

WHITE PAPER

The Power of Patient Journey: Elevating Brand Strategies and Enhancing the Patient Experience

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polk&union *health*
crossing digital stories





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Introduction

In today's increasingly competitive healthcare industry, elevating brand strategies and enhancing the patient experience has become crucial for attracting and retaining patients. The patient journey plays a pivotal role in shaping brand perception and influencing patient decisions. With patients actively seeking information online, it is imperative for healthcare brands to establish a strong digital presence that aligns with their brand voice. By incorporating engaging content and personalized experiences throughout the patient journey, healthcare brands can build trust and credibility and stand out from the competition.



Understanding the patient journey and its evolution

To effectively leverage the power of the patient journey, healthcare brands must first understand the various stages that patients go through from initial awareness to post-treatment.

Historically, patient journeys developed by pharma companies have shown the progression of patients from having awareness of a product to buying it. These journeys were created by carrying out market research with doctors and they served as a guide for pharma companies' marketing efforts.

The market research studies, which usually involved hundreds of doctors being interviewed and surveyed quantitatively, were the most reliable way to do it in the past because patients had limited knowledge of medications available and relied on doctors to choose the most cost-effective and suitable option for their ailment.

The patient journey from symptom onset to disease management is often depicted in four stages.

- The first stage is when the individual recognizes the issue, either through physical or emotional pain, or being informed by another person, usually a friend or a family member.
- The second is booking an appointment with a health provider to be assessed at a medical facility (hospital, physician's office, etc.).
- The third is when the doctor provides different treatment choices and expectations.
- The fourth stage involves the patient managing the care between visits, and the doctor monitoring the disease progression and possibly changing the brand or treatment approach.



This traditional patient journey, which is largely focused on treatment, minimizes the emotional, behavioural, and psychographic aspects and encounters several significant challenges. These issues involve neglecting to consider the emotional, informational, and behavioral factors that impact diagnoses, treatments, and overall management.

Additionally, it fails to acknowledge the events occurring outside of a physician's office (such as prescription fulfillment and financial burdens), overlooks the effects of diseases on caregivers (especially in advanced stages), and lacks a comprehensive approach to care delivery that encompasses self-management and self-monitoring. As a result, patients face difficulty in assuming control over their condition.

The shift to a digital patient journey

Nowadays, technology has become ubiquitous, particularly in the world of healthcare. According to research, there are over 4.7 billion active internet users in the globe, which is around 60% of the total population. This availability of information has shifted the patient journey to a more digital approach.


In fact, it is estimated that one out of every 20 Google searches is health-related and when people look for information on a

specific medical condition, 57% of them go online first and 71% of them check reviews before deciding on a healthcare provider. ⁽¹⁾

Thanks to the democratization of information and the breakdown of cultural barriers, patients are more involved in their care and their needs are evolving. Patients today have more control over their care, and they are actively taking part in determining it.

The incorporation of digital technology into the patient journey has reduced many of the problems of the traditional process. Utilizing mobile health apps and other digital tools to monitor and manage personal health has been gaining traction and is being used for various purposes, including disease monitoring, chronic care management, support for health services, and complex population health analysis. This has enabled quicker and easier access to information, which in turn allows healthcare providers to take immediate action in their patients' care, thus improving the quality of life.





This has led to the creation of the digital patient journey which starts before the patient even walks into a doctor's office. Patients are now using social media, online communities, blogs, forums, and mobile apps to build an understanding of disease, facilitate diagnosis, and manage their illness.

To illustrate this, consider a common instance of a female of good health who notices some signs. She can search for answers and information on healthcare websites, or take advantage of symptom checker apps and AI chatbots such as Babylon Health⁽²⁾, Symptomate⁽³⁾ and Ada.⁽⁴⁾ Prior to booking a consultation, she may also review her provider network's ratings and go through physician profiles to make an informed decision.

Additionally, she may get comfort and guidance from patient communities, blogs and forums. As shown in this example, there are a variety of digital channels and tools available to patients.

The use of technology has become increasingly widespread and has had a significant impact on our lives.

