Bring Innovation to Your Marketing Strategy

The right mind-set and practices can help move you forward

In this age of big data and technology, many brands claim that their innovation differentiates them. But what does innovation really mean in healthcare, an industry a decade behind the rest of the world? And why is it so hard to innovate in healthcare?

The interest in healthcare innovation can be directly correlated with three swift changes in the industry: (1) the Affordable Care Act, (2) consumerism being at an all-time high, and (3) quality, cost, and safety being put under the microscope. To be successful today, providers must build a better mousetrap. They need to think differently and apply a new perspective to the provision of care. A number of leading healthcare brands have created innovation institutes or innovation centers in response — with mixed results.
FRAGMENTED HEALTHCARE IS A MAJOR INNOVATION HURDLE.
Various components of health systems can include hospitals, surgical centers, home health agencies, urgent care centers, health plans, physician offices, and ambulatory “big boxes.” Mergers and acquisitions are key growth strategies for many systems, leading to greater market share. But do these pieces tie together to effectively address the three key industry change-drivers mentioned above? Unifying scheduling and patient records — along with a consistent patient experience at every touchpoint — is daunting, yet necessary.

When it comes to healthcare delivery, innovation is a foreign concept to most health systems and hospitals. They don’t have a framework in place for it or a history of practicing innovation, much less any regular funding for it. (Academic medical centers have R&D budgets, but direct the bulk of those dollars toward clinical research.)

LEARNING FROM OTHERS
To bring real innovation to healthcare, providers must leave their comfort zones and seek insights from other industries. Walter Isaacson, author of The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution (Simon & Schuster, 2015), identified these key lessons from studying true innovators:

Innovation is a team sport. This was true during the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, and it’s true to an even greater extent in the digital age. Digital business changes customer propositions, business models, industry models, financial models, culture, regulation, talent, and more. For that reason, digital cannot be owned and executed as a single departmental function. Winning in digital business will be a team sport.¹

Collaboration doesn’t just happen among contemporaries. It also happens “between generations.” According to Isaacson, “The best innovators were those who understood the trajectory of technological change and took the baton from innovators who preceded them.”

Combining a wide array of specialists generates the most productive teams. Specialists offer several benefits, because they are often quicker at their specific tasks and come up with more efficient code. While generalists might not have the expert knowledge of specialists, they can contribute in many areas and are often stronger communicators who may be better than specialists at handling new priorities and needs.²

Physical proximity plays an important role. How ironic: In this era of technology, physical proximity is still very important to the creative process. This “social facilitation” effect — that the mere presence of other people engaged in the same task as we are can boost our motivation — was one of the earliest findings in the field of social psychology.

Complementary styles constitute the best leadership for innovation. Pair visionaries who can generate ideas with operating managers who can execute them. The most successful innovations arise from collaboration anchored to a clear vision.

Your origins determine your outcomes. Successful innovation initiatives can be funded by private enterprise, by the government (as was ARPANET, the prototype for the internet), or by volunteer efforts (Wikipedia is a good example). Each of these funding sources has different norms, cultures, and practices, and those influence the flow of dollars toward innovation efforts.

Humans are social animals. A desire for interaction can energize cities and propel change. The use of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 is a prime example.

¹ Dan Beckham, “How to Foster Innovation Into Health Care Delivery,” (Hospitals & Health Networks, 10.19.15)
² Gartner, 4.3.16
³ Curtis Peterson, Smart File, 9.29.15
One last note from Isaacson: Innovation happens “at the intersection of technology and the humanities.” Health systems that are dedicated to innovation will embrace data, but also look beyond it — to arts and literature, history, and philosophy — for inspiration.

HEALTHCARE MARKETING INNOVATION
With no track record in innovation and a culture focused on improving quality through process improvement and standardization, how can you introduce marketing innovation to your health system? Take Isaacson’s innovation lessons to heart and follow these six steps:

Assemble your team. Assemble everyone in your organization who has data that you may be able to integrate. Key players may be planning, finance, population health, human resources, IT, and medical records.

Collaborate. This is harder than it sounds. For years, healthcare has operated in silos with very little cross-communication. Innovation demands that this change.

Enlist specialists. For any transformation, you need visionaries and content experts. Make sure you have the specialists you need to add meaning to your vision.

Ensure physical proximity. There’s a connectivity that happens when people meet in person that you can’t achieve via Skype, teleconferencing, or sharing a desktop.

Look for complementary styles. Creating leadership and sparking new ideas are essential to innovation. Replace groups of homogeneous thinkers with groups of like thinkers as part of the mix.

Remember the human side. When you bring people together from non-marketing areas to grow volumes or build the brand, it may be the first time they consider how business comes in the door. If you engage them in a new way that taps into their expertise, they’ll become marketing advocates.

FINDING YOUR WAY
Much of the innovation in healthcare is coming from outside healthcare. It’s a challenge to know what is out in the market given the explosion of activity in this world.

