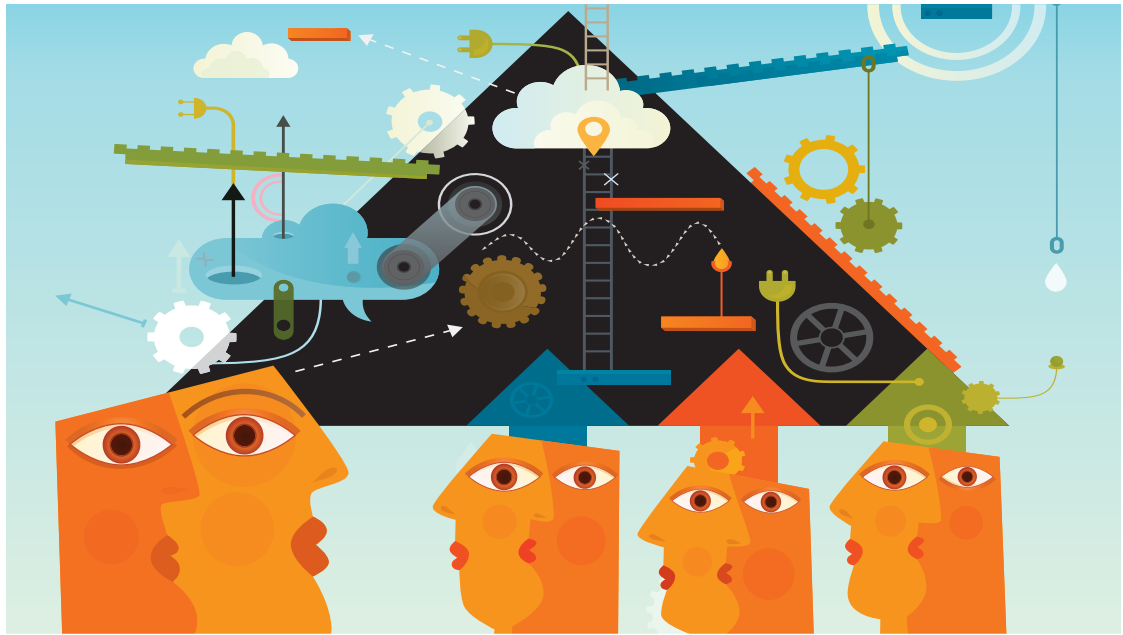




# NAVIGATING THE HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONAL HIERARCHY

HOW TO ENGAGE INTERNAL  
STAKEHOLDERS IN YOUR HOSPITAL  
MARKETING STRATEGY



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In large, complex institutions such as hospitals and healthcare provider networks, it takes interdepartmental teamwork to achieve organizational goals. This white paper looks at how marketers can navigate the complexity of healthcare politics to execute an effective marketing strategy.

## **The hospital's many headed monster**

When an organization's first priority is caring for patients, it's sometimes easy to forget that hospitals and healthcare provider networks are also businesses. And like so many others, healthcare providers are challenged to organize, align and build productive, mutually beneficial relationships among their many stakeholders and functional departments. The success of the organization depends on each department doing its individual job, yet all pulling together toward a common goal.

Each business unit – whether it's the clinicians, operations people, housekeeping or administrators – has its own interests, specialties and expectations. Each is measured and judged by different criteria and goals. When you throw in the diverse personalities and work styles of each director and department head, getting agreement on a course for the hospital can be like trying to herd cats. That's why getting buy-in and active participation in a marketing strategy takes diplomacy and an understanding of hospital politics.

## Enlisting the hospital stakeholders

The marketing team faces the challenge of working with many hospital stakeholders; relying on support from many of these functional units to achieve its goals and objectives. From translating the corporate mission into a defensible market position to communicating the brand to every level of the organization and the public at large, healthcare marketers collaborate with nearly every functional area of the hospital organization.

To further complicate the equation, healthcare organizations may enlist outside contractors, consultants and guns-for-hire to develop and execute their plans. A marketing team may be made up entirely of in-house hospital staff; they may be collaborating with a marketing partner; or outsourcing all marketing activities to an advertising agency or agencies. No matter the makeup or physical location, the marketing team is responsible for creating, communicating and promoting a marketing strategy across the political hierarchy the healthcare organization.

### At a glance, here's what the marketing team is up against:

- Working with hospital leadership to create a unique and differentiated brand position based on the organization's mission, and then develop a marketing plan that will help the hospital achieve its business goals;
- Inspire physicians to participate by cooperating with requests for interviews and patients who can give testimonials and other marketing tactics such as social media and web chats, and also communicating how their association with the brand elevates their reputation and practice.
- Educating and informing internal groups on how the marketing plan supports their objectives, their roles in executing the plan and how they can help deliver the brand experience.

Following are the internal stakeholders and departments of a typical hospital or healthcare provider network, and how the marketing team can engage them to implement a successful marketing strategy that contributes to the organization's overall mission.

