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2021

Healthcare Marketing

TRENDS

— for the —

COVID

Economy



2021 Healthcare Marketing Trends for the COVID Economy

There's an economic crisis wrapped in a healthcare crisis. Or is it the other way around? Either way, healthcare marketers can adapt, evolve and thrive.

COVID-19 is not the first global pandemic to challenge healthcare professionals but this pandemic is unlike anything we've ever seen. In the United States, we saw the fastest drop ever in GDP, employment and other indicators. Historically, the healthcare sector performed well during recessions. But unlike other pandemics and recessions, the shutdown and social distancing policies caused an equally fast drop in revenue from elective procedures while patients deferred routine care.

And unlike other recessions, this economic downturn was self-induced. We know why it happened, so on some levels we know how to fix it. At the time of this printing, social distancing policies seem to be working as

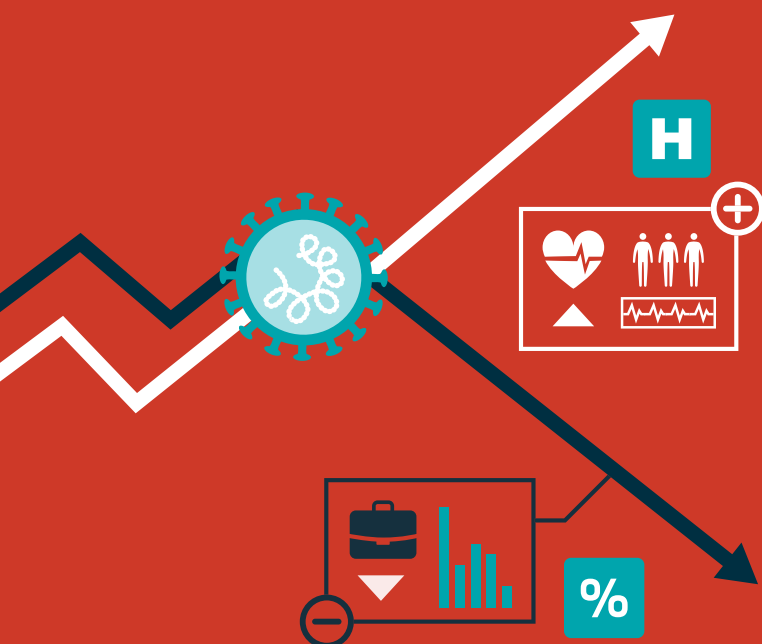
we move closer toward a vaccine. Community spread is slowing. Consumer confidence is slowly returning. This time, the banks are part of the solution, not the problem. COVID-19 too shall pass, but the changes in consumer behavior are likely to outlast the pandemic and continue years after the vaccine.

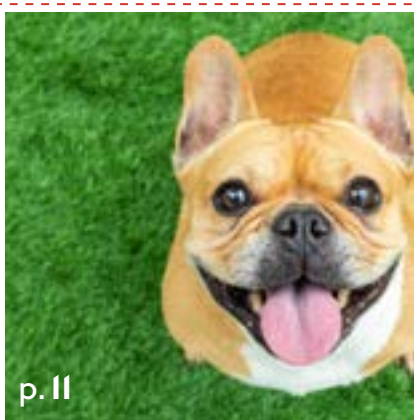
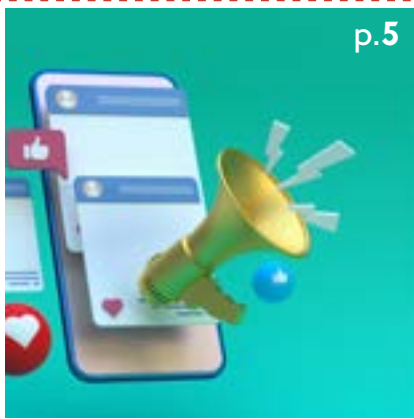
Consumers adapted to the shutdown and learned how to use new technologies to change the way they shop, socialize, consume media and continue their care. And while their behaviors and expectations have changed, many things remain the same.

