



18 Healthcare MARKETING TRENDS to Watch in 2018

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18 HEALTHCARE MARKETING TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2018

At Aha Media Group, we like to stay on top of the NBT (Next Big Thing). That's no easy feat in the world of healthcare marketing, social media and content strategy – a field that changes so rapidly, it can make your head spin. (But hopefully not like “The Exorcist.”)

To get insights into the latest trends, we went straight to the top – the leaders in healthcare marketing – to find out what they think will be 2018's NBT.

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ANNA ALIGOOD

PRINCIPAL AT ANNA ALIGOOD LLC

 [ANNAALIGOOD](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . being smart and efficient. Convert consumers into patients by using customer relationship management (CRM) tools wisely and integrating marketing and communications.

Tips on how to take healthcare content strategy to the next level in 2018?

"We're all competing for market share, trying to tell our brand stories in the same crowded digital space. But if you work in healthcare – an industry that has always lagged behind – this challenge (I mean, opportunity!) is amplified. We're also up against consumer expectations (#ThxUber) and a constantly changing landscape."

So what's a healthcare content strategist to do?

Be smart: Expand the use of CRM tools. These tools can offer insights into patients' behavior. Then take that knowledge to meet patients where they are and lead them to optimal health.

Be efficient: Tear down those silos! Many organizations want to nest content strategy either under marketing or communication. But an integrated marketing communications approach will lead to greater efficiency.

"As a communicator-turned-marketer, I launched this effort in the health system where I worked, and it has allowed us to do things we never thought possible," says Anna. "We have stories told by marketing pitched to the media, and we've repurposed news and information as native advertising. Crazy, I know! But it can be done."



ED BENNETT

PRESIDENT AND CEO AT
ED BENNETT CONSULTING

 [EDBENNETT](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . the total digital experience and clean data. The consumer's entire online journey should be accurate and seamless.

There are 2 items for the healthcare marketer's to-do list in 2018: Understand the total consumer digital experience. And make sure you have clean, accurate data.

What is the total consumer digital experience? While Ed acknowledges that most healthcare marketing departments have built decent websites, their work ends there. But the consumer experience doesn't. What happens when Joe Consumer uses the patient portal? Or the bill-pay system? And what will he see on that one rogue clinical department site? Are these systems well-integrated and user-friendly?

The consumer doesn't care that one part is owned by marketing and one part is owned by someone else. All he sees is that the pieces don't fit. "And when that happens, it

hurts his user experience, his satisfaction with the site and his overall satisfaction with the organization."

"It's time to take responsibility for these services. All digital touch points should be seamless and invisible," says Ed.

As for clean data: "If great content is how we capture new patients, then accurate data is how we keep them." That includes everything from the physician directory, to facility information, to wait times, to events information. The industry needs to take ownership and improve the consumer journey.

Ed's challenge: "Pick 1 or 2 critical data sets, get departmental agreement on what's accurate and build a single source of truth for your organization. This isn't a sexy task, but they will build the foundation for successful marketing programs and increase patient satisfaction."





ROB BIRGFELD

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT, CHIEF DIGITAL
MARKETING OFFICER AT INOVA HEALTH SYSTEM



2018 will be the year of . . . true personalization. Healthcare marketing will move beyond targeted promotional material to areas that patients truly value.

The hard line in the sand between marketing and clinical communication will begin to fade. “Technologies and strategies born out of lead generation and nurturing are finding their way to healthcare marketers, with successful engagement results following.”

Rob sees how patients respond to personalized outreach efforts from healthcare organizations. And tools like

marketing automation and 1-to-1 communication can move these efforts even further into areas patients appreciate and need, like appointment reminders, referral follow-ups and wellness messaging.

He believes that coordination is the key to healthcare marketing’s success – like marketing taking more ownership of engagement, or vice versa. He notes, “This coordination will be the start of a more orchestrated set of communication strategies to effectively manage a healthy population.”



MICHELLE BRENCE

DIGITAL CONTENT STRATEGIST AT
OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY



2018 will be the year of . . . digital vision and quality. Next-gen technologies like VR and AI beckon, but the fundamentals need to come first. Start with a shared digital vision and commitment to quality content.