Venture funding globally for healthcare technologies reached a record $4.5 billion in 2015. This is quadruple the figures in 2011, but up only 4 percent from 2014, Baker McKenzie reported.

Many new products and services are being developed by entrepreneurs who recognize the fragmentation of healthcare and are capitalizing on it. Savvy marketers will assess their assets and identify what they need to successfully market their services. If they don’t have what they need, they can build it or buy it. Here are some creative examples:

Challenge: Transporting patients to appointments.

Solution: MedStar Health is partnering with Uber to decrease “no-shows” for clinic appointments and reduce spending on taxi vouchers.
Challenge: Centralizing scheduling. Most providers have multiple scheduling systems that present a frustrating front door to consumers.

Solution: Partner with a vendor like Healthgrades, which can be your scheduling portal and work with operations to make scheduling seamless and timely for patients.

Challenge: Internet listings. They’re tough to keep current.

Solution: Buy this service from a vendor. It’s not a core competency for your department.

Challenge: Targeting (and understanding) your customers.

Solution: If you don’t have a customer relationship management (CRM) system, get one! Use its capabilities for targeting, creating patient personas, and tracking results. CRM is an excellent communications tactic for population health.

Challenge: Tracking ROI.

Solution: Return-on-investment dashboards. Perhaps you have a few items in-house that need to be tracked. Work with a vendor who can integrate all results into a dashboard that can be pushed out to stakeholders every month. By the time budgets are due, you’ll have a leadership team that receives monthly updates on your successful efforts.

Challenge: Tracking revenue. You have a massive billing system in-house, but you want to track revenue by patient.

Solution: Integrate your systems to get the full picture of what each patient means to the system in terms of revenue. How can you track the full value of patients you bring into the system?

Challenge: Getting immediate patient experience data.

Solution: As Tonic Health does, have each patient use a tablet when they arrive at a practice, clinic, or lab. It’s a user-friendly way for patients to update their information and provide immediate feedback on their visits. Post-visit, it allows you to send discharge instructions, update your CRM system, and intervene to address any issues.

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The Right Partners

You don’t have to go it alone. A good vendor partner should be able to fill the gaps in your marketing department and provide additional value, in a manner that’s more economical than the DIY approach. In fact, a single partner may be able to address multiple gaps and challenges for you. Healthgrades is a good example of such a partner, offering products and services relevant across the entire spectrum of the patient journey.

Take patient acquisition, for example. We know from other industries that 85% of customer bookings are generated by third-party sites.

Healthgrades.com has become one such major destination for patients searching for a physician. It’s important to work with a partner that makes the appointing process easier, as healthgrades.com does, by providing direct scheduling right on their site or on
BRING INNOVATION TO YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

When choosing a partner to help with your CRM needs, take a careful look at what types of data can be used. Healthcare consumers are online, looking for physicians. For example, more than 1 million consumers visit healthgrades.com each day — people who are raising their hand and saying they have a need. Data collected from these consumers’ online activities can be used to provide insight into digital strategies, to assist with physician affiliation and access, and more. Ensure that your CRM vendor has access to unique data sets that can be aggregated with your clinical, financial, and marketing data. Confirm that your partner is able to integrate their solutions with your web properties and digital assets to collect data on consumer behavior, interests, and preferences — so that you can build a robust, 360° view of consumers in your market.

This wealth of data can provide deep insights that will help you with your marketing decisions. Aided by predictive models such as clinical propensity, psychographics, payment method, and behavior, the savvy marketer can develop comprehensive, data-driven strategies that can be tracked and measured, ultimately moving a health system’s marketing department from a cost center to a statistically proven profit center. From opportunity identification and prioritization to strategy development and performance reporting, there are numerous important features that can bring your CRM strategy to life. If your marketing department lacks the necessary expertise, look for a partner that offers an extensive team of data scientists, analysts, and strategists you can tap into as part of the CRM agreement — at no additional cost.

**FINAL INSIGHT**

Do the best you can, with what you have, wherever you are! This is a great mantra for any healthcare marketer. You’ll never have the marketing infrastructure of Amazon, but that doesn’t mean you can’t bring innovation to your health system. And you probably have more data than you think. When you break down your organization’s silos, your marketing team will expand in numbers and ideas. Learn from the great innovators and little by little, you’ll bring your marketing into the Innovation Era.

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**The impact of third-party sites**

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<th>LOYALIST CHANNEL</th>
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<tr>
<td>HILTON:</td>
<td>TRAVELOCITY:</td>
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<td>♦ 77% of rooms from loyalty program members</td>
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<td></td>
<td>APPLE:</td>
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<td>♦ 85% of phones purchased through indirect channels</td>
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Source: 2013 report
Contributors

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HITCHCOCK MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS is a marketing and communications consultancy for healthcare only. Our team is comprised of experienced professionals in brand management, system growth, and marketing strategies, including digital strategies, corporate and physician communications, issues, and corporate reputation strategies.

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