Inside are 10 marketing strategies, tactics and innovations we developed for our 2021 Healthcare Marketing Trends for the COVID Economy. We hope you will rely on this report to inform the decisions you'll face in the coming months. Decisions that will affect the long-term survival of your organization and the health of your community.

Here's to the fastest recovery for all.

Paul Fahey
Vice President
Smith & Jones







» Meet Your New Patients

Their wellness visits were canceled. Non-emergency issues ignored. They underwent drastic changes to their diet, exercise routine and mental health. And many are still living with the prolonged trauma of missing friends and family.

Welcome to 2021. Everything you knew about your patient has changed.

This year, we'll only begin to see the long-term effects of COVID-19 and physical distancing, as patients are forced to re-enter a world they were told wasn't safe. Everything about their mindset, behavior and what matters to them is different. Reaching them takes an understanding of what they went through and who they are today.

Life in Full Quarantine: Patients slammed into hibernation mode. They stockpiled essential items; overspent on groceries; and suffered from feelings of loneliness, trauma and social isolation. They deferred all medical care, afraid to enter a healthcare setting.

Semi-Quarantined: Patients resumed hobbies responsibly and went outside again with their families. They emerged as engaged advocates for their own health — wearing masks and making the connection between small acts and public health.

The New Patient: They are reprioritizing their life and their spending, and rescheduling missed appointments. Forever changed, they trust the healthcare system more. They feel more empowered to advocate for their health and others.

Display data-driven empathy.

Understand how patient's behavior has changed and may continue to change. Update brand and service line messaging to align with today's needs.

Help patients be heard.

Start a Patient Advisory Committee to give patients a voice to share thoughts, ideas, and to expose brewing issues that have not caught our attention yet.



» Take Your Internal Temperature

This one's about you. It's not just patients who were physically and emotionally tested — so was your team. When the oxygen masks fall, you gotta put yours on first.

Managing the health, wellbeing and resilience of your staff is a top priority. Anticipate that as everyone else begins to feel “normal,” they will feel increased stress and trauma as their body deals with what it's been through. Employees may also feel anxiety over what might be coming down the line if spikes begin again. Check in on those who were there last year when times got dark.

Are your frontline employees burnt out? Has there been turnover due to stress or safety concerns? Help employees feel valued and protected.

Get institutional about it. Design support groups in the form of advanced training and information sessions. This will help your team feel more educated and prepared for what comes next. Whether it's proper use of PPE or when to isolate a patient (or themselves) — empower them.

Arm them with self-care strategies they can use in and out of work to feel more in control of their own body and mind. This includes free access to meditation apps, mental health services and tools for stress management.

Remember...

How your team feels will directly affect how patients feel. This is especially true in smaller communities. These are your neighbors.



» Invest in Brand

Last year we warned of the dangers of ignoring consumer distrust. In 2021, we'll discover the best way to earn that trust is to build a brand patients recognize and rally around. To do it, you must invest in it.

Your brand is the relationship between you and those you help. It's your emotional aftertaste. With patients feeling off-balance post-COVID and with an economic downturn all but guaranteed, healthcare organizations must reconnect with patients to establish top-of-mind awareness. Patients must know not just the services you offer, but what you believe in and how it flows through your organization to touch them.

**Don't tell them what you do.
Show them why you do it.**

- Recalibrate brand positioning to meet patients where they are — their needs, wants and fears.
- Draft messaging to acknowledge these new behaviors and need states. Help patients feel seen and understood.
- Put that message (strategically) everywhere, using a broad mix of traditional and digital strategies.

The good news is —patients want to remain loyal. With uncertainty all around, they don't want to find a new provider. Maintain their trust by increasing your visibility. Don't make it hard for them to find you or to see your organization as the adult in the room.

Audit it.