You can’t focus on frosting the cupcakes if your oven is broken and you’re out of sugar. 2018 is less about the bells and whistles (like a VR team that takes viewers into operating rooms) and more about getting the essentials right.

“Shifting a culture that can include thousands of employees may take time,” Michelle points out. “It took a while at our organization for everyone to embrace a digital vision – but now they understand that providing excellent care starts when a patient taps a health question into a smartphone.”

Guiding this shift is a digital engagement team that has worked to untangle confusing location information, delete duplicate content, harness analytics and design pages around user needs.

And don’t forget that quality counts. Hospital websites are often cluttered with generic marketing messages and competing or outdated pages instead of clear, useful information. So invest in creating high-quality content that focuses on what makes you stand out and is centered on the users’ needs.

Michelle acknowledges that this process will cost time and money, but the result is an organization that truly understands its patients and serves them well.





EMILY BRODERICK

DIRECTOR OF CONTENT DEVELOPMENT AT
AHA MEDIA GROUP

 [EMILYOBRODERICK](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . marketing automation. Integrating marketing automation into content strategy will bring your content to the next level.

Integrating marketing automation into content strategy should be on every healthcare marketer's to-do list. "If you understand the patient journey, you can use marketing automation to help deliver personalized messages to prospects at the right time and in the right place."

But don't forget about value: If those messages don't include compelling and relevant content – then users will delete

them like they do all the other irrelevant content that comes their way.

So what makes content valuable, compelling and relevant? Emily says, "Optimized web pages, blogs that take a deep dive into a topic and eBooks that go one step further and provide even more useful content."

Organizations may already have that content available, or they may need to create it from scratch. Either way, marketing automation will be a crucial part of content strategy in the coming year.



BEN CASH

FOUNDER AND CEO BLUEKEY INC.

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2018 will be the year of . . . digital technologies in healthcare. We'll connect through data, algorithms and technology. Staying ahead of the curve means being more human – especially in healthcare.

Healthcare systems will start investing more in digital technologies. "These technologies will help organizations provide better care to existing patients, expand their reach into rural and underserved areas and reduce costs." Data and technology can break down barriers and create user experiences that will connect people to the information they need to make a difference in their lives.

But what does that mean, practically? Today's patients expect a very personalized digital experience and easy

access to information. "It will be critical for healthcare organizations to create public websites, patient portals and digital campaigns that deliver relevant, personalized content based on patients' needs, history, behavior and preferred method of engagement," notes Ben.

And organizations will need to pay attention to new data sources such as prescription drug dispensary devices and health wearables. These emerging technologies can give providers a fuller picture of a patient's health and behavior. "Healthcare providers can tailor information, advice and programs to keep patients connected and healthy – while using fewer resources. This personalization will be even more important as outcomes-based healthcare is on the rise."





BEN DILLON

CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER AT GEONETRIC



2018 will be the year of . . . storytelling. Health systems will begin telling their enterprise-wide brand story online.

The mergers and acquisitions activity that's happened over the past few years has come with a price: With all this "merging" and "acquiring," there's been fairly little "integrating." How will these newly combined organizations work harmoniously as one?

"The next step is integrating these new acquisitions together, operating as a single organization under a unified brand," says Ben.

He says that 2018 will be about health systems telling their enterprise-wide brand story, allowing them to leverage the scope and scale of their offerings as a competitive weapon.

He notes that it may be challenging to tell this enterprise story online. But the result is better customer service: Seamlessly combining the offerings under an integrated web presence will benefit health consumers in a big way, because they will easily find the services they need.



KATHY DIVIS

PRESIDENT AT GREYSTONE.NET



2018 will be the year of . . . MarTech. The industry will continue to transition from a MarCom to a MarTech focus.

Healthcare marketers are seeing the value in using marketing technology to target audiences with exquisite precision – and then acting on that data to personalize content, making it patient- and customer-centric.

She envisions healthcare marketers taking ownership and driving MarTech for their organizations. "MarTech offers an almost limitless ability to engage and interact with target audiences. Marketers will begin to test innovative tactics to

determine which method results in the best outcomes to reach their goals."