# EARNING SUPPORT FROM HOSPITAL LEADERSHIP

## The CEO & C-Suite Executives

Hospital CEOs, like all executives in the C-suite, are busy people. Marketing is just a small part of his or her responsibility, and it often competes for time and resources with important organizational concerns such as clinical performance, compliance, fundraising, physician relations, staffing and facilities management.

Of course, every hospital leader has his or her own preconceptions about marketing's role in achieving organizational goals. Some may lack marketing experience or sophistication; unsure how to leverage marketing efforts to generate positive returns. Other CEOs look at marketing as an afterthought, failing to give it much attention. But marketing savvy CEOs understand that marketing is an investment that can help to align and inspire an organization's workforce, build awareness within the community, influence physician referral habits, and change patient population behavior and attitudes over time.

At its best, marketing is a source of pride for the CEO; a translation of his company vision and a rallying cry for the entire organization. At its worst, marketing is an expensive, risky undertaking that keeps him awake at night.

## Why marketing needs the CEO

The marketing team needs the support of the C-Suite to do its job well. The CEO is a powerful ally who can help communicate brand strategy across the organization, defend marketing tactics and protect essential resources from indiscriminate budget cuts. It's always helpful to have a cheerleader in the C-suite. Building a relationship and creating an ongoing dialog with the CEO helps the marketing team anticipate directional changes in the organization, sell creative solutions and overcome resistance from other stakeholders.

### How to gain the support of the C-Suite:

- Meet with members of the hospital leadership regularly. Listen to the CEO's vision, mission and competitive strategy. Ask questions and challenge assumptions. Offer innovative ideas and marketing solutions.
- Knowledge is power. Educate them about the strategies and tactics so they can speak authoritatively to others about their organization's marketing efforts. .
- Build consensus for the marketing strategy with all key stakeholders. Get buy-in from all decision makers early in the process. This will help quell opposition in the time-sensitive and more costly production stage.
- Create a marketing plan with specific tactics, timelines and budgets to achieve organizational goals.
- Work the plan to the letter. Execute the creative strategy for greatest impact in every channel. Measure results and fine tune the plan to improve return on investment. Make progress reports often. Great results speak for themselves, and can ensure ongoing support of marketing initiatives.

## ENGAGING AND INSPIRING PHYSICIANS

### On-staff and referring physicians

Physicians are valuable partners in the marketing process, as well as an important audience for hospital marketing messages. As advocates for the brand, they can drive patient volumes through referrals and association with the hospital. Yet, like other stakeholders, physicians have their own issues and motivations that influence their behavior.

Doctors' first responsibility is treating patients. Like most of us, they have goals and numbers to hit each quarter, and they expect marketing to help attract patients to their practices. Unfortunately, this can lead to some unrealistic expectations of the marketing team (usually beginning with a request for an ad featuring the physician's photo). While they may understand the strategy behind brand building and awareness, they expect to see an increase in traffic to their office.

Busy doctors aren't thrilled when marketing makes demands on their time, asking to shuffle patients or reschedule appointments to make room for a marketing interview, photo session or video shoot. At the end of a 12-hour shift, they want to get home to their families, not sit down in front of a camera.

### Why marketing relies on physicians

Physicians' skill and expertise is the product the marketing team is sanctioned to sell. When the doctors understand the marketing strategy and feel inspired by the brand, they are more likely to participate in marketing efforts and act as advocates for the brand. This makes it easier to recruit physicians for marketing projects, and helps eliminate criticisms and unreasonable requests.

#### How to gain support of physicians

- Physicians are scientists by nature. Whenever possible, frame marketing discussions within the context of proven process, best practices, the literature and outcomes.
- Communicate the brand strategy so physicians understand how association with the hospital enhances their reputation and patient attitudes.
- Explain how the marketing strategy contributes directly and indirectly to their goals by increasing awareness, reputation and patient volumes.
- Recognize the contributions of individual physicians by promoting them in owned media channels such as web content or online videos rather than through costly mass media channels.
- Try to accommodate physicians' busy schedules when planning interviews and photo shoots; be flexible when they get delayed, and be ready to go when they arrive.
- Be respectful of physicians' patients – follow HIPAA guidelines, protect their privacy and gain consent before using images or descriptions of their care.

## INVOLVING THE HOSPITAL STAFF

### Clinical, administrative and operations personnel

The hospital staff is on the front line of healthcare delivery, interacting with customers and influencing the patient experience with everything they do. Each group has its own concerns and responsibilities: the clinical staff (nurses, physician assistants, medical technologists) caring for patients; administrators running the business of healthcare; and facilities personnel creating a warm, welcoming environment.

They all have important jobs to do and supervisors to answer to. They don't appreciate distractions, interruptions or inconsiderate visitors wandering around their work environment. Yet hospital employees are too often overlooked as participants in the hospital marketing strategy. The way to get them involved and to become participants is to communicate with them and treat them with respect.

