Health care marketing today is about more than **slick ads**. It’s about **engaging with communities**.

**BEYOND BROCHURES**

Health care marketing is undergoing a revolution and evolution. When it first entered the health care arena 35 years ago, marketing was mistakenly defined almost exclusively as advertising and slick brochures. Most executives believed that simply adding hundreds of thousands of dollars to corporate communication and marketing budgets to create pretty artwork and engaging copy would bring customers flocking to their doors. After all, if we didn’t outspend the competition, we would risk losing our reputation, our physicians and the trust of our board members.

Many of us who lived through those times didn’t believe that then, and don’t believe it now. We understand the importance of conversations with our communities. This means focusing on employees who carry out our mission every day; physicians who hold the pen, the pad, the iPod, the orders and the trust of their patients; and, most important, the patients, families and communities who entrust their care to us.

We know that no amount of ad spend can replace excellence in customer service, high levels of engagement with our workforce and the power of word-of-mouth marketing. We have realized that success means going outside the walls of our institutions into our communities to listen, learn and educate about lifestyles and behaviors that improve health. And while effective advertising remains a popular staple of marketing campaigns and has been critical to many organizations’ ability to build their brands and increase visibility and awareness, savvy executives have come to realize that marketing is less about our ad spend and more about the sum total of impressions, experiences and relationships that stakeholders have with our organizations.

Marketing will always be about what we represent and live up to at each and every touch point, how we design extraordinary experiences, and how we align the organization and members of our team to deliver those experiences.

This ever-evolving age of marketing plunges all participants into a world where research holds the answers, reform dictates communication, consumers lead the charge and change is unavoidable.

We asked our esteemed editorial board members—marketing and communications executives at some of the nation’s best-known health systems—to share their thoughts on how the role of health care marketing will evolve over the next few years. I know you will find that their enlightening, engaging and thought-provoking responses represent an exciting new era in our profession. Here’s what they have to say.
How will the role of health care marketing evolve over the next few years?

Jean Hitchcock
Corporate Vice President of Public Affairs and Marketing
MedStar Health

The fundamental building blocks of health care marketing will not change: Mission + Vision + Market Dynamics = Marketing Strategy. What our strategies will be and how we implement them will definitely evolve. Medical staff models: With most physicians employed, marketing will focus on differentiation of physicians on quality that can be documented. Quality and service: The first must be transparently communicated and service needs to be a cultural competency. These will be the great differentiators among providers. Target audiences: These have always been a part of market segmentation. However, reaching them and identifying new digital communities will be an evolving skill set for health care marketers. Brand: This is of paramount importance and is challenging in this message-laden world. Mobilizing our staff and sales force will be critical.

Andrew Richburg
Executive Vice President of Marketing and Strategy, Sanford Health

We have to find meaningful ways to connect with our patients as unique individuals. That personalization has to translate into how we engage them in communication and dialogue through their preferred channels and vehicles. More important, we need to partner with operations more closely to design patient experiences that provide the most value to each individual patient. These individual value propositions, when brought together, align to patient segments. Sanford is working to understand these psychographic profiles and segments and align everything to these insights, especially the experience. Health care has to catch up to what the best organizations have been doing to build loyalty. Our “compare group” isn’t just the clinic or hospital down the street; it is the best experiences that patients enjoy with Audi, Zappos or Target.

Susan Solomon
Vice President of Marketing
St. Joseph Health System

Let’s start with where health care marketing isn’t going: print campaigns that mimic everyone else’s ads, big-budget, mass-mailed, glossy newsletters containing little actual news, and bloated websites with the same content as every other provider. Those days of me-too marketing with limited accountability are over. New marketing must focus on differentiation, always be measured, and really care about engaging audiences in meaningful ways that support health and well-being. We started experimenting with personalized, targeted health care marketing in the early 2000s and, with CRM, social media and other tools readily available, we are all headed this way. Consumers now look at health care marketing with the same scrutiny they do for all purchasing decisions. We have to listen and respond intelligently. It’s good marketing and it’s about being better stewards of health care resources.