And Kathy is looking beyond the latest iPhone or Android device. "Content marketing needs to invest time, effort and dollars into communication and connection via voice search, like Alexa and Google Home, as well as IoT devices and virtual reality applications," she notes.

Kathy's fervent hope for the coming year is to see the term "digital marketing" fade away as marketers realize that it's really all marketing.





GLEN DOSS

VP, STRATEGY AND BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT AT CENTRETEK

 [CENTRETEK](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . integration. Healthcare systems will need to integrate their websites, patient portals and electronic medical records (EMRs) for a smooth, personalized digital patient experience.

Organizations will start to explore strategies for making this type of true integration possible. Glen notes that integration is common in other industries, like retail, banking and investing. It's time for healthcare to catch up.

Glen points out, "Healthcare providers know a lot about their patients. Now, organizations need to leverage this information to provide highly targeted, relevant and personalized web experiences."

And he sees it starting to happen: Some healthcare organizations are now exploring options for this type of holistic integration and implicit personalization.



DAVID GROTH

HSC WEB COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER

 [DAVE_GROTH](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . user experience. Look to leverage every possible avenue to engage your users. Personalize their experience, and manage their journey seamlessly.

Why does Google dominate the search market space? They put the user experience above all else.

In the past year, David observes, most users probably haven't noticed that Google's search results pages have changed. What they have noticed is that they are getting the answers to their questions without ever having to visit a healthcare site.

So how does a healthcare system compete? "While we might work in a marketing or IT structure, we must work doggedly for our patients, visitors and the public – daily and in every decision. We need to answer questions that our users haven't even thought of yet."

Optimizing the user experience includes things as simple as your Wi-Fi. "People joining our guest network are on our healthcare campus, and they are probably not our employees. So how are we enhancing their journey? Do we take them to a generic page, or do we guide them to areas they may need?"

And don't overlook the potential that the electronic medical record (EMR) system offers. Mine that data. Find out who your patients are and why they are coming to you. "Can you tie onboarding into location and EMR data? What are you doing for patients who choose you over a closer facility? Do you have out-of-market customers – and do you know why? Find ways to manage their journeys seamlessly," says David.

The health systems that will dominate are those that enhance the visitor journey, by both improving the small details as well as answering the big health questions.





TONY HUTH

CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF MEDICOM HEALTH INTERACTIVE



2018 will be the year of . . . ADA compliance. Meeting ADA compliance for web accessibility is going to be a challenge, and health systems need to start understanding this issue.

Focus on the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 – specifically, ADA compliance for web accessibility.

Though ADA initially applied to physical accessibility, like wheelchair ramps, courts have begun to interpret the law to include websites. Complicating the issue is the lack of clear guidelines from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

But lawyers aren't waiting around for those guidelines. "After having high-profile wins against retailers, attorneys are targeting healthcare on behalf of disabled patients and bringing suits against major hospital systems. They want to force hospitals into ADA compliance now, and judges are siding with them."

In the absence of binding guidelines, institutions are trying to read between the lines on recent legal rulings in other industries, like airlines. Most organizations believe they can achieve ADA compliance by meeting the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA standard.

"This interpretation is probably correct, but without clear rules from the DOJ, some healthcare legal and compliance departments are already starting to impose tight restrictions on web content, forcing hospitals to move rapidly and decisively."

Tony understands the challenge well, noting: "Several of our clients are facing this issue. We have made it a priority to upgrade all of our health risk assessments to meet the current WCAG 2.0 AA accessibility standard."

Unfortunately, many of these standards detract from the high-quality user experience that consumers expect. Tony hopes that the standards evolve so that organizations can meet compliance requirements while also meeting user expectations.

The next challenge in meeting compliance: Converting the hundreds of existing web pages, online tools and other digital assets.

So yes, this is a huge, complex issue, and healthcare systems need to get on top of it. "There's definitely space for consultants to develop an expertise and step in to help hospitals."



JEN JENKINS

WEBSITE CONTENT AND PROJECT MANAGER AT UNIVERSITY OF UTAH HEALTH



2018 will be the year of . . . AI and chatbots. They can open up insights into healthcare consumers' needs that can be answered online.

