

ASK THE EXPERT ... TED BALOWSKI

Question: How Should We Align Our Hospital Strategy With Generational Shifts and Values?



With the healthcare Web environment rapidly changing, new technologies are constantly emerging and are being adopted in varying degrees by

demographic target groups. Now four generations have unprecedented access to healthcare information and the providers that deliver it.

According to a 2013 survey by Econsultancy, four in 10 global marketers planned to increase their digital marketing budgets during that year, with 39 percent of them seeking to reallocate existing budgets to digital channels. But just having a Web strategy and content isn't enough to engage consumers.

Since consumers in each generation have unique values, traits, and attitudes that guide their search for healthcare services, understanding how the different groups consume content that influences their decisions is critical for healthcare organizations moving forward. Factor in the role of the Internet as just one of the channels used to reach diverse populations, and it's clear that one brush doesn't cover them all.

Silent Generation: Born 1928 – 1945

This group lived through the end of the Great Depression, and World War II rationing is still a vivid memory. The combination of those factors has led to cost-conscious decision making and little

engagement with marketing efforts. Other factors:

- Members' healthcare decisions are driven by physician suggestions and their own life experiences.
- Younger family members may influence or make healthcare decisions for this generation.
- They are likely to choose a hospital based on a physician's reputation or proximity to their home.
- Members require longer and more frequent doctor visits.
- They prefer to receive healthcare reminders in print form.
- They are open to advertising in mass media as well as messages delivered in the physician's office.

Baby Boomers: Born 1946 – 1964

Members of this currently dominant group tended to grow up in large families fed by postwar consumerism and the new medium of television.

Other factors:

- Healthcare decisions are driven by both offline and online research.
- Influenced by their physicians, baby boomers research their own options to a certain extent.
- They are likely to search for information online, in response to television and other traditional marketing.

- Online searches focus on treatments and medications as well as their side effects.
- Members engage with traditional marketing efforts and also prefer to receive healthcare reminders in print.

Generation X: Born 1965 – 1980

Members of this group have historically taken better care of themselves, compared with earlier generations. Other factors:

- They lived through the collapse of U.S. manufacturing and rise of the global marketplace.
- Their decisions are driven by affinity for healthcare brands.
- Gen Xers shop for healthcare options.
- They experienced the rise and expansion of television advertising.
- Gen Xers represent the first generation to use computers in any meaningful way at home and school.
- They are moderately responsive to healthcare advertising and favor TV and doctor's office messages.
- They consult online information for ratings and reviews.
- Members prefer healthcare reminders in the form of a link to a website where they can download information.

Generation Y: Born after 1980

Also sometimes called Millennials, this youngest group historically has

been more health-conscious than previous generations, with much greater access to accurate health information. Other factors:

- Millennials are the first generation to relate their whole life through technology, connecting with the world through the Internet, social media, texting, and smartphones.
- Their decisions are driven by social media recommendations of friends and contacts, plus reviews of patient experiences online.
- They have lived through the rise of online marketing, engaging almost exclusively with non-traditional marketing efforts.
- Millennials prefer healthcare reminders in the form of email alerts.
- They value positive relationships with care providers but are highly likely to switch doctors or hospitals if they have a negative experience.
- Targeting media messages when Gen Yers are close to making a decision on necessary care offers the best results.

Multichannel marketing strategy

A multichannel marketing strategy should reach potential patients through the medium in which they are most comfortable. There should be an integrated and consistent brand message in each medium that makes it easy for consumers to engage with the provider so that results can be tracked. Healthcare systems should focus their online strategy accordingly with considerations for strong content, social outreach, and mobile-friendly messages.

Broward Health: Targeted initiatives

Broward Health embarked on a digital strategy to strengthen its position in the Fort Lauderdale, FL, area. The marketing department took ownership of building a new strategy that focused on a multi-generational, multichannel approach, with the goal of reaching all the demographics the organization serves in a more effective manner. The initiatives that specifically targeted the four generational groups were:

▪ Mobile access

Aiming primarily at Generation X and Y, Broward Health focused on a new responsive website, developed within the last 12 months. The main goal of the redesign was to make the website easy to access on all devices, and provide key information quickly, since younger (and healthier) potential patients tend to make their healthcare decisions on short notice. Mobile users are interested in high-level, *transactional* access: "Taking care of business on the go." Accordingly, mobile visitors to www.browardhealth.org increased 84 percent from 2012 to 2013. Tablet visitors to the site increased 91 percent from 2012 to 2013.

▪ Social media

Social media at Broward Health is geared toward baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Messaging is focused on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google+, and Foursquare. Obviously Generation X and Generation Y are very active, but so too are baby boomers. Baby boomers started using social media as a way to monitor the profiles of their children and grandchildren, but have now adopted social media as an engagement tool. The demographic groups that are most engaged at

Broward Health are females (76 percent), ages 25 to 54.

▪ E-newsletters

The e-newsletter program appeals to all generations as a way to stay informed about the latest hospital and health news. The program incorporates a large database of email addresses and has various targeting options, including age, interests, gender, and ZIP code. Targeting each generation, Broward Health offers subscriptions based on specific interests, including breast health, children's health, diabetes, heart health, and men's and women's health.

▪ In- and outside-hospital interactive experiences


Interactive experiences appeal to all generations and are marketed through all channels. The goal is to reach everyone and provide tangible, real-life experiences and engagement opportunities. Broward Health aims to reach each generation through these customized experiences:

1. Digital billboards, including ones within the hospital designed for wayfinding, that target each generation through specific messaging
2. The Man Van, a mobile men's health experience, outfitted with three high-definition televisions (Baby boomers and Gen Xers can watch their favorite news or sports programs while they wait for any one of 10 insurance-covered health screenings.)
3. Interactive breast exhibit during MAMMOPALOOZA, targeting female Baby Boomers
4. Interactive heart exhibit, targeting members of the silent and baby boomer generations
5. "Powerful You!" an exhibit at the Fort Lauderdale Museum of

Discovery and Science, targeting each of the four generations

Defined metrics are key in tracking the success of the new digital marketing strategy. Broward has established goals for each campaign, and metrics differ based on the campaign. In the Mammopalooza campaign, for example, Broward Health tracks how many people came in for mammograms in order to ultimately determine ROI. From a digital perspective, the organization is tracking page views, visitor paths, the number of appointments requested online, and the number of clicks from various promotional efforts – search engine marketing, social media, email, and website banners.

A necessary realignment

Generational differences must be considered for an effective use of technology when marketing healthcare products and services, bearing in mind that younger, healthier generations are the most interested in using technology but have the least need for care. In addition, the different media preferences of the four generational groups must be taken into account in devising healthcare marketing strategies to engage them. 

Ted Balowski is a Web executive at CareTech Solutions, a healthcare IT and Web services company. He has more than 13 years of experience in sales, digital strategy, online marketing, social media, search engine marketing, operations, community building, and entrepreneurship. You can reach him at ted.balowski@caretech.com.

Editor's Note: Different sources use varying dates to describe the span of generations. The dates here reflect those used by the Pew Research Center.