focus of the organization. Like all sound business strategies, the marketing plan begins with a carefully conducted market analysis and includes systematic and objective market research. An environmental scan should be conducted by gathering, studying, and interpreting data from internal, external, and competitor sources to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This process should identify the stakeholders and the appropriate data to be collected.

Market research in a healthcare setting answers the questions of who will use the hospital and its services. This data furthers an understanding of the customer, the competition, and the advantages of the hospital when compared to others in the marketplace. The marketing plan should not be developed in a vacuum. Throughout the planning process, it is important to include appropriate leaders, stakeholders, and an internal team to ensure that the plan realistically reflects the community and investigates a variety of perspectives. These sessions serve as a reality check on the data, delve into "why" answers to key questions from the market research conducted, and forecast potential marketplace behavior. This inclusion ensures the best possible plan because the marketing plan addresses issues with a variety of those served and influenced by the organization. In developing the plan, it should address how the hospital will grow to serve the region it serves, rather than hoping to change the region to better fit the hospital, realistically setting objectives and targeting them to a specific timeline. Healthcare changes, and the strategic plan and marketing plan need to be practical, adaptable, and flexible. The planning process concludes with the administration setting priorities to establish a budget and resources for achieving the objectives.

## **4. Building and Managing Relationships with Stakeholders in Healthcare Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations**

Background: Nonprofit healthcare companies build and maintain relationships with several groups of people in the community, including patients, donors, volunteers, and community partners. All these groups of people have a stake in the organization and can have a significant impact on the company's performance. Patients are the primary stakeholders in the delivery of healthcare because they provide the revenue that can be used to provide care and other services. By giving their time and financial resources to the organization, donors and volunteers play a key role in keeping the organization functioning by helping ensure profitable strategies are effectively financed. Finally, partnerships with other organizations that provide health and social services can be valuable.

To attract, engage, and retain these different groups, stakeholders need to build relationships based on trust and transparency. While the scope may shift between interested and affected parties, focusing unnecessarily on separating stakeholders can weaken the legitimacy of any organization. After all, a stakeholder's legitimacy comes from the responsibilities they have in return. Lack of interest can therefore arise from both direct and indirect influence, so marketing efforts should focus on keeping all recipients satisfied. This part should also reveal some measures that the organization can take if it detects conflicts between stakeholder groups, including honest acknowledgment of who the organization prioritizes. Communication is key in relationship-building, approach, and maintenance. It flows into several interconnected processes geared to building a meaningful relationship between stakeholders and organizations. As the backbone of all strategic communications, one must involve corporate and stakeholder communication. The form involves a regular exchange of dialogue with the organization's stakeholders, ensuring that communication reflects the values and objectives of the organization. As part of need-based communications, the exchange of useful information with stakeholders increases the credibility and legitimacy of the organization. Regular feedback also serves as a litmus test for the organization to decide if its policies and programs have been accepted, as well as motivations and participation in decision-making. Multi-layered communications act as a channel for the organization to demonstrate openness and transparency, which is of considerable importance to many

stakeholders, especially their employees and the population. Organizations must communicate directly with stakeholders at various levels and teach them about ongoing and planned activities. Form letters and press releases are not the best ways to talk directly to affected parties, let alone those who have not been informed. Co-organizing and hosting community meetings, workshops, and discussion groups are more inclusive and keep all in the clear. It also provides greater opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions directly to those responsible. This also provides an opportunity to meet and listen to the concerns of stakeholders, gather useful local and appropriate background information, and is generally an effective means of building support. Regular meetings at different organizational levels can facilitate engagement between them and different stakeholders. Judicious use of surveys, telephone calls, interviews, and workshops to gather opinions can accomplish this.

