

INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY LEADS TO GOLDEN ERA OF HEALTHCARE MARKETING



BY MICHAEL COHEN

Michael Cohen is vice president of marketing at eRelevance Corp., where he leads both corporate marketing and the client marketing team, which creates sophisticated, multi-channel marketing campaigns for clients. Prior to joining eRelevance, Michael spent 25 years in various marketing roles at both enterprise companies and startups.

There's no denying it: We live in an always-on, digitally connected, mobile world where we are constantly checking email, texting, using mobile apps, accessing the web, and engaging in social media.

To stay connected to their patients, healthcare practices must find ways to effectively reach them through their digital channels of choice. Patients want to confirm appointments via text, access records on web portals, and view before and after galleries on Instagram.

All of this digital adoption is paving the way for a Golden Era in healthcare marketing. Practices that digitally connect to patients through multiple channels, while adhering to legal regulatory restrictions, can differentiate themselves from competitors and develop the kind of patient engagement that builds long-term loyalty.

But it takes a bit of sophistication. Here are three tips on how to make the most of your digital marketing efforts.

ADOPT A MULTI-CHANNEL APPROACH

While it is easier than ever to reach your patients digitally, be sure you have a strategy before you hit "Publish" or push "Send." Some practices update a Facebook page, post pictures on Instagram, or send batch-and-blast email newsletters and call it a day. But how do you know if your audience is seeing the social content or opening the emails?

In reality, email open rates average about 20 percent in the healthcare industry, which translates to 80 percent of

your patients missing your message. Facebook is reaching even fewer people. According to research from Ogilvy, Facebook Business Page posts only reach about two percent of the patients that like your page. That means a whopping 98 percent of people aren't seeing your message.

So how do you get their attention? The key is realizing that your messaging may not reach your audience through one channel, so your best bet is a multi-channel approach. You want to digitally surround your patients with offers that are relevant to them.

Adopt a personalized email program that sends targeted messaging to individuals based on their interests and needs. Run social media ads that only target the patients in each marketing campaign.

FOCUS ON REPEAT BUSINESS

Existing patients represent 40 percent of revenues and 32 percent of referrals—a significant portion of your business. You already have their attention, so create campaigns that will encourage them to come back to take advantage of more services. Additionally, encourage these patients to refer their family and friends by creating campaigns and promotions that reward them for doing so. Expanding relationships with these patients is much more cost effective than trying to find new patients, which only generate 13 percent of revenues and can cost up to \$1,000 per patient to acquire.

PLAN AND MEASURE THOUGHTFULLY

Like traditional advertising, digital marketing requires a plan. Before you send out a one-size-fits-all email, identify your business objectives. Are you trying to increase revenue? Are you trying to get more people to try a particular treatment to grow a certain area of your business? Are you hoping to drive more referral business?

Once you establish your goals, develop relevant messages for specific targets. Are you offering something that all of your patients would be interested in, or are you hoping to target women over 50 who spend a certain amount of money with you?

Thoughtful preparation will help you measure the effectiveness of your marketing. Once a marketing campaign is running, you can look at how many people opened an

email, clicked on an offer, made an appointment or followed up for more information. You can connect this data to actual bookings and revenues to determine if the campaign was effective. If it isn't getting traction, try targeting a different audience or tweaking the creative or offer. By measuring engagement and testing your campaigns, you are better positioned to adjust future campaigns to be more effective and build stronger relationships with your patients.

CONSIDER REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Ensuring your marketing messages are relevant and match the needs and interests of patients is an important step toward meeting the regulatory requirements related to patient communications. It's necessary to secure permissions to market to patients through any channel and follow guidelines set up in laws, such as the CAN-SPAM act.

The integration of technology in healthcare presents exciting opportunity, but it takes some effort to get it right. You can no longer rely on email blasts and Facebook alone if you want to see real business results. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

Existing patients

40% of revenues

32% of referrals

New patients

13% of revenues

Can cost up to **\$1,000**/patient to acquire