Nowadays, more and more people are relying on technology to get through their day-to-day tasks. This has seen a surge in the variety of tools and applications that are available.

Furthermore, the use of these tools has become widespread throughout the world. As a result, technology has become integral to our lives, and its influence is only likely to continue to grow.

Importance of a patient-centric approach

A patient-centric approach is essential for healthcare brands looking to elevate their brand strategies. By placing the patient at the centre of their marketing efforts, brands can create a more personalized and tailored experience.

This approach involves understanding the patient's needs, preferences, and pain points at each stage of their journey. By doing so, healthcare brands can deliver the right information and support, ultimately enhancing the patient experience and building long-term loyalty.

In order to create a successful patient-centric strategy, healthcare brands must have the right technology and tools in place. This includes leveraging data and analytics to gain insights into patient behaviour and preferences.



Additionally, healthcare brands should use AI and machine learning technologies to automate processes such as appointment scheduling, medication reminders, and follow-up care.

By investing in the right technology, healthcare brands can ensure they are delivering personalized experiences that meet individual patient needs. Furthermore, they can provide support throughout the entire patient journey from pre-treatment to post-treatment stages.

Healthcare brands should also invest in developing a strong digital presence. This includes creating educational content to help patients make informed decisions and providing support through online channels such as email, chat, or social media.


Additionally, healthcare brands should use digital channels to communicate with patients and provide personalized experiences. This may include sending targeted messages about upcoming appointments or promotions based on the patient's preferences.

With the right technology in place, healthcare brands can build trust with patients and foster long-term loyalty.

It is also important for healthcare brands to focus on customer service and engagement. Developing an open dialogue with patients helps build trust and strengthens relationships with them.

This can be achieved by providing timely responses to questions or inquiries,





offering personalized advice tailored to each patient's needs, and addressing customer concerns promptly.

Healthcare brands that prioritize customer service will be able to create lasting relationships with their patients by providing a positive experience throughout the entire patient journey.

To achieve true patient centricity, pharma must first understand the patient's experience, behaviour, and unmet needs across the care continuum. To do so, healthcare brands should invest in data-driven approaches such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

This will provide insight into what patients need and want from their healthcare providers. Additionally, healthcare brands should leverage analytics to gain insights into patient behaviour and preferences. By investing in data-driven strategies, healthcare brands can understand how to deliver personalized experiences that meet individual needs.

Furthermore, they can provide support throughout the entire patient journey from pre-treatment to post-treatment stages. With the right technology in place, healthcare brands can build trust with patients and foster long-term loyalty.

Mapping the Patient Journey

Mapping the patient journey involves visualizing the entire process from the patient's perspective. This helps brands identify pain points, gaps in information, and opportunities for improvement. By understanding the patient's journey, brands can optimize each touchpoint and create a seamless experience.

This can be achieved through the use of customer journey mapping tools, data analysis, and patient feedback.

By continuously refining the patient journey, brands can ensure that they meet the evolving needs and expectations of their patients.

Once the patient journey is mapped, healthcare brands should focus on delivering an exceptional customer experience at each touchpoint. This involves creating personalized messaging and content that is tailored to the individual's needs.

Additionally, healthcare brands should prioritize convenience and accessibility by



offering convenient appointment scheduling options, digital payment solutions, and virtual care services.

By investing in a seamless customer experience, healthcare brands can build trust with their patients and encourage long-term loyalty. Furthermore, they can use patient feedback to continuously improve their services and ensure that they are meeting the evolving needs of their patients.

Enhancing patient experience

A positive patient experience is vital for creating a strong brand image and fostering patient loyalty.

To enhance the patient experience, healthcare brands can focus on several key areas. First, brands should prioritize effective communication and ensure that patients feel heard and supported throughout their journey. This can be achieved through personalized interactions, timely updates, and easy access to healthcare professionals.

Second, brands should invest in creating a comfortable and welcoming physical environment, whether it be a clinic, hospital, or online platform. Third, brands should consider the emotional aspect of the patient experience and provide empathetic and compassionate care.

Finally, healthcare brands should invest in technology to streamline operations and improve the patient experience.