## **5. Utilizing Digital Marketing Tools and Strategies in Healthcare Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations**

Digital marketing is a powerful tool for healthcare marketing at nonprofit organizations. Digital platforms allow for quick deployment of a health campaign to target large populations with many different communication backgrounds. Some examples of digital platforms in marketing for health include social media ads and influencers, websites, and email campaigns. The use of these platforms can make the message and opportunity for taking action hyper-local and focused on segmented populations, indigenous communities, low income, or corporate business communities. These platforms can be more cost-effective and efficient than traditional marketing platforms. For these reasons, it's important to become facile with the various steps of digital marketing. However, an important aspect of executing a successful campaign comes from compelling content that calls for specific action and speaks directly to the target populations. Effective digital marketing will have a strong understanding of its target population, clear objectives and message, and an understanding of strategy and tactics to ensure the message gets in front of those most likely to connect with and take action on the message.

Selecting your ideal content is essential to the success of your marketing campaign. An effective healthcare campaign must ensure the message resonates with one or more of the following audience needs—safety, state, environment, relationships, purpose, morale, rationality, or commitment. Open rates, the use of fair trade or recycled materials, and the absence of phthalates are examples of message content

that may speak to the consumer's interest in safety or use of good environmental stewardship. There are opportunities to evaluate the growth of a page or post, and it's important to understand the data sets related to your digital marketing strategies to ensure the campaign is running ideally. Marketing for healthcare organizations and other nonprofits is not just the sum of its digital parts, such as social media, websites, and mobile apps; however, the ability to combine data from posted signs, blog posts, Facebook pages, print, web, and email in one place and quickly share the link across digital, print, and face-to-face situations is extremely useful.

While traditional and digital media use the same strategies and tactics, the interface tools and type of content may vary. Online, an organization will need to understand Facebook ads, while print media may need a 3x5. The media—face-to-face, print, and digital included—should not be considered separately, but rather as components of a single system; unifying your message through all the interaction points can save time and leverage overall audience experience and improve effectiveness at all connection points. Further, understanding both the historical use of digital media and how to apply new trends to your marketing processes across the board is an important benefit to ongoing digital marketing training.

## **6. Measuring and Evaluating the Effectiveness of Healthcare Marketing Initiatives in Nonprofit Organizations**

Measuring and evaluating marketing initiatives is a critical process within nonprofit organizations. We must understand that process effectiveness affects the outcomes of the organization. One of the first steps in determining the effectiveness of healthcare marketing initiatives is to establish metrics. These can be predefined benchmarks or performance measures collected over time. Either method gives the marketer the tools to see if there have been any structural changes to the process. Several methods can be used to evaluate marketing initiatives. Qualitative evaluations may consist of surveys, focus groups, or direct feedback from patients or clients. Quantitative measures of evaluation may consist of elements such as increased visits to the website or an increase in incoming calls.

Stakeholder feedback is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of any marketing initiative. The feedback from potential customers or patrons can dictate if additional

funds should be invested in a multidimensional marketing approach or if elements of the marketing mix should be enhanced or adjusted. If outcomes are achieved, organizations should report their successes and progress to their internal and external stakeholders. Oftentimes, the financial benefits experienced by the organization can be traced back to a good (or poor) marketing initiative. Nonprofits often face distinct challenges in evaluating marketing strategy effectiveness. The resources for strategic marketing are often drawn from donations designated for programmatic purposes rather than for marketing itself. We may not have the resources to gather data on all the people we may want to reach, or the time and attention to evaluate all the potential outcomes of the marketing efforts. In addition, it is often difficult to attribute an increase in stakeholders to a marketing program. Given that there are limited resources, it is especially important to target and refine your marketing strategies. Programs should frequently review and evaluate marketing initiatives. Each review should be utilized as an opportunity to learn, adjust, and improve future marketing initiatives.

## **7. Ethical Considerations in Healthcare Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations**

Ethical considerations are relevant in any marketing actions, and they are especially relevant in the domain of health care services and in the context of nonprofit organizations. The principle of honesty, integrity, and accountability guides the development of the communication tools of marketing. The message given by health care services marketed by nonprofit organizations could be particularly delicate. Often, in fact, these services involve suffering, fear, and privacy issues. Moreover, many of the users of these services are poor and elderly people who could have difficulties in understanding the language and the offers of health services. Marketers must be aware of these issues to build communication strategies according to these characteristics of potential users. Moreover, for fundraising campaigns aimed at beneficiaries also in countries where malnutrition and health deprivation are dramatic, other ethical aspects arise.