### Why marketing needs the staff

The staff is an important audience for hospital marketing communications. Because they have daily contact with patients, they have to live the brand and understand how their behavior contributes to delivering positive patient experiences.

Of course, it helps to have an insider along any time the marketing team decides to exploit the hospital environment for marketing purposes. The floor staff makes a great ally when shooting video or implementing owned media within the hospital. Unit managers can recommend the best locations and timing for activities, and can recruit staff members to participate in marketing activities if needed. Nurses know the medical ins-and-outs, and can help protect patient privacy and safety. Housekeeping and facilities personnel can control the physical environment by cleaning up messes, moving equipment or turning off distracting lights and ventilation systems. The key is to get clearance and make arrangements in advance before taking over a hospital ward.

### How to gain support of the staff

- Communicate the brand position to every level of the organization, so everyone on staff understands exactly how their behavior contributes to the desired patient experience and the organization's brand promise.
- Engage with hospital staff through social media channels; a great way to communicate with hundreds of employees on a daily basis, and to reach out to the thousands of friends in their social networks.
- Work through channels for in-hospital marketing and shoot scheduling to avoid disrupting the care environment.
- Be respectful of the hospital work environment; ask before you start moving equipment or furniture, turning off appliances or redirecting common area traffic.
- Choose locations and sets carefully to minimize background traffic and sight lines into units that might jeopardize patient privacy.



# COLLABORATING WITH INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

## Functional teams and business units

### Information Technology (IT)

The IT department manages a large, complex technological network with many internal and external audiences. Their customers include doctors and nurses who rely on patient health information, human resources for staff information, the billing department, and oh yeah, marketing. If the hospital's marketing strategy includes website content, online videos, and integrated online and offline advertising, the marketing team will depend on support from the IT department. Essential to the success of this relationship is a clear division of responsibilities: who will host videos, who will build web pages, who will upload new content, and who will manage the site traffic and analytics?

The marketing team can create a healthy relationship with IT by meeting early on in the marketing planning process to outline any requirements of the hospital's or network's website or internal communications, and determine up front who will be responsible for the different tasks. This will help eliminate frustration later on caused by duplicating work or overstepping boundaries.

### Legal Department

The legal team's primary concern is liability and protecting the hospital from lawsuits and negative legal publicity. The marketing team works with legal to ensure that creative materials and campaign ideas are compliant with the hospital policies and regulatory restrictions.

The tricky part about healthcare marketing is to make sure it doesn't violate patient privacy or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) when using patient testimonials. HIPAA states that healthcare organizations cannot use private patient information to promote products or services without written permission, and that a patient may revoke their authorization at any time.

To create a strong relationship with legal, the marketing team should meet with legal to review new branding initiatives or campaign ideas to get feedback or anticipate any objections. The marketing team should also conduct thorough research on all patients used in marketing materials and keep up-to-date on their wellbeing after the campaign to avoid unfavorable associations or contradictory outcomes. Any way that the marketing team can help the hospital or network dodge legal troubles will be appreciated by the department.

### The Hospital Foundation

The foundation's mission is to secure funding for hospital programs and initiatives. They reach out to donors and respected members of the community, seeking to inspire people to give charitably and to believe in the healthcare brand and its mission. Because of this, the foundation markets to different audiences than the primary hospital marketing program.

The marketing team can assist the foundation in translating the brand to make it relevant for the donor audience. For example, when promoting fundraising events that support specific service lines in the hospital or the opening of new facilities, the team can help ensure the marketing represents the overall brand through consistent messaging. If donors see the same brand values communicated by the hospital and the foundation, it will resonate with them, be more memorable, and motivate them to give.



## SUSTAINING INTERDEPARTMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

### Keeping hospital stakeholders on board

Communication among the marketing team and the different internal stakeholder groups and departments is key for building mutually beneficial relationships that, in turn, help the organization achieve its business and clinical goals. If the marketing team makes an effort to understand and address the needs of each stakeholder group, the organization will be better prepared to deliver on their brand promises.

The marketing team can get buy-in by presenting their ideas early, and in ways that show the benefits for all parties involved. The more agreement and consensus the team can find from the various departments and groups, especially the C-suite, the less push-back it will experience in the creation and approval process of their marketing programs.

Follow up is key, also. Reporting results, sharing successes and correcting course based on analytics are important ways to build trust and confidence in the marketing team's ongoing activity.

Healthcare marketing is a group effort. Motivating and inspiring stakeholders to agree on and participate in the organizational culture helps the hospital or healthcare provider network deliver what the marketing materials promise. Understanding how to navigate the politics of a large, complex institution – and a lot of energy – will help keep everyone on board.

If your marketing team could use help, call us or visit our website for more information:

[smithandjones.com](http://smithandjones.com) ■

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