This might include utilizing an electronic health record (EHR) system for patient data storage and retrieval, implementing AI-based chatbots for customer service inquiries, or leveraging telemedicine solutions to enable virtual care.



By investing in the right technologies, healthcare brands can provide a more efficient and convenient patient experience that meets the needs of all their patients.

Additionally, they can use data analysis to gain insights into their patient's needs and preferences and continuously refine their services accordingly. In this way, healthcare brands can ensure that they are providing an exceptional customer experience that meets the evolving needs of their patients.

Adopting technology in the patient journey

In this digital age, patients have taken a more active role in the management of their health care. Consequently, their needs are changing as they become more involved in their own treatment. Patients are now engaging in the selection and control of their medical care.

Mobile health apps have become increasingly popular as a way to help people track and maintain their own health. These apps are useful for a variety of purposes, including disease monitoring, chronic care management, health services support, and comprehensive population health data analysis.

According to figures from August 2021, the Google Play Store contains ~112,500 health and fitness apps, and the Apple App Store includes ~82,000 apps in the same category, and this number continued to grow.⁽⁵⁾

It is evident that technology has had a significant impact on the way we live our lives. No longer is it necessary to be physically present in order to accomplish tasks or connect with others.

Through the use of the internet and digital devices, a person can reach out to anyone in the world, and manage many aspects of their life with relative ease.

Integrating digital technology into the patient journey has proven to be a successful strategy to address the traditional patient journey's shortcomings.

By leveraging mobile technology to connect patients and healthcare providers, the efficiency of treatment can be improved through quicker, easier access to data.

With this influx of digital technology, the digital patient journey has evolved, beginning well before the patient even visits the physician's office.



Patients are now utilizing social media, blogs, online communities, forums, and mobile apps to gain knowledge about their condition, support diagnosis, and manage their illness.

For this reason, patients are more and more influenced by digital channels, which meet their emotional, informational, and behavioural requirements while creating an interconnected and focused experience.

Patients today have access to a large number of digital channels and tools. This amplifies the touchpoints in their healthcare journey, allowing them to take charge of their own health.

The right interventions at these touchpoints can help remove obstacles in their treatment and keep them on track. It is essential for these interventions to address not only clinical issues, but also informational, emotional, and behavioral issues. Consequently, interventions must be tailored to meet each of these needs.



Technology plays a significant role in enhancing the patient journey and improving brand strategies.

Healthcare brands can leverage the numerous digital tools and platforms available to patients to connect with them, provide information, and streamline processes. For example, brands can develop user-friendly websites and mobile apps that offer personalized content and enable patients to schedule appointments or access medical records.

Additionally, telemedicine and virtual consultations have become increasingly popular, offering convenience and accessibility to patients.

By embracing technology, brands can enhance the patient experience and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Personalization in patient branding strategies

Personalization is a key component of successful patient branding strategies. By tailoring content, messaging, and experiences to individual patients, healthcare brands can create a more meaningful and engaging journey.

Personalization can be achieved through data-driven insights, such as patient

demographics, preferences, and behaviours. By leveraging this information, brands can deliver targeted marketing campaigns, personalized recommendations, and customized patient education materials. Personalization not only enhances the patient experience but also strengthens brand loyalty and advocacy.

Healthcare brands must also focus on providing a seamless, integrated experience across multiple channels.

By creating an interconnected and focused experience, healthcare brands can ensure that patients receive the same level of service regardless of the platform.

This includes providing consistent content and messaging, as well as streamlining processes such as scheduling appointments or accessing medical records.

Additionally, healthcare brands should strive to create a unified brand identity across all channels to ensure that patients recognize the brand and understand its mission. By establishing a strong presence on digital channels and providing an interconnected experience, healthcare brands can foster trust and loyalty among their patients.



Case studies: successful patient journey strategies

Several healthcare brands have successfully implemented patient journey strategies to elevate their brand positioning and enhance patient engagement.

One such example is a dental clinic that implemented a comprehensive digital marketing strategy, including informative blog articles, engaging social media content, and personalized email campaigns.