Chatbots are "wicked intriguing." To those who counter that chatbots aren't the next big thing because they've been around forever, Jen notes their rising prominence in all industries – and is excited about what that could mean for healthcare.

For example, there's Woebot, a therapy chatbot. Woebot uses artificial intelligence (AI) trained in cognitive behavioral therapy to help treat depression. Jen's considering trying it

herself, just to test the quality of the therapy. After all, she says, "Who doesn't need a shrink?"

And a recent chat with Brian Gresh of the chatbot startup Loyal made her realize the massive potential that chatbots have for gathering content queries. Chatbots can help collect information about your current patient population. Find out why consumers are visiting your site, and then build content around those queries. "You could put the bot out of business . . . or maybe it will start writing content for you?" Of course, training the AI would be time-consuming, but Jen believes she's up for the job.





JARED JOHNSON

MANAGER OF MARKETING TECHNOLOGY
AND ANALYTICS AT PHOENIX
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

 [JAREDPANO](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . data science. There will be no more smoke and mirrors with analytics. You'll need hard data to back up your content and increase customer satisfaction.

Warning for analytics imposters: Your days are coming to an end.

"You don't have to be a data scientist, but you do have to work with one and think like one. You'll need to shed Data 1.0 definitions of terms such as impressions, engagement and conversions. Data has its place in every part of our universe, and, therefore, investments in data-related resources will increase."

Jared says that without data, the perceived ROI of content marketing is hitting a wall. Hospitals are cranking out content, but they aren't necessarily keeping up with how to

measure its success – and senior leadership is starting to question the value of that content. Investing in resources to back up your content with data will become a necessity, not a luxury.

In addition, sophisticated tools such as marketing automation, customer relationship management (CRM) and digital patient engagement platforms are capturing massive amounts of data. But the data is useful only if you know what to do with it. Chief marketing officers, instead of asking for more tools in their 2018 budgets, will make room for people to manage the tools they already own.

"This is good news for an industry that has struggled to keep up with consumers' expectations. Thanks to the rise of data in our everyday lives – and content strategies – we can begin to close that gap," says Jared.



CLAUDIA LINH

DIRECTOR, DIGITAL CHANNELS AT
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL LOS ANGELES

 [CHILDRENSLA](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . simplifying. Less will be more.

Healthcare marketing needs to simplify, simplify, simplify. "Simplify messaging and make content and ads relevant to what patients are experiencing in this current healthcare climate."

She also notes that healthcare organizations need to be where the patients are and integrate into their world – not expect them to fit into ours. She says that we'll be seeing a change in advertising as the healthcare industry shifts to more native advertising.





WILL SIGSBEE

CEO OF MEDICOM HEALTH INTERACTIVE

 [MEDICOMHEALTH](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . healthcare acting like retail. Be like Amazon – deliver the service consumers want, when they want it.

The continued disruption in healthcare marketing is exciting. And to stay on top, healthcare systems need to add some moves from Amazon’s playbook.

“The leading health systems will be the ones that take a consumer-centric approach to engagement, similar to the way Amazon targets the right consumer at the right time.” And to do that, healthcare will need to leverage big data to understand their populations in a new way.

Will says, “By looking at “big data,” including consumer purchasing trends, health club subscriptions and online activity, organizations can deliver highly personalized, timely, relevant content to the individual.”

Health systems need to create an interactive and valuable digital experience for consumers. “That includes telehealth, online coaching, symptom and risk assessment and online appointments.”

In fact, telehealth should be on every health system’s radar. It allows providers to meet patients’ needs in a fast and cost-effective way. Using telehealth can also attract employer groups, who are seeking efficient and less expensive ways to serve their employees.

Telehealth and other digital tools that help busy doctors provide quality care will bring in new patients – a critical move, since hospital admissions continue to drop. “With health premiums rising annually at 10 to 15% on average, innovative care delivery methods must become an option.”

Use technology to get into the consumer’s head: What do they need? Where and how do they want to be served? How can we provide high-quality, seamless and cost-effective care?

Healthcare marketers will also need to create a robust social media strategy. An interactive, helpful presence on Facebook and Twitter will facilitate greater and more targeted engagement with consumers.



