



Improving the Patient Experience Through Content

In today's economy, the customer **MUST** come first—regardless of industry. By applying lessons from the best customer service organizations in the world, healthcare marketers can transform the patient experience and better meet customer needs—before, during, and after a health event.



BY **Ahava Leibtag**

President
Aha Media Group
She can be reached at
ahava@ahamediagroup.com.

What unites the greatest companies in the world? How would you reply if someone asked you, “What do Starbucks, Zappos, Amazon.com, and The Ritz-Carlton all have in common?”

The answer is unparalleled customer service. Starbucks is a customer service organization that sells coffee. Zappos is a customer service organization that sells shoes (as well as other clothing and accessories). Amazon.com is a customer service organization that sells everything. And The Ritz-Carlton is a customer service organization that provides hotel rooms. But at their heart, what all of these companies are really delivering is an exceptional “experience,” an experience designed to engage the customer ... to make them feel good about their interaction with the company.

Healthcare marketing professionals are pressed rice-paper-thin, having to juggle shrinking budgets, increasing competition, and a rapidly transforming marketplace. While it might be tempting to forgo active involvement in the design of the patient experience, that would be a mistake. There is plenty marketers can and should be doing to make patients' lives easier as they contemplate their next healthcare choice and move through the experience of care.

It starts with transforming mentalities. The companies listed above have a passion for delivering experiences that transform their customers' lives. There's a reason why so many of today's organizations are hiring Chief Customer Officers and Chief Experience Officers. We're experiencing a customer revolution: customers have more information and access to content and more influence over ratings, opinions, and likes than ever before.

Armed with this understanding, healthcare marketers can contribute to a better patient experience by delivering the right content to the right people at the right times. It comes down to four key steps.



Map the Patient's Journey

The word may be tired but the meaning is not—the journey. Mapping a patient's journey is a critical part of transforming the experience. Walk in your patients' shoes. Receive care from your organization. Call and make an appointment. Watch for the strategic touchpoints that can make or break an experience. Gather your team, and analyze those touchpoints carefully.

To introduce its new “no time” service, for example, Starbucks began by putting signs in stores introducing the concept to customers. The signs ask, “No time? No line,” and then instruct customers to order their beverage ahead using the Starbucks app.

Starbucks asked customers about their pain points, and one of those was waiting in line. So a service was created to solve that pain point. Then, to inform customers that it was solved, Starbucks placed content in the store, one of the strategic touchpoints the company knew customers would see and pay attention to.

2 Understand That Conversations Change an Experience

Marketers can help guide and shape important conversations like ratings, likes, and comments by thinking through the questions a patient might have at each strategic touchpoint. Understand barriers of entry for some customers and hit those fears head on in your web, print, and other forms of content. Use technology: provide Live Help on your websites or offer online appointment scheduling.

When patients have registered for an appointment, take the time to build a relationship. Instead of sending a canned follow-up email, use algorithms to provide links to content that answer the question of what the experience around their appointment will be. Or send a video of a patient walking through the hospital and registering in order to illustrate the process.

To assess your strategic touchpoints, gather your team in a conference room and brainstorm at least 50 questions a patient has at that particular moment in

his or her journey. Then do a gap analysis to determine whether your current content is answering those 50 questions in a way that will appeal to patients; for instance, through videos, photographs, slideshows, and graphics.

3 Test Your Content

Healthcare organizations often test products and certain services but rarely test the content created to support them. Yet testing content with target audiences can provide valuable feedback for guiding content creation and organization.

Consider this example from Johns Hopkins Medicine. Marketers there wanted to test the effectiveness and organization of a certain set of web pages written to promote a digestive weight-loss center. While clinicians liked the pages very much, the project team thought they seemed too long and questioned how effective they would be in communicating the intended message.

With the clinicians’ blessings, one page was tested for a very specific piece of information: “How much weight do I need to lose to lower my risk of getting diabetes by 58 percent?” The answer was 5 to 10 percent.

During the usability test, users were asked to read the page. Then after completing a few other tasks, they were asked how much weight they needed to lose to lower their risk of getting diabetes. The test clearly showed there was a problem: only 17 percent of participants could remember that fact. But when the page was rewritten to graphically set off the information, the percentage of people who could remember increased dramatically—to

63 percent. Sharing that powerful evidence with clinicians provided the marketing team with the budget they needed to transform the content strategy for the entire site.

4 Watch the Greatest Companies in the World

At Disney, you can purchase a Fast Pass to get through lines quickly and schedule exactly when you’d like to take a ride. What if something similar could be done in healthcare? What if patients scheduled for surgery could be sent a bracelet, similar to the Fast Pass, with all of their information already encoded on it?

Patients would no longer have to wait in a physical line to be registered, so they could spend an extra hour at home before heading to the hospital for their procedure. At the hospital, the bracelet would be swiped. A staff member would simply double-check the information while a video is sent to the patient’s smartphone to show what will happen in the next 30 minutes. Once that video is complete and the patient is prepped for surgery, content would be sent to the patient’s caregivers explaining what they should be prepared to gather at home.

The possibilities are endless if we find a way to marry technology and process to what customers need and want in healthcare. The scenario described above might seem like light years away, but it’s coming faster than we all realize, because customers are going to demand it. Make sure you’re prepared. Carefully map patients’ needs and wants at each stage of their healthcare journey, create strategic content that supports their decision making and answers their questions, build relationships by establishing trust, and watch the magic happen.

Customers have more information and access to content and more influence than ever before.