Tom Vitelli
Assistant Vice President of Communications
Intermountain Health Care

Evolution is likely to occur over a longer time period than the next few years, but some change is coming. As elements of health care reform take effect and pressure from payors (government, commercial and individuals) intensifies, criticism of traditional advertising may mount, marketers may rely more on other types of communications and the nature of the “product” may be different in key respects. Still, though the strategies, tactics and messages may change, the role of marketing in building brands, defining services, communicating benefits, differentiating from competitors and attracting patients will remain vital to organizations.
Health care marketing will transition to a greater focus on the customer experience to retain existing patients and increase word-of-mouth referrals, an exploding phenomenon that has its origin in social media. With Medicare reimbursement tied to Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems scores, patient satisfaction will be even more pressing. Marketing professionals need to take the lead to identify customer needs and wants, assessing their organization’s gap, and then developing processes and behavioral standards to create a superior patient experience. Another major focus will be partnering with quality professionals to better segment and manage patients based on specific needs. For example, using CRM to reach diabetes patients to help them manage their glucose levels is not only an effective way to create loyalty, but also likely to decrease the chance of unnecessary emergency room visits and re-admissions.

Rose Glenn
Senior Vice President of Communications and CMO
Henry Ford Health System

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Peter Brumleve
Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer
Scott & White Healthcare

As reimbursement systems evolve “from volume to value,” I see four major shifts in emphasis for the marketing function. First, more emphasis on educating the consuming public about the advantages of accessing health care through true systems rather than a collection of providers. Second, a continuing shift away from traditional mass media advertising toward the Web and social media. Third, a shift of more resources devoted to internal marketing and other alignment of the external brand position with the internal brand experience. And fourth, as systems consolidate, a practical execution of co-branding with other providers while maintaining the brand stewardship of your brand. Marketing’s role in driving top-line revenue will remain critical but will shift from driving units of care to the number of unique patients regardless of utilization.

Kathleen Dean
Chief Marketing Officer
Oregon Health & Science University

Obviously, technology is changing how we communicate. But, more importantly, what we communicate as marketers is also changing. Value is an increasingly important piece of the decision for all health care customers—patients, payors, employers and physicians. The value conversation means that marketers must now be well-versed in quality indicators and reimbursement models.

Andrea Cotter
Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, UPMC

Health care marketing is at its greatest moment right now. The dynamics of health care reform, driven by consumer demand for quality and affordability, have positioned health care as a value-based service and in the realm of many other consumer-based industries. This positioning is driving health care marketers and communications experts to consider creating a dialogue in a digital age, which listens and responds to the patient voice and provides an improved experience at all of the systems’ touch points. Digital strategies and mobile applications are becoming front and center in these dialogues and will require renewed commitment to purpose, new marketing and communications skills, partnerships with care delivery teams, response processes and openness about capabilities combined with patient or member-defined value.
Don Stanziano  
Corporate Vice President of Marketing and Communications  
Scripps Health

At Providence, all of our efforts are focused around a compelling vision, captured from the patients’ perspective by the words, “Know me, care for me, ease my way.” Transforming to integrate our services, connect patients and ease their way through our nation’s complex health system will require much more intentional collaboration between marketing and internal and external communication functions. It’s the only way we can ensure that we’re aligned in how we build lasting relationships with all we serve.

Diane Gage Lofgren  
Senior Vice President of Brand Strategy, Communications and Public Relations  
Kaiser Permanente

Under the federal health care reform law, newly created state-level health insurance exchanges will likely dominate the evolution of health care purchasing and marketing, especially for individuals and small businesses, starting in 2014. How those exchanges will be structured, and how coverage can be marketed, could change if there are political or legal changes to the health reform law. No matter what happens, we feel strongly that the nation has finally entered the era of measuring quality and using that information to continually improve care. That means we will need to find new and accessible ways to engage in conversations with current and prospective members about quality and what it means for their well-being.

Orest Holubec  
Vice President of Communications  
Providence Health & Services

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June McAllister Fowler  
Vice President of Corporate and Public Communications  
BJC HealthCare

There will be increased focus on outcomes, rather than just outputs. We will gain the ability to more effectively measure the results of marketing efforts, thanks to advances in information technology. This same technology will let us get closer to our customers and talk with them rather than just talk to them. We will know more quickly what is effective and what is not, providing the opportunity for faster course correction.

Megan Manahan  
Vice President of Marketing and Communications  
Mercy/Catholic Health Partners

Changing industry dynamics will force the continued evolution of marketing. Business as usual is not an option. In the face of these dynamics, marketers will have more opportunities to lead change efforts across the system, most notably by representing the voice of the customer, understanding market dynamics, and helping to align and engage employees in embracing change to achieve organizational goals. The increased complexities of health care marketing will require us to be experts in managing a portfolio of brands and become innovators in how products and services are designed, delivered and communicated. As health care innovations are often dependent on a number of stakeholders that must work together to achieve success (complex health systems, hospitals, physicians and insurers), marketers will have to manage the inherent conflict that often exists among these groups.