



Healthcare Marketing White Paper



FOUR REASONS TO INVEST IN HOSPITAL BRANDING

POSITIONING AND IDENTITY HELP
HOSPITALS COMPETE



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In today's highly competitive healthcare environment, hospitals and physician practices strive for every advantage to move their organization above the rest. Many invest in new facilities, expanded services and high-priced advertising campaigns. But marketing data suggests only a few invest in the more subtle but surprisingly powerful strategy of brand building. In this white paper, we'll look at why branding SHOULD remain a priority for hospital marketers.

"Brand" is often defined as what people think about an organization; the public perception of a hospital or practice. Yet, according to an estimate by Chris Bevolo, author of *The Marketer's Guide to Brand Strategy*, less than 20% of U.S. hospitals are guided by an active brand strategy. That's only one-fifth of the more than 6,000 hospitals nationwide that are proactively cultivating their brand.

How can an industry that spends hundreds of billions of dollars on advertising overlook the importance of brand strategy?

Here are four important reasons to invest in branding:

- Strong healthcare brands control their own destinies;
- A clear brand position aligns physicians and staff;
- Brand tools ensure consistent communications; and
- Branding supports multichannel and social media initiatives.

STRONG BRANDS CONTROL THEIR OWN DESTINIES

Brand equity helps hospitals drive perceptions

Hospitals and physician practices that invest in proactive brand-building communications shape their own futures. By identifying an honest, competitive position and marketing it to their internal and external audiences, they can drive perceptions and expectations of their brand. They can also weather the pressures of economic and market influences without being forced to take reactive measures or change tactics.

Just look at some of the top U.S. hospital brands: the Cleveland Clinic, Johns Hopkins Hospital or Mass General. These brands operate from positions of power; consumers know them, what to expect, and what they deliver. Barring a big mistake, these healthcare brands don't have to work as hard to maintain their leadership positions.

Below this top tier, it's a branding game with players moving up and down the awareness and market share ladder. Weak and unarticulated brands will experience ongoing erosion, slipping gradually down the food chain. Hospitals with memorable brands will continue to grow until they're supplanted by an emerging competitor with a stronger brand.

A CLEAR BRAND POSITION ALIGNS PHYSICIANS AND STAFF

The brand promise defines the desired customer experience

Consumers aren't the only target of positioning and brand-building communications. A strong brand has a powerful influence with internal audiences, too. A clearly stated position helps align employees and physicians to the company mission and provides a model for behavior and common goals for the customer experience.

Internal branding efforts reap big rewards:

- Inspire and engage staff by promoting your competitive position and brand messages with your team. Share core values and model behavior to help them consistently deliver the expected customer experience.
- Align physicians with the hospital's brand mission to drive patient referrals and brand advocacy. Physicians are powerful allies as marketing partners and advocates for the organization.

When your management team, marketers, and frontline service personnel are clear on what you're selling, they can direct their behavior, their appearance and their customer interactions to reinforce the brand promise.

