



SPECTRUM

Society for Healthcare Strategy and Market Development®

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Marketing Communications

The Patient-centric Website of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Healthcare websites have evolved from brochureware sites to a tool to connect with patients in personalized ways.

Remember hospital websites of the not-so-distant past? Silos of health content. Marketing collateral saved as PDFs and placed online. Information organized by internal department structures so that no patients could ever find what they were looking for.

For years people have been managing their money and travel plans online. They expect to manage their healthcare online as well. Despite the impressive strides the field has made in the past five years, we are still playing catch-up.

Healthcare has been slow to join the online revolution, but we are making progress. Hospitals are considering the consumer experience when developing websites. They build navigation, write copy, and add functionality with the end user in mind. Hospital sites don't allow people to choose an appointment time with their doctor as they can choose an airline seat, but most sites have a good foundation in place and are well poised to take the online experience to a new level in the coming years.

The Patient-centric Website of Yesterday

Only a few short years ago, health consumers began to rely on the web to research symptoms, doctors, and hospital services. In 2006 there were 8 million health-seekers searching online for information on any given day, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project. More than half reported that online information affected their decisions about medical treatment, changed their approach to maintaining their health, or caused them to ask their doctor new questions.

These compelling statistics led to the first real shift to patient-centric websites. Healthcare marketers began to realize that their organizations' websites could connect with patients and potential patients in meaningful ways. Instead of using their sites to push messages to visitors, they began rebuilding their sites to place the consumer at the center of the experience.



Hospitals started to:

- **Adjust their information architecture.** Hospitals began designing sites, including their architecture, from the user's point of view. They asked questions to better understand their audiences—for example: Who is visiting the site? What are they looking for? What actions do they take? They used this insight to organize information and provide navigation that consumers could understand.
- **Provide relevant information.** Healthcare marketers began cross-promoting services and cross-referencing information online. For example, they started placing information about the hospital's OB/GYN doctors, NICU capabilities, and upcoming courses throughout the birthing section of their sites, exposing visitors to other information that might interest them.
- **Add transactional capabilities.** Hospital sites also began moving past brochureware—sites created by translating the organization's printed brochures directly to the web—and started allowing transactions. Rather than being implemented for its own sake, online functionality

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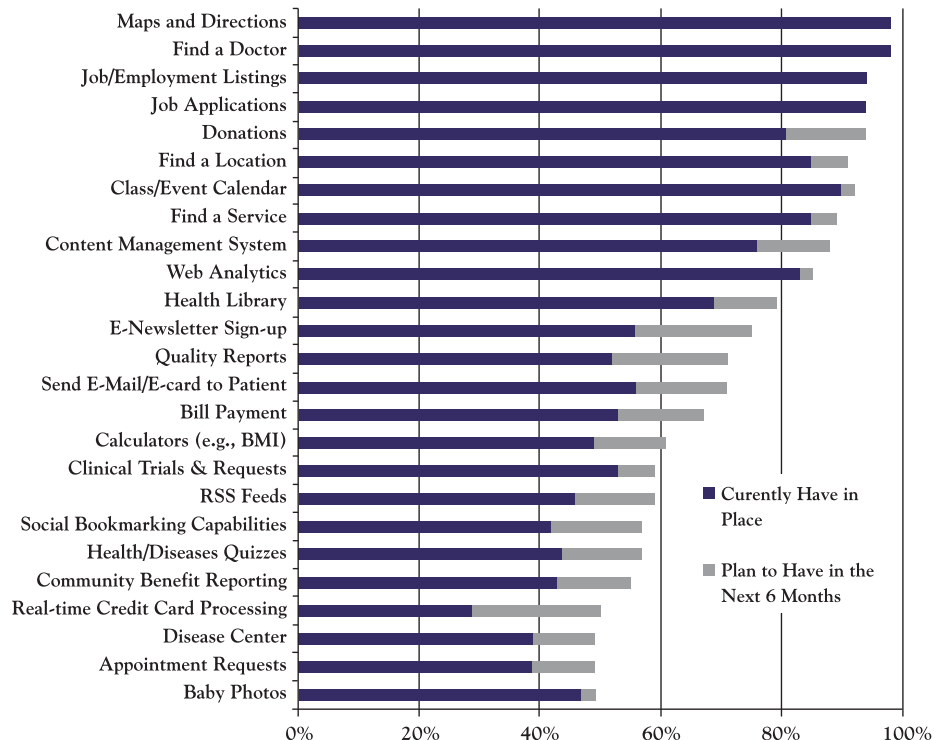
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began to have a purpose: to improve patient engagement and convert site visitors to patients. For example, site content encouraged visitors reading about diabetes to sign up for a diabetes management class, and visitors researching doctors were able to make an appointment.

