



Healthcare Marketing White Paper



INBOUND MARKETING: NOURISHMENT FOR CONTENT-HUNGRY PATIENTS

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR HOSPITALS
AND PHYSICIAN PRACTICES



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Healthcare consumers are getting better at tuning out interruptive marketing and are actively seeking relevant information through search engines and social networks. This white paper explores how healthcare organizations can use inbound marketing to engage prospective patients by providing a depth of information that traditional marketing doesn't allow.

OUTBOUND MARKETING VS. INBOUND MARKETING

Traditional healthcare marketing (a.k.a. outbound marketing) typically uses one-way, interruptive communication methods such as TV commercials, billboards, direct mail pieces, and e-mail blasts. With outbound marketing, the hospital remains in control of the information flow by pushing its messages out to prospective patients. Unfortunately, when used alone, outbound marketing methods aren't as effective as they used to be because today's consumers don't perceive advertising to be as credible or informative as they used to. They are looking for more information and depth than traditional advertisements allow.

In contrast, inbound marketing is the act of creating relevant, credible content, and then helping healthcare consumers find it. It's a difference in how your audience receives your message. Rather than trying to "sell them" through interruptive messaging, inbound marketing puts the control into the hands of the patient and allows them to find your blog posts, informational videos, and interviews on diseases, treatments, products, physicians, hospitals, and healthy living, on their own terms. Healthcare messages are more credible when patients find it themselves, so it makes the most sense to put it in front of them when they need it.

The line between outbound and inbound marketing can get blurry. For example, e-mail marketing can be considered both inbound and outbound marketing; it all depends on why the prospective patient receives the e-mail. Did you buy an e-mail list and send out a blast about your new office opening? That's outbound marketing. Did you create an email capture or subscription list and send out recent blog posts to patients who opted-in to your e-mails? That's inbound marketing. As you can see, patients could easily tune out a blind solicitation, but your blog post review will pull prospects closer to your hospital by creating web engagement that can ultimately convert them to patients.

Once a piece of content is created, you can place links to the health information patients are looking for on the channels where they are spending their time, such as social media platforms, news sites, blogs and YouTube. You can also make it easy to find through SEO, keywords, and backlinks. Outbound marketing (online display, social media, outdoor and even television advertising) can be used in conjunction with inbound to bring attention to your content and help consumers find it faster.

Types of inbound marketing:

- Videos, blog posts, infographics and podcasts about health and wellness
- Informational videos about your hospital or practice and what care services you offer
- Short videos profiling physicians and nurses, or answering patient FAQs
- Funny images or cartoons related to health and wellness that patients will share
- Presentations and webinars related to health, wellness, and your specialties
- Newsletters with hospital and foundation news, as well as community wellness events
- White papers on your specialties and general health and wellness topics
- Webinars and web chats that answer patient health FAQs
- Photos of your hospital, practice, doctors, staff, and community outreach or foundation events
- Emails (opted-in) that share all of the above content and drive people to your website

WHY SHOULD HOSPITALS USE INBOUND MARKETING?

Outbound marketing strategies can be used to build awareness and keep your healthcare brand top of mind, while inbound marketing can be used to nurture relationships and encourage patient engagement. Patients have gotten better at filtering out unwanted marketing messages, especially those in Gen X and Gen Y (Millennials). They have made the transition to healthcare consumers by taking a proactive role in their health and using the technology at their fingertips to research their options. Hospitals and physician practices now must build trust with prospective patients and earn the loyalty of current patients by regularly publishing content.

This shift in patient mentality, paired with the changes in the Google ranking algorithm (see sidebar), create a necessity for inbound marketing. Organizations that continually update their websites with fresh content, and encourage others to share it, remain relevant in Google searches. According to HubSpot, 82% of marketers who blog daily report positive ROI for overall inbound marketing efforts, and 60% of companies will use inbound marketing strategies in 2013, allocating 34% of their overall budget to its execution, compared to 23% slated for outbound marketing strategies. Another benefit of inbound marketing is that it's easy to set up measurement tactics to track successes and ROI. However, it is important to manage expectations, as inbound marketing takes time to develop, and must be given adequate time and resources to work.

