

Healthcare Marketing White Paper



Organizational Alignment for Healthcare Brands

How Marketing Helps Align Staff to the Brand
Promise



ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT FOR HEALTHCARE BRANDS

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Delivering a consistent patient experience takes shared values and a common purpose. This white paper explores how hospitals and physician practices can use marketing to help define and communicate the organization's mission so every member of the healthcare team understands their role in keeping the brand promise.

Why is alignment important for hospitals and physician practices?

Delivering healthcare in the 21st century is a complicated business. It requires a large, complex organization made up of thousands of individuals with wide-ranging responsibilities. Healthcare providers face new regulatory and competitive pressures, and like all businesses, they have limited resources. For these and other reasons, hospital leaders are looking to organizational alignment initiatives for a competitive advantage. They understand that a shared purpose, supported by clear goals and values make the organization more desirable, more competitive and more profitable.

Benefits of an aligned healthcare organization:

- Reinforces the competitive brand position
- Helps deliver a unique patient experience
- Defines expectations for staff members
- Attracts and retains the best employees
- Uncovers and corrects deep-rooted bad habits

In *The Organizational Alignment Handbook*, authors H. James Harrington and Frank Voehl suggest that alignment occurs “when strategic goals and cultural values are mutually supportive and where each part of the organization is linked and compatible with each other.”

Why alignment matters for healthcare marketers

For the healthcare marketer, alignment means delivering on the brand promise. They know that the most effective marketing channel is word-of-mouth, generated by positive outcomes and satisfied patients. But meeting patients' expectations doesn't happen by accident, especially in a large, diverse organization. By finding creative ways to communicate the brand position, the marketing team can influence both staff behavior and consumer perceptions.

Three steps to organizational alignment for healthcare:

1. Articulate what makes your organization different or special
2. Educate staff members on how to deliver the patient experience
3. Hold staff accountable for keeping the brand promise

So why can't all hospitals achieve internal alignment? Unfortunately, very few organizations bother to communicate or educate their employees on competitive positions, patient experience or brand promises. An article in *Leadership Excellence* reported that on average, less than 20% of employees knew the company mission and an even smaller percentage could articulate it. If employees don't understand what's expected of them, the patient experience suffers.



ARTICULATING YOUR COMMON PURPOSE

Defining what makes your organization different

Organizational alignment begins with a position; a shared purpose, a brand promise that sets an organization apart from others in the competitive set. A successful position is part corporate mission statement, part emotional promise, distilled down to an engaging and memorable idea. It's not what-you-do or who-you-serve, (otherwise all healthcare brands would be commodities that "deliver healthcare to sick people" or "keep people healthy"), it's how you do it differently or better.

Finding that point of difference is hard work and an important undertaking, but it's not the subject of this newsletter (see more on branding at the end of this article). What's relevant here is what you do next with your brand position.

Marketing: Creating multichannel messages

A brand position only gains traction and value when it's understood by internal audiences before being communicated to external audiences. Occasionally, an organization builds a successful brand by sheer force of personality, but most do it by deliberate messaging, staff training and frequent reminders. It's the marketing team's job to create engaging messages and channel-appropriate executions for hospital staff and physicians, and then for patients, families and the community.

Channels for communicating the brand position:

- Internal communications: brand building language for leaders and staff
- Owned media: brand building and reminders in hospital environments
- Social media: awareness messages in social channels
- Other channels: physician referral messages, niche markets and inbound content
- Mass media: awareness and reputation building in print, TV, outdoor

C-Suite: Alignment from the top down

The CEO and executive team are responsible for communicating the brand within the organization, expressing its ideals and core values through the goals and daily practices of the hospital.

The position or brand promise becomes part of the organization's vocabulary. It's evident in the way people care for patients, in the conversations at board meetings, team huddles and chamber of commerce events. It's in the shared stories and role models identified and shared throughout the organization. Through all of these things, leadership can create corporate culture that supports the organization's brand position.

People look to hospital leadership for meaning and focus. By walking the walk, the executive can help the staff embrace the hospital's core values and understand how they influence the patient experience.

Here are some ways CEOs can communicate the organization's purpose:

- Understand, believe and be passionate about the hospital's competitive position.
- Clarify the mission statement. Learn to articulate it in one sentence, and as part of a 15-second elevator speech and a 30-minute presentation.
- Engage the organization's counselors, managers and staff to define how to deliver the desired customer experience so everyone understands their roles..
- Make the brand story part of everyday conversations. Talk about it with the board, hospital managers, at chamber of commerce events and public-facing functions.



