

10TH ANNUAL

HEALTHCARE MARKETING
TRENDS 2023 EDITION

Navigating the New Normal



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There's no turning back.

COVID's impact on healthcare systems is here to stay. Staff are leaving burnt out and disillusioned at alarming rates. The big box stores have firmly moved into our space, pushing out hospitals and health systems as the gatekeepers of access to care. And high-deductible plans have accelerated healthcare consumerism at the fastest rate since the advent of WebMD in 1996.

In other words, the long-predicted power shift in healthcare has arrived. Everything we ever knew about consumer behavior and our competition has dramatically changed.

But hospitals and health systems have an opportunity to regain the loyalty that is directly associated with profitability. Consumers want to love their providers. They want relationships they can rely on. Today, those key drivers of patient loyalty have shifted from clinical prowess to convenience, customer service, and compassion.

Once again, it comes down to brand.

On the following pages, Lisa, Katie, and I summarize a year of Smith & Jones' research, white papers, and webinars to compile this year's biggest trends. We hope our insight helps you meet these challenges head-on and successfully manage your brand, market your service lines, recruit and retain your talent and embrace the new normal.

We're with you, one chapter at a time.



Paul Fahey
Vice President

TREND I

The High Cost of Low Morale

Soon, it will have been three years since things turned upside down, and healthcare workers were expected to jump in and correct them. As COVID-19 continues its unrelenting reign, our staff has been forced to weather constantly-changing protocols, the closing and reopening of services, and increased workloads.

The result has been increased stress, mental health issues, and your staff leaving for new opportunities or changing careers entirely. The effect of this extends far beyond attracting new hires, including:

- ⊕ The closing of, or reduced hours for, vital programs and services
- ⊕ Adverse impact on patient care
- ⊕ Increased readmissions
- ⊕ Lower patient satisfaction scores
- ⊕ Lower reimbursements

We need to turn the ship around. It starts not with finding new staff, but with taking care of our current team.

Reassign tasks and workloads.

Staffing shortages have doubled workloads for the faithful. How can you realign roles and responsibilities? Do you need three FTEs, or can you utilize a third-party resource or tools instead?

Build in opportunity for regular connection.

Communication issues and lack of connection have a direct impact on morale. Visible leadership helps to provide clear direction. Set weekly team meetings for everyone in your department or floor to create an open forum to build camaraderie.

Focus on overall employee well-being.

You're running aggressive recruitment campaigns to attract new talent, promoting your positive culture and team-based approach. But are you actually living this with current staff? Put structures in place to limit forced overtime hours. Give employees opportunities to care for their physical and mental well-being with increased PTO and improved perks and benefits.

Reward and recognize.

Your staff is deep in the trenches of a pandemic. It's okay to acknowledge this is hard and thank your team for delivering in challenging times. Making sure they feel recognized and valued can significantly improve their morale and well-being.



TREND 2

Zeroing in on Recruitment

We've been working together with you to solve recruitment and retention challenges for decades. In fact, the current nursing shortage dates back to the 1930s! The issues that laid the groundwork for the shortage then still ring true today: increased utilization, changes in technology, and a reduction in the workforce.

That said, we saw the issue accelerate faster in the last two years than any of us could have predicted. It's grown from an inconvenience to dramatically affect patient safety, staff morale, and the bottom line greater than ever before.

So, for this trend, we'll assume that you've already identified the compelling drivers and key differentiators for your organization, and you've run a few ads here and there but perhaps you're just not getting the form fills and phone calls that you were expecting. How can you move forward?

Smarter Targeting

In most instances, recruitment campaigns come down to one thing: switching. It's all about reaching the right people, in the right place, at the right time, with the right message to get someone to switch from their current employer to you. So, let's help focus your campaigns and develop a better targeting strategy. You already know the people, or at least their job title and qualifications, so let's focus on the right place and the right time.

The right place.

Reaching a prospective employee at the right moment means that your message will connect with them when they're most likely to be thinking about their job. That means when they're on their way to the job, and when they're at their job.

- ⊕ **COMMUTER ADVERTISING.** We really like the combination of out-of-home and radio to reach commuters. Depending on your market that can mean billboards and terrestrial radio, or subways and streaming radio. But either way, it's a powerful combination.
- ⊕ **GEOFENCING.** And once your prospective employee is at their hospital or clinic, let's reinforce your commuter advertising by geofencing their location and serving up ads to their social media and web browsers. If you don't believe us, take a peek at what they're doing in the breakroom. Yep, they're on their phones. To further enhance performance, add a little retargeting to your digital media plan and follow them for the next several days. Be sure your ads are unified to ensure each new impression builds on the last.



The right time.

About ten years ago, Chris Ingraham, a writer for the Washington Post, aggregated data from Google Trends on the topics of depression, anxiety, stress, pain, and fatigue. When he plotted the peaks and valleys from search trends, he developed something he called the Misery Index, basically those times of the year when we are most stressed, anxious, and depressed.