JOEL STEUBEN

HEALTHCARE CONSUMERISM STRATEGIST AT NRC HEALTH

 [JSTEUBEN](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . loyalty. The healthcare industry needs to be proactive rather than reactive to win consumers’ loyalty.

There’s a lack of loyalty in the healthcare industry: “Meeting with marketing leaders in healthcare over the years, a common phrase that keeps coming up is, ‘The healthcare industry is behind.’”

Take the Net Promoter Score (NPS): Almost every other industry – except healthcare – tracks NPS to gauge customer loyalty. This missed opportunity is unacceptable, says Joel, especially considering a recent NRC Health study that shows that more than 40% of consumers are not loyal to their local hospital or health system. And that number is rising.

Consumers generally do not engage with healthcare brands. And when they do, it is typically an annoying chore – scheduling appointments, paying a hospital bill or getting test results.

Joel believes that the solution is to change how consumers perceive healthcare. Most people still think of healthcare only as something for when they’re sick, rather than part of their overall wellness. And a cosmetic adjustment, like changing the health system name to “ABC Health,” does not fix this problem.

To help consumers transition from “healthcare is for when I’m sick” to “healthcare is part of my daily life,” organizations must focus on being proactive rather than reactive.

Start tracking and understanding the evolution of consumers’ wants and needs to gain their loyalty. Joel says, “Don’t wait until the consumer is sick. A better approach is to understand not only how their experience was (reactive), but also what their expectations are (proactive) – and then tailor the experience for them.”

It’s a tried-and-tested approach: You’ll gain customers’ loyalty by exceeding their expectations.





AMANDA TODOROVICH

DIRECTOR, CONTENT MARKETING AT CLEVELAND CLINIC

 [AMANDATODO](#)

2018 will be the year of . . . experiences. Content marketing is moving away from a focus on words to a more sophisticated discipline of creating exciting experiences for audiences.

Gone are the days when content marketing was about words, words, words. Moving forward, it's all about creating experiences.

And those experiences need to be multimedia, with a capital M. "You need to delight and excite your users. Blog posts are not enough. Content marketing requires live streaming, interactive and mobile-driven content that uses new technologies to reel in consumers."

Leading the charge in this brave new world of engagement is voice. Technologies like Alexa and voice search are substantively changing the way we work. "The resurgence of podcasts," observes Amanda, "is clear evidence of the impact of the spoken word."

"Content marketers will be challenged more than ever to be strategic about the channels we use and how to best engage users with high expectations. Consumers are looking to have experiences as seamless as those they get with Amazon and Uber."



JULIE TRAVIA

MANAGER, DIGITAL EXPERIENCE
CONTENT AT AURORA HEALTH CARE

 [TRAVIANK](#)

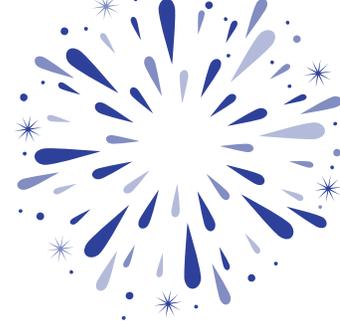
2018 will be the year of . . . consumer experience. No matter what else is happening in the industry, our focus must be on the consumer experience.

Healthcare organizations need to maintain focus on the consumer. "Patients – now more than ever – are in control of their healthcare. They have more access to information,

more provider choices and more influence in buying decisions because of value-based care."

The digital revolution is gaining momentum in the healthcare industry, helping increase customer satisfaction. At the same time, Julie cautions that health systems have to continue to prioritize the individual consumer's needs and health goals.





Now your head is probably really spinning. But hopefully all this great advice will make it easier to tackle the exciting challenges ahead.

SO WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN 2018? Will healthcare marketing focus on:

- [Integration?](#)
- [A smooth user experience?](#)
- [ADA compliance?](#)
- [Chatbots?](#)
- [Customer loyalty?](#)
- [Analytics?](#)
- [Marketing automation?](#)
- [Simplification?](#)
- [Personalization?](#)

We'd love to hear your thoughts! Tell us: [What do you think will be the NBT of 2018?](#)

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