

You Are What You Post

5 Tips for Cultivating Content that Reflects Your Brand

The marketing team at Henry Ford Health System is using digital content—from social media messaging to blog posts—to engage with consumers and drive online traffic.

By Brooke Hess and Emily Stieber

When consumers visit your Facebook page or website, is what they see and read representative of the experience they have in your hospital or clinic? As marketers and communicators, we know the importance of creating engaging online content and using the tools of social media to promote service lines and enhance brand awareness. But the day-to-day challenge of achieving those objectives can be daunting.

The pressure to post frequently can sometimes overwhelm the need to ensure that the content is high quality, on brand, and focused on the key performance indicators that your leadership team is using to evaluate success.

In our roles at Detroit-based Henry Ford Health System—which includes eight hospitals, 29 outpatient centers, and a 1,200-member employed physician group—our goal is to strategically use social media messaging, health and wellness blog posts, and other digital communications to tell the story of the Henry Ford brand. For us, that means honing in on the brand attributes that exemplify who we are for our patients and community: confident, experienced, innovative, and, above all, providers of individualized care for each of our patients.

Here are our tips for making digital communications work for your brand:

1 Choose topics or posts based on the consumer's perspective.

The main tenet of our brand platform is that we are completely focused on every patient's

needs and wants. So, why would we waste their time or clog up their Facebook newsfeed with information that is not relevant to them? As keepers of the brand, sometimes we must either say no to requests for posts that other departments submit because the content is too promotional or internally focused, or we must work with them to find a creative way to modify the post to make the angle more interesting.

How do you know when your message is relevant? One tactic we have employed is conducting short online surveys among consumers, asking them about topics they'd like to learn more about. We use that feedback to help guide editorial decisions.

We also test different types of blog posts and social messages, and then observe what performs well and what doesn't.

Finally, we trust our instincts. We put ourselves in the mindset of the consumer and do a reason-check.

2 Develop guidelines and tools for consistency.

This can be a huge challenge. Therefore, it helps to develop clear expectations for tone, voice, style, and imagery. Like many organizations, we have an overarching brand style guide that outlines our design principles and rules for logo usage, as well as direction for our writing style. In addition to photo templates and recommendations for choosing images that fit our brand, we also developed a social media style guide that provides direction for word choices, abbreviations, and other writing tips for effective communications.

These tools make it easier for our entire team to contribute to the many social channels we use while still maintaining a unified brand. We reiterate the standards often, as it may take a while for people to adopt them consistently.

3 Measure what matters.

Don't get caught in "analysis paralysis." There is an endless amount of data

you could collect about your social and digital marketing efforts. Choose a small number of key metrics tied to your strategic goals and measure those. We found that understanding what our leadership is measuring operationally has helped us determine which metrics to highlight. For example, if growth is an organization goal, it's likely more important to track conversions rather than total reach or impressions. Making a conversion, such as a prospective patient filling out a form or calling to make an appointment, can directly impact revenue.

To monitor these metrics as efficiently as possible, we have set up dashboards that allow our team to focus on the metrics that matter the most. This simplifies our efforts and helps others learn to better understand and measure data. When appropriate, we send these reports to clients, leadership, colleagues, and key stakeholders within the health system to underscore the value of our work.

We also differentiate between ongoing analytics (which track our continual progress and how we are performing month-to-month) and campaign analytics (which have a clear beginning and end date). It is important to measure both and know they are not necessarily comparable.

4 Leverage your team and share content.

Share and repurpose content on as many channels as possible. Our marketing and communications team members are all working hard, but there are many messages to tackle. Without coordination and sharing, many of us would be doing duplicate work.

To move us out of the silos we had fallen into, we now hold a weekly "content huddle" to share what's happening across the department and make content connections between team members. For example,

during flu season, our marketing team is busy promoting our primary care service line and the availability of walk-in flu shots through clinic displays, digital advertising, and other tactics. Our internal communications team is working on intranet stories, e-mails, and messaging for leaders to remind employees to get their flu shots. Our media team is fielding calls from the media and producing videos spotlighting our infectious disease experts.

By coordinating with each other, we can take available content and tweak it for the unique audience or medium. The talking points for the media interview can be turned into a blog post, which can then be shared on Facebook. A handout we use to reassure patients about flu shot safety can be repurposed for an employee e-mail or turned into an infographic for Pinterest. Stretch every piece of content in as many ways as you can.

5 Don't be afraid to experiment and have fun.

It's OK to fail. In fact, it's inevitable. You learn by trying different types of posts and figuring out what works best with your audience. Digital communications is evolving quickly, and the only way to succeed is to experiment.

This means that not every post needs to be focused on growing volume or news about your health system. We also need to engage our audience and reflect our brand attributes in unique ways. Our mix of posts has included highlighting our community spirit with cool photos of Detroit from our archives; sharing inspirational quotes on innovation from our founder Henry Ford; and featuring the story of a patient's unique experience with us.

Staying true to your brand is no small feat. These five key steps have enabled us to remain focused on the fast-paced, evolving healthcare field. While what works for each

organization will inevitably vary, developing a roadmap for your digital strategy that reflects your brand is imperative.

To learn more, check out our online course entitled "Producing Engaging Online Content Through Social Media," part of the SHSMD U Digital Series, at shsmd.org/education.

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