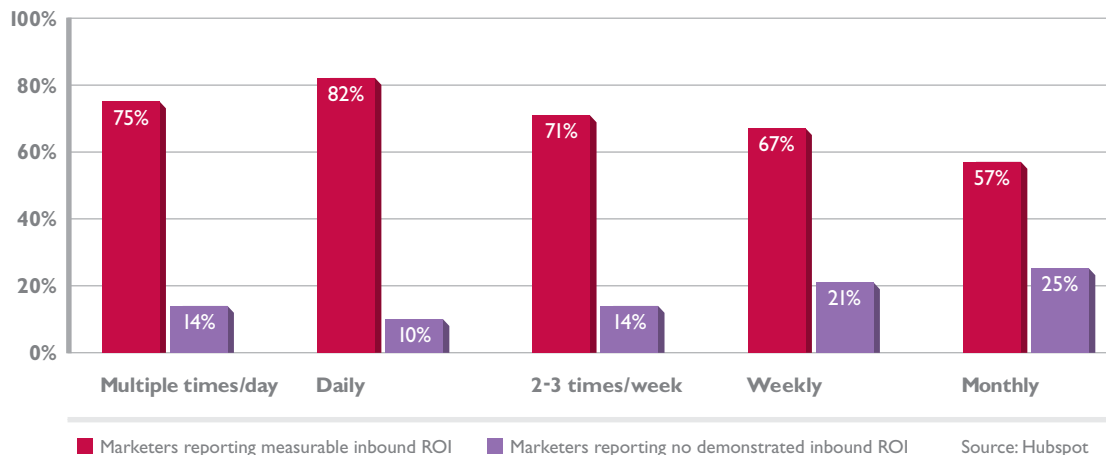
Google rankings favor inbound marketing

Three significant updates to the Google ranking algorithm have created an online environment that favors proactive inbound marketing.

In 2009, the Google Caffeine Update made content index faster, causing websites with frequently updated content to outrank websites that remain unchanged. In 2011, the Google Panda Update targeted websites with low-quality content (bot-generated or fluffed up with keywords), rendering them irrelevant to the search. Finally, the 2012 Google Penguin Update reviews inbound links and penalizes sites with links from untrustworthy websites.



CONSISTENT BLOGGING BOOSTS INBOUND MARKETING ROI



How to measure and increase value of inbound marketing

- Use Google Analytics to track your website traffic, including: webpage views, search ranking, search links, inbound links, pages visited, time spent on each page, and bounce rates
- Track landing page submissions to see which pieces of content and topics attract the most patients
- Monitor video views to see which topics and types are the most popular
- Actively check social media accounts to track the number of likes and shares each post gets
- Monitor shares and forwards on social sharing tools like [AddThis](#)
- Survey new patients who come to their first appointment to find out how they learned about your practice or hospital

WHERE DO YOU START?

The key to a successful inbound marketing program is content creation. Hospitals and physician practices that use inbound marketing create and publish content for patients to find online, such as newsletters, blogs, videos, and social media posts. Having all of this content online makes it easier for prospective patients to find your information, and if it is keyword optimized, it can help to improve your online reputation by placing a lot of great content at the top of Google search results.

1) Mobilize your team

If you are just starting out with inbound marketing, it's a good idea to hire or partner with a team who has experience with it, can explain how it all works, and can spearhead the plan. This team should have knowledge of the subject and constantly research current trends and best practices to apply to your hospital or practice.

It's also important to work with qualified content creators. Many organizations have relied on an unpaid intern to write blog posts and manage their social media only to find their content is not getting the attention they had hoped. It's important to work with people who know how to write well and are knowledgeable about healthcare so they can write intelligently on topics of interest to your patients and prospective patients, while being conscious of keywords and SEO so your content ranks for your chosen keywords.

2) Create your strategy

When developing an inbound marketing strategy, these three steps will create the framework for your plan: SEO and keyword lists, an editorial calendar, and topic ideas.

What do you want your hospital or physician practice to be known for? What are your strengths? What services do you offer? What can you offer patients that your competitors can't? These are the keywords that you want your organization to rank for in SEO. Make lists of keywords by topic: service lines, locations, and physicians. What information about cardiac health would a patient be searching for that your organization can provide? Include it on your list.

Next, take your keyword lists and develop an editorial calendar around the content that you want to rank for. This can be organized by both your outbound marketing calendar, and national trends. For example, it would make sense to take your cardiac keywords and publish content using and relating to those words in February, which is American Heart Month. Round out this content by running an outbound marketing campaign that features your cardiac care during the first quarter of the year. Inbound and outbound marketing work well in conjunction; if you run a TV advertisement about cardiac services at your hospital, people who see it and are interested in learning more may go online and search for information about it. They would then find all of the content you published related to the topic based on your keywords and SEO, and land on the cardiac section of your website.