During this time marketers refocused the goals of the hospital website, transforming it from a platform used to provide information into a tool that gets visitors to take action. Websites stopped being a one-way communication channel and became a way to help patients build a relationship with the hospital.

Figure 1. Top 25 Hospital & Health System Website Features (N=70)



Source: Geonetric's eHealth Insights Benchmarking Survey, May 2010.

The Patient-centric Website Today

With a user-focused foundation in place, hospital marketers now look at the website as part of the patient care experience. Patients deal with their diseases long before and after their visit to an actual facility. Healthcare organizations are better able than ever before to support those before-and-after needs by using online solutions. Specifically, sites:

- **Make the experience more personal.** Many organizations are expanding their current web presences and adding elements of a patient portal—technology that provides a more personalized online relationship. This allows users to sign in securely and communicate with the hospital, schedule appointments, obtain lab results, renew prescriptions, and review discharge papers.
- **Provide a vehicle for communication.** Five years ago, the health-care field was barely talking about blogs, and Twitter wasn't even

born yet. Today, social media has exploded, and healthcare has effectively used many Web 2.0 tools to connect with patients. Healthcare marketers are learning how to use social media successfully—especially, how to listen and respond to the conversations taking place on the Internet.

- **Achieve a return on investment.** Sites of the past were more concerned about providing a service to health consumers than on realizing business value. Today's healthcare marketers think more strategically about online objectives and how they are connected to the hospital's organizational goals. This includes implementing functionality, like preregistration, that helps reduce staff resources and associated costs, or implementing search engine marketing campaigns that drive revenue for service lines.

There has been a shift in the field's willingness to view the healthcare experience from the health consumer's perspective instead of the provider's. It *does* matter if a patient can preregister online. It *does* matter how long a patient is on hold. These interactions affect the overall experience just as dramatically as the interactions that take place in the facility.

The Patient-centric Website of the Future

Today healthcare marketers are embracing the opportunity to help patients take a more active role in managing their health before and after in-person interactions. In the future, patients will use the Internet not only to research care providers and options, but also to interact with their care team for disease management, coaching, and even diagnosis.

Online technologies provide a great opportunity to improve care delivery, reduce costs, and enhance the healthcare experience for patients. They can be a competitive differentiator for leaders in this space. This translates into patient-centric websites of the future that will:

- **Make interactions even easier.** It's one thing to have a portal; it's another to have a portal patients use. To improve user adoption rates, patient portals of the future will offer features of convenience: forms that prefill automatically from hospital records and allow patients to save information, calendars that track appointments and procedures for the entire family in one place, and information from the patient's medical records.
- **Improve chronic condition management.** As the recent healthcare reform debate has revealed, the percentage of healthcare costs attributed to caring for patients with chronic conditions is staggering. To help patients better manage their conditions, more organizations will be investing in technologies like electronic medical records, decision support functionality, and portals that will allow information to flow back and forth securely between the patient and the doctor.

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Key Genesis Website Functionality Over the Years

Genesis Health System in Davenport, IA, has aggressively used online technologies to educate, inform, and engage its patients and visitors. With a focus on personalizing the e-health experience and improving communication between its visitors and the organization, Genesis has continually integrated patient-driven features into its site and measured the return. The following timeline presents a snapshot of Genesis' online efforts.

