

# Enhancing the Online Experience

## Building Engagement through Personalization



BY Ben Dillon

Vice President and  
eHealth Evangelist  
Geonetric

He can be reached at  
[ben.dillon@geonetric.com](mailto:ben.dillon@geonetric.com).

The patient experience encompasses all of an organization's touch points, not just clinical care settings. So, tending to the online experience is a must for improving connections with consumers, patients, and families. Recognizing that, forward-thinking healthcare executives are taking a cue from other industries and striving to create a more personal online experience.

Many organizations have embraced user-centric Websites—designing sites from the consumer's point of view, providing more relevant content, and adding transactional capabilities. The challenge now is to further enhance the online experience by gathering information about consumers and tailoring Web content to their individual needs. After all, the more personalized the online experience is, the more valuable the Website becomes—for consumers and the organization.

### A Gradual Approach to Personalization

The ultimate in personalization is to have a patient portal that is integrated with the organization's electronic medical record (EMR) systems so that users can securely sign into the Website to obtain medical records, review treatment recommendations, and send secure communications to their care team. But not all organizations are there yet. For those that aren't ready to move directly to an integrated portal,

experiences can still be personalized. The key is to continually improve the online relationship and create a solid foundation for future integration.

By incrementally improving the experience based on information site visitors provide, a healthcare organization can deliver more valuable content and better functionality. In turn, visitors become more engaged and committed to the site. This process of gradual engagement includes three main levels:

#### Level 1: Optimizing the Experience on a Hospital Website

This is the introductory step in the visitor's online relationship with the hospital. At this stage, all visitors see the same Website content and have access to the same functionality. Health consumers visit hospital Websites for a reason and usually come to the site based on a search engine query. So, it's essential to treat every page like a landing page. Pages must lead

visitors to relevant information and offer opportunities for engaging with the organization. This translates into sites that offer:

◆ **Relevant content:** Content should reflect best Web writing practices, with information that is concise and easy to comprehend when skimmed. Copy should include key search terms and demonstrate the services the hospital offers, reinforcing the page's value to visitors arriving from search engines.

◆ **Content that leads:** The site should direct visitors to additional information they may want as well as to information the organization wants to present. For instance, if a site visitor is viewing an obstetrics page, the site should automatically present information on pregnancy nutrition, OB/GYN doctors, due date calculators, and Lamaze classes.

◆ **Calls to action:** The site should offer transactions that enrich the experience and drive site visitors to take action. These can be as simple as encouraging visitors

to sign up for a class or request a brochure.

Level 1 personalization is passive and limited by the lack of information collected about the individual visitor. But by optimizing experiences around visitors' interests, hospitals can effectively direct them to information beyond their initial objectives. This begins to establish a relationship and encourages visitors to engage with the organization.

### Level 2: Leveraging Visitors' Preferences With a Patient Portal

The next level of online engagement involves interaction through a portal that allows visitors to create an account, save preferences, communicate with the organization, and take advantage of advanced transactional features. The portal is not yet integrated with the organization's medical records system, though, and no authentication processes are required to create an account. At this stage, personalization is based on patient-provided information. Patient portals at this level offer:

◆ **Targeted content:** Visitors have the ability to select healthcare topics of interest, and the Website provides targeted information based on those preferences. This means organizations can direct visitors to relevant information through targeted links or personalized email newsletters.

◆ **Secure messaging:** Patient portals safeguard private information and provide a secure channel for users to send and receive messages. Through secure messaging, portal users can communicate with hospital administrators to discuss bill payments and other routine correspondence. Any clinical discussions should be

avoided at this level because the user's identity has not been verified.

◆ **Advanced capabilities:** Features that streamline complex transactions, such as forms that prefill with known information and the ability to save and return to forms for later completion, are common. Because one household member often manages care for other family members, patient portals also allow users to manage information for an entire family under a single account.

Secure messaging and other advanced capabilities, such as the ability to save and submit prefilled forms, can be marketed as a convenience to users while benefiting the organization. Less staff time is required to process forms, fewer callbacks are required to follow up on illegible data, and fewer incomplete forms are received. Allowing visitors to create an account also sets the expectation that the user will be back, which can help build loyalty.

### Level 3: Delivering Care Online With an Integrated Portal

The highest level of personalization occurs when a patient portal is integrated with the hospital's EMR. An identity proofing process allows organizations to integrate clinical information, create patient-provider interactions, and facilitate online care management. These types of portals offer:

◆ **Personalized content:** Users who log into an integrated portal can receive information relevant to their specific medical conditions. This information may include access to their medical records, a list of current medications, encounter summaries, lab results, and discharge papers. Portal content can also provide tailored information that correlates with a recent diagnosis or care plan.

◆ **Easier interactions:** Integrated portals offer features of true convenience—forms that prefill with information from hospital records; calendars that track appointment and procedures for the entire family in one place; and direct access to information from the patient's records from across the hospital, clinics, and labs.

◆ **Chronic condition management:** To fulfill the vision of patient-centered medical homes and accountable care organizations, hospitals will need to implement online technologies to manage and deliver healthcare, particularly for chronic disease populations. With an integrated portal, hospitals can help patients with self-management by offering health diaries, weight management tools, medication adherence tools, and other decision support functionality that encourages ongoing secure communications and treatment between the patient and the care team.

As more organizations offer integrated portal technology, care won't only occur within the walls of a building. At this level, care also takes place through Web-based encounters. Patients have access to tools that improve adherence to care regimens and communication with the care team. The result is better care and better outcomes.

### Embracing the Opportunity

As the online consumer experience evolves, it will become an increasingly important extension of the care that takes place at the hospital or doctor's office. Organizations that devote the time and resources now to improving online collaboration with patients will see big returns down the road—in terms of patient satisfaction, loyalty, and, ultimately, engagement. ○

The key is to continually improve the online relationship and create a solid foundation for future integration.