We looked deeper at the data to see patterns; the peaks and valleys that reflect the rhythm of the workweek. People are more miserable on weekdays, less so on weekends. We took that one step further and asked ourselves how to apply this information to the media targeting for a recruitment campaign.

We learned that employees were least anxious about their job toward the end of each shift, and at the end of each week. So, we started building campaigns that targeted commuters with terrestrial radio and digital billboard messages earliest in the day and at the beginning of each week. And as an added experiment, during the “Sunday Scaries”. We’ve been applying this strategy for more than a year with great results. So, consider adopting your ad campaigns to reach prospective employees when they’re most susceptible to your message to switch from their current employer to you.

TREND 3

Using Data to Fuel Growth

During the earlier days of the pandemic, it became apparent that marketing would need to prove its worth in bringing in patients and revenue. We challenged healthcare marketers to build campaigns around analytics, integrate with technology, and collaborate with other departments to get as much tangible and actionable information as possible.

This concern is relevant during the economic downturn and possible recession. Can we use this as an opportunity to create better, more relevant marketing? To be more holistic or look at things a different way?

What can we learn from growth marketing?

Growth marketing is about using your data to drive your marketing decisions forward, and constantly experimenting and iterating on your messaging, creative, and other tactics to continuously improve your results.

Also referred to as full-funnel marketing, it focuses on moving your leads or patients throughout your funnel instead of traditional awareness-based marketing, which only brings people to the top of the funnel.

Though growth marketing is traditionally used for startups and consumer products and services, there's no reason these tactics shouldn't be applied to healthcare. In fact, organizations that start employing these tactics will be ahead of the game. Here are three ways to get started.

- ⊕ **THINK BEYOND A/B.** A/B testing for digital advertising or email marketing is great. But instead of two options, try to test as many options as you can, both copy and creative. Google's Responsive Display Ads allow you to input multiple headlines, descriptions, photos, and/or videos, which its AI will then combine and optimize.
- ⊕ **MAKE IT PERSONAL.** Keep those in your funnel engaged with content that is relevant to them based on their history. Have they been browsing the cancer doctors or weight loss pages? Don't assume consumers already know everything. Walk them through what the next steps in the process would be. Tell them (or better, show them) the benefits. Link them out to even more resources. And of course, let them easily opt in or out of emails based on their needs.

- ⊕ **START A TEXTING STRATEGY.** Integrate texting into your marketing and communications strategies. Texts have a 98% open rate, and people are generally receptive to opting into texts. Start with appointment reminders, prescription refill reminders, and allowing patients to confirm appointments. If they opt-in to marketing messages, you can start sending information on free classes, events, or other services you offer. Make sure to include trackable short links or tracking phone numbers. Then, this information can be logged into your Marketing Automation Platform.

What are some other ways we can use data to improve our campaigns?

- ⊕ Know which campaigns to deploy in the first place based on service line revenue.
- ⊕ Decide which platforms to use based on performance and activity.
- ⊕ Help inform your content strategy by looking at which types of content perform best (short form, long form, video, infographics, etc).



TREND 4

The Competition is Heating Up

Simply said, patients are customers. And customers enjoy “everyday low prices,” two-day shipping, and the many other conveniences of big box stores. So it’s no surprise (well, maybe it is) that Dollar Tree, Walmart, and Amazon have joined CVS and Walgreens by stepping deeper into the healthcare space. They want to meet the patient’s needs in places where hospitals and health systems lack the resources to do the same.

Most of these retailers are working aggressively on a variety of multi-channel initiatives including expansions in existing stores, construction of free-standing stores, telehealth, and the delivery of primary care, medical services, lab work, and products that you used to have to go a hospital, doctor’s office, or clinic to access.

If you still aren’t convinced, consider this: Last year, Dollar General announced that it hired its first-ever Chief Medical Officer, tasked with expanding the retailer’s product and service offerings to its nearly 20,000 stores and “build and enhance affordable healthcare offerings for our customers, especially in the rural communities we serve.”

The way we see it, the threat to traditional healthcare providers comes down to a few things. Big box retailers have:

- ⊕ Infinitely more resources than hospitals
- ⊕ The scale to make an impact (the retailers on our list above have nearly 50,000 stores nationwide, not to mention their vast online presence)
- ⊕ Significant experience in multi-channel delivery (in person and virtual)
- ⊕ Expertise in managing and leveraging consumer data for profit

We should expect to see significant competition in 2023, and if hospitals and health systems aren’t focused on building stronger brands and emphasizing differentiators, they will struggle even more. So, what are the strategies that hospitals and health systems can embrace to compete in this new marketplace?

Patient Experience.

Brands are built on their experience, and how well that institution meets expectations and delivers a positive one. Bedside manner, timely access to appointments, patient navigators, and even valet parking are more often cited as drivers of quality perception than the best college degrees and latest technology. Leverage your people, those “neighbors taking care of neighbors,” and consider campaigns that use testimonials to tell the story.