The last step is to fill in the editorial calendar with specific topic ideas. Topics could be related to health trends in the news, personal health experiences, or how the hospital or practice is addressing community wellness. Don't be afraid to draw inspiration from patients. Just make sure the condition or question is the subject of the post, rather than the patient, to avoid violating HIPAA. Repurpose your content in multiple inbound channels to maximize visibility and ROI.

3) Commit resources

It sounds easy, but in reality, inbound marketing has the tendency to get pushed behind other work that demands more immediate attention. For example, your marketing team will deem dealing with a crisis situation more important than writing a blog post about cardiac health. It's an easy task to push off, but in order for inbound marketing to work, adequate time and resources need to be dedicated to its development and maintenance.

Once you have a clear outline of what you want your inbound marketing strategy to achieve, the next step is to delegate and keep staff on task. Weekly content meetings among your marketing team help to make sure all of the line items on the editorial calendar are designated to someone, and everyone is putting in the effort to get it done.

It's also important to manage expectations of your inbound marketing plan. It will not work overnight, but once it is in full swing, ask your team for monthly analytics reports. This will show which topics and platforms perform the best and where your marketing team should concentrate its efforts. It also helps you determine the appropriate amount of time and money that needs to be budgeted for this plan.

Repurpose content to maximize inbound marketing ROI:

To extend the shelf life of each piece of content and make it worth the time spent creating it, repurpose and repackage it across multiple platforms. For example:

- Turn a beat of blog posts into a white paper, and then a webinar
- Post individual slides from a webinar on social media as an image or infographic
- Upload webinars and presentations to [SlideShare](#) or YouTube
- Post each piece of content as a Pin, Tweet, Facebook, and Google+ post
- Include links to blog posts in press releases and media pitches

MOTIVATE STAFF TO PARTICIPATE IN CONTENT CREATION

Content creation is not limited to the marketing department. Get physicians, nurses, foundation employees, and staff to contribute their ideas, expertise, and personal stories. This will showcase different perspectives and help keep the content fresh through unique voices that will appeal to diverse patients. Many times, staff members are interested in contributing content based on their experiences, but they aren't confident in their writing skills, or they simply don't have the time. Some staff members may need to be convinced of the benefits of inbound marketing for themselves and the organization.

Content creators are often perceived as thought leaders in their industry, and staff members who participate will be able to gain credibility in the healthcare field and build their personal brand. [Google Authorship](#) is also changing the way that content is served by ranking content based on the author's byline, and shows a headshot within the search. The more pieces of content that staff members have their names on, the more benefits they will see for both the hospital and their personal reputation.

To help non-writers get started, create editorial guidelines that staff members can follow. For those who don't have the capacity in their schedule to create their own content, such as physicians, have a marketing specialist interview them and then create and author videos, blog posts, articles, and presentations on their behalf. It's not realistic and doesn't make economic sense to have clinicians create all of their own content, but they are great resources for health information that is relevant to your patients.

If the benefits to the hospital or practice itself isn't enough, you can try educating staff about the individual benefits they will see if they participate in inbound marketing. For physicians, you can remind them that their content may help to drive business, which would mean new patients that can help them hit their quarterly goals. Being a published author can also lead to opportunities in the industry and in the community, such as speaking engagements, interviews for medical publications, or appearances at community events.

How inbound marketing led to a stent procedure

When all else fails, real-life examples of how inbound marketing works can help sell your point. One of the physicians from a hospital client of ours shared with the entire cardiac team how inbound marketing helped to bring in a new patient. The patient was seeing a cardiologist at a competing hospital and decided that he was unhappy with his care. He went online to conduct a search for cardiologists and landed on the hospital website. In addition to reading the published content on the hospital's capabilities, the patient watched all of the cardiologist interview videos and chose this physician. He called the office and was able to get in for an appointment the next day. Forty-eight hours later, he was at the hospital for a stent procedure.

ARE YOU USING INBOUND MARKETING STRATEGIES?

Patients today want to be in control of their healthcare decisions by researching and digesting health information on their own terms through search engines and social media platforms. Outbound or traditional marketing messages may build awareness of your hospital brand, but inbound marketing can help hospitals and physician practices engage patients and provide the depth of information that traditional marketing doesn't allow. When given the adequate time and resources, inbound marketing can help position your healthcare brand as a resource for content-hungry patients, and provide clear results with measurable ROI. ■

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