TRANSLATING THE BRAND FOR STAFF AND PHYSICIANS

Educating team members on how to deliver the brand promise

A strong healthcare brand can have a powerful influence with internal audiences. It helps align employees and physicians to the company mission and provides common goals for care and a positive patient experience. When the management team, marketers, and frontline service personnel are clear on the organization's core values and what makes it different, they can think, act and react to reinforce the brand promise.

Share success stories

Some of the most compelling and memorable examples of a hospital's brand position come from the everyday lives of employees and patients. Whether it's a staff member who went beyond the call of duty to assist a coworker or customer (patient, that is), or a patient's experience that exemplifies the best the organization has to offer, there are real life episodes of the organization's purpose happening all the time.

Find ways to identify and share personal stories:

- Ask department leaders to monitor their case histories or employee reports for exceptional events, comments or conversations.
- Create forums to promote model behavior and recognize high-performing individuals.
- Get permission to share patient stories, not only within the hospital, but on the organization's website or marketing (within HIPAA-guidelines to protect patient privacy, of course).
- Invite patients or employees as guest speakers at internal meetings and community events.

Provide frequent reminders

It's one thing to promote your competitive position to the public, but it's also important to share the same ideas and messages with your team, staff and physicians – and do it often. Hospital environments are busy places. There are frequent distractions. People have bad days. It's easy to lose sight of goals and ideals when faced with everyday dramas. That's why it's important to make the brand promise visible and keep reminders throughout the workplace.

Marketing channels inside the hospital or practice, what we call owned media, offers virtually endless opportunities to translate brand positioning, share core values and model behavior to consistently deliver the expected patient experience. Using creative placements in the care environment, from hallway posters to screen savers, marketing can help remind everyone of the organization's promise.

Examples of owned media for creating brand reminders:

- Hospital websites and social media channels
- External and internal signage, hallway posters, break areas
- Screen savers and wallpaper on workstation computers
- Company fleet vehicles
- Uniforms and hospital linens



ALIGNMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Set expectations for all employees

Organizational alignment means getting the right people on the bus, putting them in the right seats, and removing anyone who doesn't belong. Hospital leaders are responsible for translating the organizational mission for every level of the organization, as well as defining the brand's core values and expected behaviors. These are the brand pillars; the support for your brand position. Core values are non-negotiable and everyone is held accountable.

In his book, *The Power Values*, David Gebler describes a system that helps leaders analyze their company's performance and organizational culture by tracking their alignment to three core elements: Goals (what the organization does); Standards of behavior (how the organization does it); and Values (why the organization does it). The model allows organization leadership to measure and manage the aspects of their culture that impact performance to improve the culture.

Create incentives for appropriate behavior

Working with department directors and managers, the CEO and C-Suite executives translate the mission into measurable performance indicators for functional areas of the organization. Depending on the hospital's competitive position, it may mean tracking clinical outcomes, time-based service goals, patient satisfaction measurements or other metrics that weigh staff performance against the organizational goals. Measurable performance indicators hold everyone accountable – department directors, managers and staff – and gives every employee a yardstick to track their results.

Employees who live up to the brand, those who demonstrate the desired behavior and contribute to the organizational goals, should be recognized and rewarded. To sustain this positive behavior, organizations may develop ways to compensate or incentivize employees who live the brand.

Create consequences for people who refuse to comply

With accountability comes the need for consequences. Those who fail to live up to expectations, or flat out refuse to participate, should be identified and disciplined. If they continue to behave inappropriately or contrary to organizational objectives, more serious consequences should be enacted, culminating in termination.

Of course, it's not always easy to balance model employees with the real world of healthcare delivery. Sometimes, you have to make temporary concessions in core values to keep a unit staffed or to fill an essential role, but it's amazing how much damage a rogue employee can do. In a time of social networks and word-of-mouth endorsements, any staff member who doesn't live up to the brand can single-handedly bring down an organization's reputation. The key to alignment is getting ALL employees working toward one goal, and violation of core values is cause for dismissal.

IN CONCLUSION...

What sets one healthcare brand apart from another is its unique patient experience. Delivering a consistent patient experience takes shared values and a common purpose. Marketing plays an important role in defining the organizational mission, communicating the expectations and helping every member of the team understand and live the brand promise.

SOURCES

David Gebler, *The Power Values*; Jossey-Bass / Wiley, 2012

H. James Harrington and Frank Voehl, *The Organizational Alignment Handbook: A Catalyst for Performance Acceleration*; Productivity Press, 2011

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