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12.29.11 / 11:30am / Jonathan Root

SELLING THE PATIENT EXPERIENCE

How hospital advertising influences the purchase decision

Most people don't have a favorite hospital "top of mind" like they would a car, restaurant, or computer brand. However, hospital marketers can influence the purchase decision with an effective advertising strategy that addresses the patient experience. Here's how.

Defining the healthcare purchase process

Purchasing hospital services differs from traditional product and service purchases because, with the latter, the customer has a choice about what they are buying, who they are buying it from, and they can relate the different value they receive based on the cost.

With hospital service purchases there is a good deal of unknown to the patient. Take orthopedic surgery, for instance. How would I form an opinion about the value that I am receiving? Consider that:

- I don't shop for this service as often as I do clothing or haircuts;
- I don't know the value related to the cost, or where to look for that information;
- I don't fully understand the service because I am not a medical doctor;
- And the health insurance company masks the cost from me as a reimbursement.

As a health care consumer who knows very little about the service and the cost, by what measurement do I form an opinion? The answer is experience – patient experience to be exact.



Communicating an honest, deliverable brand promise

For the most part, people form opinions about their hospital's patient experience based on stories from friends, neighbors, relatives, and co-workers. This is why it is so important that a hospital lives up to the brand promise that it markets to its constituents and takes responsibility to communicate the patient experience.

The alternative is to spend millions of dollars advertising new surgical equipment (which patients do not purchase) or awards (which patients do not research when choosing a patient experience).

How does your hospital communicate its commitment to customer satisfaction and patient experience? Do you have a strategy to engage the patient throughout their pre- and post-op experience with your hospital brand? Have you identified who your customers are and how to reach them when it really matters?



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By communicating the experience of past patients, new patients learn what they can expect and gain peace of mind about their operation. They are assured that they will be cared for. This is what the patient cares about – and why they will care about your hospital vs the competing hospital. Your advertising can play a major part in articulating a differentiated and desirable patient experience.

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