Masks. Signs of PPE. Social distancing. Patients will be looking to your marketing to feel safe. Audit and refresh your messaging and creative to meet today's reality.

Live it.

Back up empathetic messages with action. How can you support the community beyond virus control? Identify virtual resources for families and at-risk populations.



» Keep Essential Services Visible in Market

Now is not the time to play hard to get. Patients who put their health on hold in 2020 are ready to reclaim it. We've all seen how important health is, and how the small actions taken today can have a great impact on our health and the health of our community long-term.

Essential services such as primary care, cardiology, cancer care and orthopedics should remain highly visible in the market with increased budgets in digital and traditional marketing. Patients will continue to need these services and they'll be looking for a provider they can trust to walk them through it. Healthy budgets in paid search, native advertising and social media will ensure they find you first. We recommend complementing existing buys with more personalized tactics such as email marketing and video to ensure they don't just see you, they remember you.

Anticipate next year's pressure to maximize profitable service lines. Work to develop a healthy balance between preserving the brand equities that exist, while also doing what's required to increase patient volume.

Let intent lead elective.

Protect your budget. Only promote elective procedures to those looking for them.



» Mental Health Will Come to the Forefront

Social isolation, growing unemployment and unparalleled stress will introduce an even greater need for mental health services.

Expect to see a significant increase in the number of people dealing with anxiety, depression, substance abuse and grief this year. We're all in a state of grief. Not just over the death and illness of loved ones, but the loss of everyday normalcy. Missing out on things we had planned and looked forward to. Like our child's first day of school. A big wedding. That family vacation.

Those who may have previously reached out for mental health services during a difficult time may have stopped, afraid to leave their home due to COVID or because they simply weren't able. They could feel the delay may have intensified existing issues.

But there's hope.

This creates an opportunity for healthcare and behavioral health organizations to step up. To normalize mental health services and to expand access to virtual mental health support, counseling and other services. Seeking help is something patients can do from the safety and comfort of their home — not only making it physically easier to seek treatment but emotionally more comfortable as well.

Take mental health mobile.

Mobile apps create a new virtual environment for patients. Repackage existing content related to meditation, breathing exercises and stress management into toolkits to let patients access them with ease.



» New Patients = New Opportunities

Your patient has changed. Embrace new tactics to meet new demands, new behaviors and a new ecosystem.

- **Reassess media buys.** With workers assigned or opting to work from home, move the budget away from out-of-home advertising and terrestrial radio toward channels less reliant on commuter traffic. Public relations, digital advertising and streaming content will all boost visibility and are more cost-effective advertising options. (But remember to do your research; if you're in a rural area or one with more essential workers, you may still want to invest in some traditional tactics.)
- **Invest in quick-to-deploy digital advertising campaigns** that allow you to respond in real-time to necessary changes. This includes changes in public health, messaging, CTAs, etc. Agility is key.

- **Bulk up your email efforts.** Stop thinking transactional. Increase patient loyalty by connecting with them even when they don't need you. Educational email series gives you a reason to keep in touch, reinforcing your expertise and your commitment to patients.
- **Adapt to new search queries and user needs** with digital content. Changes in their life have sparked changes in what and how they search. Create content that helps patients assemble critical information ("how do I...") while taking care of themselves and others. This is your opportunity to be their teacher (and to create stackable pieces of content).

Go digital first.

Concerns for their health and well-being are accelerating digital-first behaviors.

Maximize spends and resources.

Budgets are down. Find one agency to handle marketing and IT tasks without splitting dollars across multiple teams. You'll save \$\$ and increase efficiency.



» Move Beyond the Blog.

Your patient feels sick. They don't call you. They go online, searching for their symptoms in hopes of identifying what ails them. That's when Dr. Google suggests seeking a true healthcare professional.

To attract and retain patients, be there in the moment they're searching. Not just with ads, but with educational, resourceful, high-quality content that answers their questions and positions you as the expert.