- **1998:** Genesis launches its website.
- **2003:** Genesis relaunches its website using a web content management system (CMS).
- **2004:** Genesis becomes one of the first organizations to launch a healthcare blog authored by a patient. The blog promotes Genesis' bariatric program. In the next several years, Genesis attributes 81 patients, representing more than \$900,000 in revenue, exclusively to the blog, with many more bariatric patients influenced in their decision to receive services.
- **2004:** Genesis, a very early adopter of portals, launches its first patient portal. The portal, provided by its EMR vendor, did not perform up to expectations, gaining fewer than 1,000 users in its five-year life span.
- **2007:** Genesis deploys online bill payment. Since then, the system has received more than 72,000 payments online, representing \$10.3 million in online payments and an estimated \$216,000 in transactional savings.
- **2007:** Genesis launches a calendar of events. The system has received 1,295 registrations through its website and more than \$26,000 in event fees. Downstream services revenue from these classes is estimated at \$3.95 million.
- **2009:** Genesis deploys online preregistration. In the first six months, Genesis receives 250 online registrations and reduces staff time by 50 percent, partly as a result of an 80 percent reduction in callbacks about illegible data and a 50 percent reduction in callbacks about incomplete information.
- **2009:** Genesis launches a new patient portal focused on the user experience. More than 28,000 accounts have been created.
- **2010:** Genesis runs an online campaign, using both search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing, for its oncology services. A total of 10 oncology patients with various cancers have received services as a result of this campaign. Total revenues from these patients are estimated at \$400,000 once treatment is completed.

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- **Allow patients to manage healthcare almost exclusively online.** With the vision of a centralized, coordinated care delivery system in the works, future hospital websites have the opportunity to become a hub for managing and delivering healthcare. The patient can drive the relationship, with the hospital and providers offering support along the way. Advanced transactional capabilities, such as e-visits, will be added, allowing more interactions to take place exclusively online.

Checklist: Make Your Website More Patient-centric

Things you should be doing already:

- Arrange site content in patient terms, not according to your organization's departmental structure.
- Cross-promote site content. Assume every page is the first page a visitor sees. Think about the other site information or functionality that visitor will want to see next, and create those links.
- Add site functionality for the purpose of moving site visitors from browsers to patients. Create interest in services with risk assessments and screenings, and allow site visitors to request information or appointments at key points throughout the site. For the most widely adopted website capabilities, see Figure 1.


Things you should start today:

- ! Implement a patient portal that connects patients to the organization and their care team. Use the information you have about each patient to promote relevant information and services. Streamline online transactions, such as preregistration for visits.
- ! Utilize social media. Begin to discuss health topics and your organization in social media, where health searchers spend their time.
- ! Implement an analytics program. Review site traffic information and track transactions. Capture the services visitors receive, and connect online activities to patient revenues.

Things to plan for:

- ! Implement secure messaging between patients and care teams.
- ! Allow patients with chronic conditions to log their daily progress in a diary that can be monitored by their care team. Use rules to notify both patients and their care team if an intervention is clearly required.
- ! Begin (or plan for) e-visits. Encourage online collaboration between patients and their care teams. E-visits will require the participation of many parties, including payers. You can start making the cultural changes required for e-visits by encouraging care providers to work more with patients online.

There will be a definite blurring of the lines in the future; care won't be so easily defined as taking place before, during, or after a hospital visit. Patients will be engaging with their care teams more frequently and working more collaboratively throughout the course of their illness and recovery. After all, that's the goal of building patient-centric technologies—improving outcomes, improving care, and, most important, improving health.

To learn more on our thoughts on patient-centric websites and where we see the future heading, attend our presentation "The Patient-Centric Web: Then and Now" at SHSMD's Annual Conference in September. 

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SHSMD Datebook

July 19–30

SHSMD U online course: "Building an Effective Physician Referral Strategy," with Carolyn Merriman, Laurie Slater, and Jill Stratton

July 30

Deadline for early-bird Annual Conference registration

August 18

Cutoff date for reservations at the Hyatt Regency Chicago (1.888.421.1442)

September 8

SHSMD U webcast: "Nontraditional Marketing: Small Budget, Big Impact," with Beverly Ingle and Michael Zucker (no fee for SHSMD members)

September 12–15

"Connections 2010: Healthcare on the Winds of Change," The SHSMD Annual Educational Conference and Exhibits, Hyatt Regency Chicago, Chicago, IL

Ongoing

SHSMD U webcast archives

For more information on these and other professional development opportunities, go to shsmd.org and click on the SHSMD U tab. For more information on the 2010 Annual Conference, click on the Annual Conference tab.