Respect and equity issues are relevant here. It is clear that the first duty of each charitable organization is to provide beneficiaries with improved services for their health condition. But drafted documents generally request a good marketing and communication strategy to communicate clearly what is effectively provided to beneficiaries. At the basis of this new communication policy, there will be respect

for users' privacy and self-determination. This claim is both an ethical and legal issue. Involving users will be part of a process to make the organization more horizontal and closer to users, from whom many suggestions to improve services could come. The informed consent of every guest to be documented must be obtained by the nonprofit organization managers. If consent is not obtainable, it will not be documented. Only aggregate data must be used, ensuring users' privacy and anonymity.

Two potential dangers of marketing communication must be underlined: first, the danger of obtaining informed consent when in reality it does not exist; second, the danger of communicating independently from the true nature of an organization. This paradox appears when information can be used or abused to realize an agenda other than the organization's official ones. Finally, it must be clear that in health care services, which aim at improving human health and welfare, the misuse of language that may lead to a lie or the omission of such necessary information may erode the trust of citizens and reduce the credibility of the system. An ethical framework can help the manager to weigh these issues and to decide what are inappropriate communication practices in this context, according to the peculiar nature of not-for-profit organizations or according to the specific cultural background. Indeed, behind a regulation or a marketing policy, there is always an ethical vision that is based on the assumptions and principles of managers. Credibility is an essential requirement to attract funding and patients, making them loyal. From a business perspective, credibility means maintaining market share; from a nonprofit perspective, credibility translates into attracting and keeping potential supporters and members over time. From a stakeholder perspective, credibility means supporting and sustaining vital services and programming. To a nonprofit organization, when adopting a generic social role theory, the exercise of publicity can further other responsibilities and ethical considerations.

## **8. Case Studies and Best Practices in Healthcare Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations**

Introduction Wendy M. Wilkinson, Executive Director, and Joseph Agostinelli, Marketing Coordinator. Abstract Case studies of real-world healthcare and non-profit campaigns follow. These "best practices" are collected from calls for submissions, advertising placement campaigns, and contacts with organizations. Several very good programs and packages were also collected along the way. Each

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best practice was put through a series of "whys" and "hows" in order to explain how the program was developed, what resources and partnerships were involved, what strategy was used, and if the program achieved the desired outcome. Case studies and best practices will be familiar, and some will be new. There are three items of great importance, however, that our clients will quickly understand: we are serving a multicultural world and will produce advertising and public relations copy with great sensitivity to this issue; the senior market is an important one for all our clients, and they must tailor their marketing programs to meet the health and mental well-being of a wide range of older Americans; and it's important to take risks with innovative programs and marketing concepts. This newsletter is a bit long because there was too much good material to condense. However, it is worth the time to "page through" it. We invite all program managers and marketing professionals to think about their best practices and send them to us to share with colleagues. Please contact us for more information. Here are some of our "best practices" in today's marketing environment: Impact Award Programs recognize the incredible work and creativity of grassroots program managers. Impact Award winners know that with limited resources and dollars, they can provide information and services where the "rubber hits the road." We invite other program managers to tell us their stories so that we can share our learning experiences with each other. The "market changes" slide is based upon an assumption that while marketing packages change constantly to offer better service, more information, and improved choice, there are a few pivot points that drive these changes. Please let us know any new pivot points that we may have overlooked. Best Practices—the Long Haul of Ortho-Kin/PMTCT. Melrose-Wakefield Hospital and Dorchester House Multi-Service Center. Massachusetts Healthy Start Initiative. Powerful Minds – Changing Realities. The goals and background of your marketing, education, and outreach program. As an example, what creative idea was the basis for your materials? What did it take to turn that copy idea into successful ads, billboards, videos, or radio scripts? Which team MVP and outside resources got results with you? What results were you after, and did you achieve them? Please let us know if the program was a one-time effort or if you have easily duplicated the idea to use again and again. Finally, can potential viewers or readers call you for further information and other promotional materials?

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