BRAND TOOLS AND GUIDELINES ENSURE CONSISTENT COMMUNICATIONS

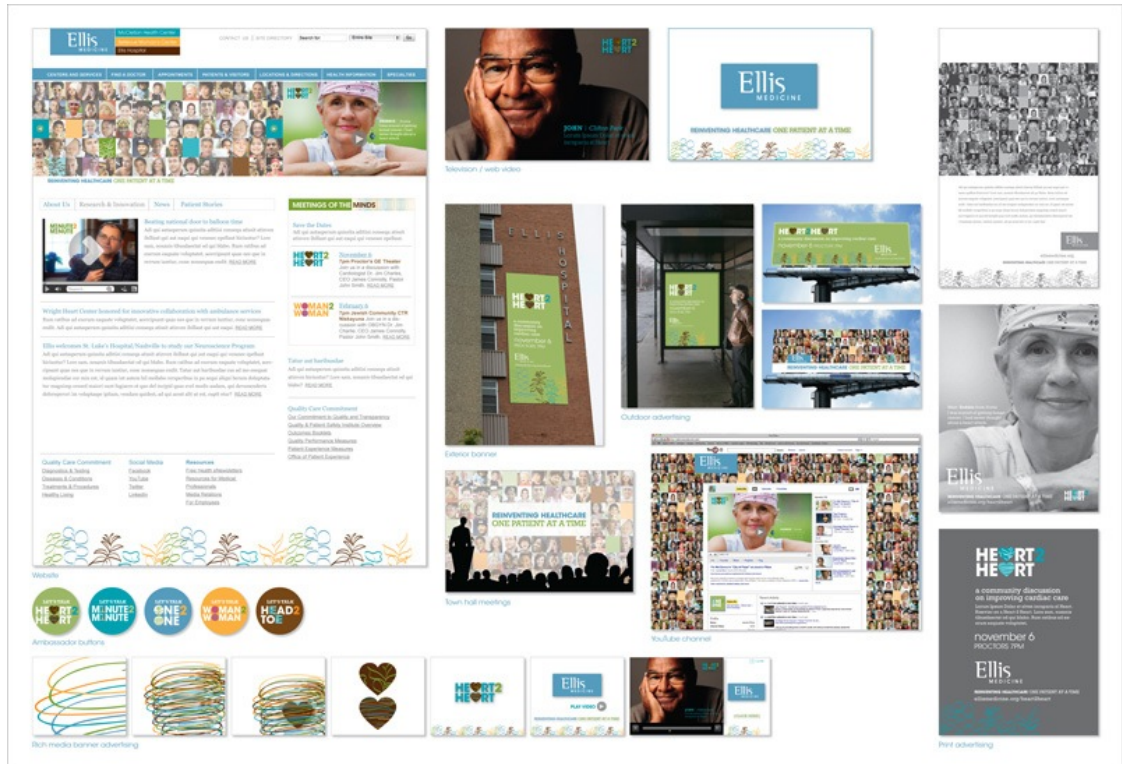
Managing the healthcare brand identity

Building and maintaining a strong brand identity requires constant vigilance. Defining brand standards, sharing them widely, and policing brand communications for consistency is critical.

Over the last 20 years, we've developed several practical tools to help our hospital clients maintain their brand positions and identities. These help marketing teams focus on the core messages and test the clarity of every piece they create. These tools can be applied to almost any media channel, too, from internal communications to broadcast media, personal interactions to social networks, even extending to owned media, such as signage, uniforms or web sites.

Here are a few proven tools for policing hospital brands:

- **Brand Vision Board:** A combination of photographs, graphics and words on a single panel that reflect the desired brand position (rather than the current position) and help establish the personality and visual identity of the brand. Vision boards are very helpful for getting buy-in on positioning initiatives, communicating the brand to frontline staff and as decision-support tools. In a world of subjective opinions about design and communication, the brand vision board can provide an objective tool to help you make important decisions.
- **Brand Guidelines:** Also known as graphic standards or brand standards, this document is an instruction manual for creating communications that are aligned with the strategic position and identity. It provides specifics for layouts, fonts, colors, artwork, even the proper tone for strategic managers, creative directors and writers. The guidelines help keep the look and voice of communications the same, so every communication comes from a single voice – recognized, trusted and true – no matter who creates a piece.



- Advertising Toolkit: Like a craftsman's tool box, the brand toolkit contains resources for marketers and designers: electronic art files, logo graphics, photographs, stationery, ad formats, signage or almost any visual elements that have been created in support of the brand identity. Delivered on a CD or DVD along with the brand guidelines, these files help designers execute the identity consistently, and save time by eliminating the need to recreate graphic elements of the brand.
- Brand Czar: A person or team assigned as the keeper of the brand vision, the overseer of all brand communications and identity executions. Depending on the organization, this may be a full-time position, an informal role assumed by someone close to the branding process, or outsourced to an independent contractor (your agency, for instance). But be careful; a hired brand czar must understand what a brand can and can't do, place the hospital's interests above their own, collaborate with internal staff and vendors (with whom they might naturally compete) and be willing to take unpopular, yet strategically appropriate positions when policing the brand.