Authenticity.

Your roots are deeper than retailers. Many patients are hesitant to go all-in on retailers for their healthcare and are skeptical of their motivations. These are companies driven by profit and lack the history that your hospital has in the community. Many hospitals even have CEOs with MD degrees. Our point is, that you're on the side of angels, and are driven not entirely by the bottom line. That's another important story to tell.

Technology.

Telehealth grew rapidly during the pandemic but it's starting to taper. But make no mistake, it's here to stay. As you plan for the years ahead, embrace technology and make it a priority for your organization. Then, implement the wraparound technologies such as the marketing automation ideas we mentioned, and nurture those patient relationships to beat the big box stores at their own game.



TREND 5

Winning Social Proof

Social proof is an important element of digital marketing, especially in healthcare marketing where trust really matters. Social proof is not a new concept—following the successful actions of others is traced to our early primitive behaviors. The term became popular in Robert Cialdini's 1984 book *Influence*.

We are social animals who look to others to help us make decisions and navigate problems and solutions. Think about it—we eat at restaurants we've never been to because strangers give them online approval. Social media and other digital platforms give us access to others like we've never had before.

- ⊕ Over 80% of buyers recommend brands they follow on social media
- ⊕ Over 90% of consumers read online reviews before buying
- ⊕ Over 80% of U.S. shoppers seek referrals from their networks before making purchases **of any kind**

So how can healthcare marketers win at social proof? By building brand trust and loyalty through strategies around:

- ⊕ **REVIEWS AND TESTIMONIALS.** Ask people to speak about your strengths and successes, and tell those stories in a way that aligns with your brand. Think videos, photos, messaging and copy, and graphic treatments. Keep the copy short, to the point, and as close to the speaker's own voice as possible. Authenticity is key!
- ⊕ **EARNED MEDIA.** Be proactive when controlling your message and brand story, and find news media partners who will publish your pitched content on their platforms, including their social media. News media professionals are "influencers" in our communities, and earned media acts as an endorsement in the eyes of your audience.
- ⊕ **INFLUENCERS & BRAND PARTNERSHIPS.** Leverage the influencers you have easy access to; patients, doctors, nurses, specialists, interns, etc. Seeing is believing, so use high-quality imagery to drive these campaigns home. Identify external partnerships as well and make sure to cross-promote between social accounts. Think other wellness centers, healthy food, sports... the list goes on!

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- ⊕ **DATA.** Using real facts in your marketing weights your messaging and enhances public perception that you are well-positioned in your field. Pair stats with scroll-stopping graphics to show how long you've been a key community resource, or to illustrate how many people trust and have utilized your services. If you've been serving your community for over 50 years, tell that story. When it comes to social proof, data has a real impact.
 - ⊕ **AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS.** Being recognized as the best in your field speaks volumes to those making buying decisions. Put time in your regular queue to pitch your organization to reputable and visible awards programs and then publicize those recognitions on your own platforms and to news media outlets.
 - ⊕ **USER GENERATED CONTENT.** Monitor brand mentions regularly. When real people go out of their way to talk positively about your brand, others take notice. Encourage your audiences to share their content with you; all the social platforms have features designed to build this type of engagement.

TREND 6

Virtual is Just a Piece of the Puzzle

Over the past two years, we've discussed the need to continue to improve the telehealth experience. As we mentioned, telehealth usage is down from the height of the pandemic, but still higher than pre-pandemic numbers. Meaning we were correct in assuming that even when the threat of COVID isn't as high, some will still continue to use telehealth. On the other side of the coin, during the variant spikes, telehealth remains an important tool to keep patients feeling safe. Patients and doctors are finally on the same page with seeing telehealth's value for delivering timely, quality care. So don't slow down in training your doctors and staff. Don't stop investing in your systems. Don't stop educating your patients about what services are offered online.

However,

We can (and do) talk about the digital experience all day long. But remember, virtual care is just a part of your continuum of care. It can't and shouldn't replace everything. Nothing can replace the empathy and connection that comes from being in person with a patient. Whether they're nervous about a test result, excitedly waiting to meet their baby through an ultrasound, or just confused and needing some-

one to talk to. People in these vulnerable states shouldn't always be pushed to use telehealth. Especially after the digital exhaustion many of us face as we continue to work and study remotely. Many of us are still in desperate need of human connection.

Speaking of human connection


Although we want to appeal to Gen X and Millennials who prefer to book appointments and pay bills online, we can't forget about the Baby Boomers who may not feel comfortable using the internet for everything, and might not have a support person to always help them. Your staff must have excellent customer service skills both over the phone and in person. Make sure it's simple for patients to get in touch with a real person and that staff is properly trained on how to field their questions so they can get the help they need.



Smith & Jones is where healthcare brands come to get better.

We specialize in branding, integrated service line campaigns, and retention and recruitment for hospitals, health systems, and care providers.

Need help navigating the new normal?
Let us help.

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