Don't think blog. **Think content hub.**

This is the year to graduate beyond those 400-word blog posts. Instead, build a multi-medium resource center that patients can access to find answers to all their health needs. What lives in the content hub?

- Service-line-specific videos introducing your experts as THE experts on the topic.
- Longer-form content for patients to download and take with them to appointments.
- Interviews with doctor-endorsed ways to stay healthy at home.
- Podcasts and audio marketing for on-the-go insights.
- Mobile apps that allow patients to access what they need, when they need it.
- Email nurture streams that pair patient interests with personalized content.

You are what you E-A-T.

Ensure content meets Google's standards for Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness (EAT), and that you're clearing a path to success by optimizing for voice search and featured snippets.



» Personalize the Virtual Experience

In 2020, telehealth became an essential service. Distance doctoring brought patients into virtual environments where care was safer, faster and more convenient.

The benefits of telehealth medicine are obvious. But, for healthcare professionals, so are the drawbacks. The physical distance between doctor and patient can commoditize the provider experience, decreasing patient engagement and loyalty. Savvy healthcare marketers will seize the opportunity to transform the patient experience with better telemedicine, reaching beyond the screen to create a patient-first experience.

- **Telehealth triaging.** When you tie telehealth to specific service lines, you force patients to self-select where they begin. Telehealth for ortho. Telehealth for primary care. Instead, let telehealth be a virtual front door to your healthcare facility. Let them make contact before they are assigned a path.

- **Treat virtual patients like real patients.** Design a telehealth system that remembers patients. Their information, their family history, their preferences, etc. Making them re-share the same data points each time they log on makes them feel like a product, not a patient.
- **Lean on technology** and put the human back into patient care. Build follow-up interactions with automation that offers a personalized value-add to the care patients received. Videos of their (unmasked) doctor describing their care plan. User-led content paths that give patients more information. Send post-care surveys to obsessively gather feedback about their experience so that you can improve it.

Connect virtual to community.

Connect virtual patients to community services including food security, housing support, transportation, employment and more.



» Spark Moments of Joy

We need some good news.

Helping patients find joy will be the key to helping them stay resilient and mentally strong during hard times. It's about more than feeling good; focusing on happiness is necessary to help people counteract the fear and negative energy they're feeling.

You have the power to be a beacon of hope for your community by connecting them to the lighthearted and happy news they're looking for.

Be...

Be hopeful. Be empathetic. Be there. Be human.

Where should you start?

- Look within your organization and use social media to highlight positive stories about your staff and patients.
- Leverage user-generated content and stories from within your community to give people something positive to rally behind. Last year we suggested working with local influencers to help get your messages farther and to more audiences. Now, everyone with a touching story can be an influencer and inspire hope for others.
- Identify community partnerships that allow you to give back, support social causes and strengthen your neighborhood footprint. This will help boost your internal team's morale to create positive change while strengthening your own community footprint.



» Seize Our (Recruitment) Moment

The world is watching.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a spotlight on the critical importance of healthcare and the frontline heroes keeping us safe. Don't waste this moment.

Use the good will to inspire people to pursue careers in healthcare. Highlight the different types of roles available and lean on storytelling to activate those looking to make a difference as a hometown hero.

What about your employer brand?

Great healthcare candidates will have their choice of where to go. Creating an employer brand strategy will show you as a great place to work and make them choose you.

- Use your social channels to show your gratitude for the people on your team. Build an appreciative culture to aid in recruitment and retention of your current staff.
- Increase your thought leadership. Hold virtual career fairs. Host webinars on the growing importance of healthcare careers. Invest in public relations campaigns that showcase what you're doing and how you're leading the way.
- Tell stories and highlight current employees to attract the type of healthcare candidates who can envision themselves in a career just like that.

Need help meeting consumers
at their new normal?

Or, putting together the right
plan for the fastest recovery?

Let us help.

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