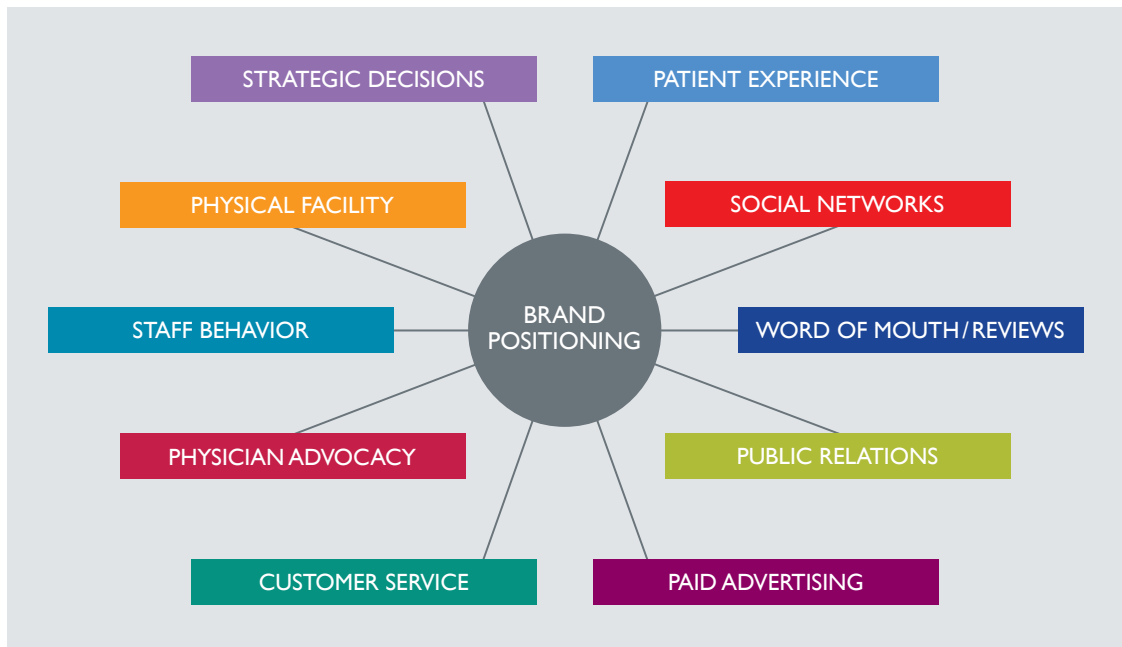
BRANDING SUPPORTS MULTICHANNEL AND SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES

Successful hospital positioning transcends media channels

Some people would argue that ‘branding is dead;’ that social media has completely undermined the ability of marketers to define what they stand for. They say that word-of-mouth trumps any brand message and that consumers will believe what they want.

We agree that social media and word of mouth have surpassed paid media for relevance and credibility with consumers, but that doesn’t diminish branding’s place in the communication hierarchy. On the contrary, branding reinforces efforts in all channels, including social media.

A consistent voice, a memorable point of difference, and a strong identity will help hospitals and practices translate into the social realm. Defining the brand position also helps the internal team deliver on the brand promise at every customer touch point, whether it’s a one-to-one interaction in the hospital environment, conversations in the social network, or mass communications through paid media channels.



A RETURN TO PROVEN MARKETING COMPETENCIES

Brand building remains a required marketing skill

Hospitals' failure to embrace and leverage brand positioning as a growth strategy is due to a convergence in marketing trends that has put our industry behind on the branding curve. Face it: building a strong brand isn't easy, especially for healthcare organizations that once held a monopoly on consumer choice.

Until recently, it wasn't even necessary to advertise healthcare services. Today, there are countless choices for care, and increasing financial exposure is making patients more likely to question the cost or need for expensive medical care. Hospitals are now forced to market their services to retain even their local consumers' care spending.

With hospital marketers struggling to build sensible, ROI-driven marketing strategies, there has never been a greater need to embrace basic branding competencies to remain competitive, align audiences and support consistent multichannel communications. ■

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