By providing valuable dental care tips, showcasing before-and-after patient photos, and providing customized payment options, the clinic was able to attract new patients and retain existing ones.

Another example of a successful patient journey strategy is a pharmacy that launched an online platform to streamline the prescription refill process. By allowing patients to order refills online, the pharmacy was able to reduce wait times, improve customer service, and increase customer satisfaction.





Additionally, the pharmacy deployed targeted email campaigns to remind patients when their prescription was due for refill and offered discounts for repeat customers. Through this comprehensive strategy, the pharmacy was able to drive revenue and increase brand loyalty among its customers.

These examples demonstrate how healthcare brands can leverage patient journey strategies to maximize engagement and build trust with their patients.

By personalizing content and experiences, creating an interconnected experience across multiple channels, and offering value-added services such as discounts or reminders, healthcare brands can create a positive patient experience that leads to long-term loyalty.

Measuring the impact of patient journey strategies: from KPIs to CXIs

The ever-evolving digital landscape and the abundance of data available to us have posed a challenge for measuring and understanding customer experience.



What was once a four-stage journey is now much more complex, made up of eighteen stages and over twenty digital touchpoints, as described in a study IQVIA.⁽⁶⁾ While this can be beneficial for data collection, it can also lead to analysis paralysis.

Traditional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been used by healthcare brands to determine the effectiveness of patient journey strategies and measure relevant metrics. These metrics can include patient satisfaction scores, brand awareness, patient retention rates, and conversion rates. Regularly reviewing and analyzing these metrics can help brands identify areas for improvement and make data-driven decisions.

Additionally, gathering patient feedback through surveys or online reviews can provide valuable insights into the patient experience and highlight areas of strength or weakness.


But are these traditional metrics truly indicative of the customer's overall experience?

Shifting the focus to Customer Experience Indicators (CXIs) enables companies to gain a better understanding of the customer's perspective.

However, it's important to note that CX doesn't stand for Customer Experience, but rather "the experience of the customer," as Forbes pointed out.⁽⁷⁾ This distinction is significant.

An increasing number of organizations are striving for customer-centricity by adopting, measuring, and refining Customer Performance Indicators (CPIs).⁽⁸⁾





These metrics are what customers care about - such as the speed of getting a pricing quote or the quality of a customer service call - rather than what the company is most concerned with.

By tracking what customers need, companies can gain insight into ways to improve customer outcomes, which can have a direct influence on business performance. It's ironic that, despite the fact that many companies claim to be customer-focused, they still largely concentrate on company-centric metrics.

Those companies who make the switch to - or will integrate - CPIs and the customer-centric culture associated with them will have an advantage over their competitors and be better suited for sustainable growth.



Conclusion: the future of patient- centric branding strategies

Healthcare branding is an ever-evolving field, and as technology continues to develop, healthcare brands must be prepared to adopt new strategies and technologies to stay ahead of the competition.

For instance, artificial intelligence can be used to identify customer trends and preferences, automate customer service tasks, and deliver personalized experiences. Additionally, social media platforms can be leveraged to interact with patients in real time and foster meaningful connections. By leveraging these tools, healthcare brands can create an engaging patient experience that is tailored to each individual.

Furthermore, healthcare organizations should focus on developing an omnichannel approach that leverages various channels such as websites, apps, emails, chatbots, SMS messages, videos, blogs and so on, in order to engage with patients across multiple channels. This will ensure that messages are consistent across all touchpoints and patient interactions are streamlined.

In conclusion, the patient journey is a powerful tool for healthcare brands looking to elevate their brand strategies and enhance the patient experience.

By understanding the patient's perspective, embracing technology, and fostering meaningful connections, healthcare brands can deliver a seamless and exceptional patient experience.

By incorporating personalized experiences and engaging content throughout the patient journey, brands can build trust, credibility, and loyalty. In an increasingly digital and competitive landscape, healthcare brands must prioritize patient-centric branding strategies to stay ahead of the curve and drive patient engagement.

In order to remain competitive in the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the future of healthcare branding lies in embracing the power of the patient journey and consistently adapting to meet the evolving needs and expectations of patients.

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