USING TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO MEET CONSUMER NEEDS

Your patients are Uberized. Here's how to keep up with their expectations.
BY TOM SEERY, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, FOUNDER AND CEO OF REALSELF

Uber introduced magic to our lives. With a single tap, a car would show up and whisk us away to any destination at a fraction of the cost of a taxi or personal car. Why is this relevant to your practice? Every interaction a consumer makes that doesn't work in this frictionless manner now feels deficient, including your patient's interaction with your practice.

Consumer expectations are shaped today by customers' "last best experience" with a company, theorized former Gartner Marketing Chief of Research Jake Sorofman.[1] And in trying to win consumers' hearts, minds, and wallets, companies are not merely competing with others in their category, but with companies that are at the cutting edge of creating "sticky" and delightful customer experiences like Uber, Amazon, and Apple.

I'm not here to oversell you on the idea that you can create consumer experiences that are exactly on par with the leading lights in technology today. But there are some tactics you can commandeer—social media, third-party technologies, and even some process improvement—to deliver on some of consumers' key expectations.

1. ACT LIKE A BRAND

You are more than a medical practice or small business. You are a brand. And a positive brand is an invaluable asset for a business because it projects your values to your customers.

Ninety percent of consumers, according to a report by communications marketing firm Edelman, say they want more meaningful relationships with brands, but only 20 percent say brands are delivering the experiences they want.[2] You should define what your brand is and communicate it to your customers. Then give more thought to how you deliver your services so that your brand promise is apparent during every interaction that current and potential patients have with you, your staff, and your practice's marketing. Being thoughtful about threading your brand through every touchpoint with your patients can help separate you from your competitors.

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2. MAKE TRUST YOUR HEDGEHOG

Jim Collins developed the hedgehog concept in his best-selling business book, *Good to Great*. He argued that organizations can be more successful when they can identify the one thing that they do best. So, while great patient outcomes are a very integral part of your practice, I'd encourage you to think that the higher order patient need is trust. Trust in your skills, trust in your integrity, trust in their results. According to Salesforce, 95 percent of consumers said they are more likely to be loyal patrons to a company they trust.[3] And nearly two-thirds of consumers are more fearful than they were two years ago that their data will be comprised. Every practice, therefore, has a duty to protect privacy.

- Do you have a digital security consultant? If not, get one.
- Do you have clear privacy policies and training with staff? If not, prioritize it.
- When asking permission for before and after photos,

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NEXT STEPS

- Define your brand promise. Is it radical transparency? State-of-the-art mastery? Lock down your brand message in brief, then think about how to apply it top to bottom.

- Show your credentials. Use language in your marketing and conversations that helps patients understand why they should trust you—before they have to ask.

- Get in your patients' heads. If you were your patient, what aspects of the patient experience would you find most frustrating? Think about ways to fix them. No need for mystery here, you can get great info by reading your reviews, talking to your staff, and asking your patients themselves.

rights need to be done right and with integrity. Make certain your patient is giving a full media release; they should positively affirm that they understand that the images will be posted on the Internet and could be found in other places like Google Images.

Reviews are a critical path to forging trust before a consumer contacts a practice. According to BrightLocal, 85 percent of consumers trust online reviews as much as they trust personal word-of-mouth recommendations.[4] You should actively court reviews for your RealSelf profile from your patients and develop a process to keep those reviews flowing in. A 2016 RealSelf consumer survey found that practices with 10 to 24 reviews get eight times more inquiries than those with fewer than 10 reviews. Make sure to keep your reviews recent, as patients also assign a high value to fresh reviews.

3. PUT YOUR PATIENTS FIRST

Paying attention to your patients can tell you a lot about how to delight them.

Uber revolutionized vehicle travel by eradicating mysterious car service wait times and nixing the awkward cash exchange at the end of a ride. Amazon is looking to do away with the inconvenience of waiting in line with its Amazon Go stores, and if they succeed they will have completely made over the retail experience.

Thinking about common problems and sticking points from a patient's point of view is a great way to take your level of service up a notch.

At your practice, the patient inquiry, consultation, and procedure are all opportunities to gather information that can make for better conversations with other patients and increase their likelihood of booking appointments. Develop thoughtful answers to common questions that you can deliver on your website, on social media, and even in person during your consultations.

You should also take a look at when your patients are reaching out—this might not align neatly with your business hours, as many email inquiries take place outside of business hours, according to a 2017 study conducted by RealSelf. Practices that respond to inquiries in five minutes or less get around seven times more contacts than

those that take 15 minutes to respond, so consider ways to actively monitor lead channels for longer so that your patient engagement lines up with their schedules.

You should also meet potential patients where they're engaging with you digitally, and that might not be your website. When RealSelf surveyed users to determine the effect of reading positive online reviews, the number of people who said such reviews would encourage them to visit the practice's website actually dropped 17 percentage points from 2016 to 2017. Make sure potential patients can reach out to you when their interest is piqued: post your practice's phone number on your RealSelf profile, activate inquiry forms on your Facebook profile, and have staff monitor the messages on social networks like Facebook and Instagram. ■

1. https://blogs.gartner.com/jake-sorofman/in-customer-experience-last-best-shapes-expectations/
2. https://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/brandshare-2014/
3. https://www.salesforce.com/blog/2018/06/digital-customers-research.html
4. https://www.brightlocal.com/learn/local-consumer-review-survey/

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