

SHSMD26 CONNECTIONS

Health Care Marketing, Strategy & Communications

American Hospital Association Conference
September 27-29 ⚓ Baltimore

From Acquisition to Acceptance: Building Awareness & Preference in New Communities

Cody Albert, Regional Marketing Advisor

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Have you been part of a hospital acquisition or integration?

Acquiring side. Acquired side.

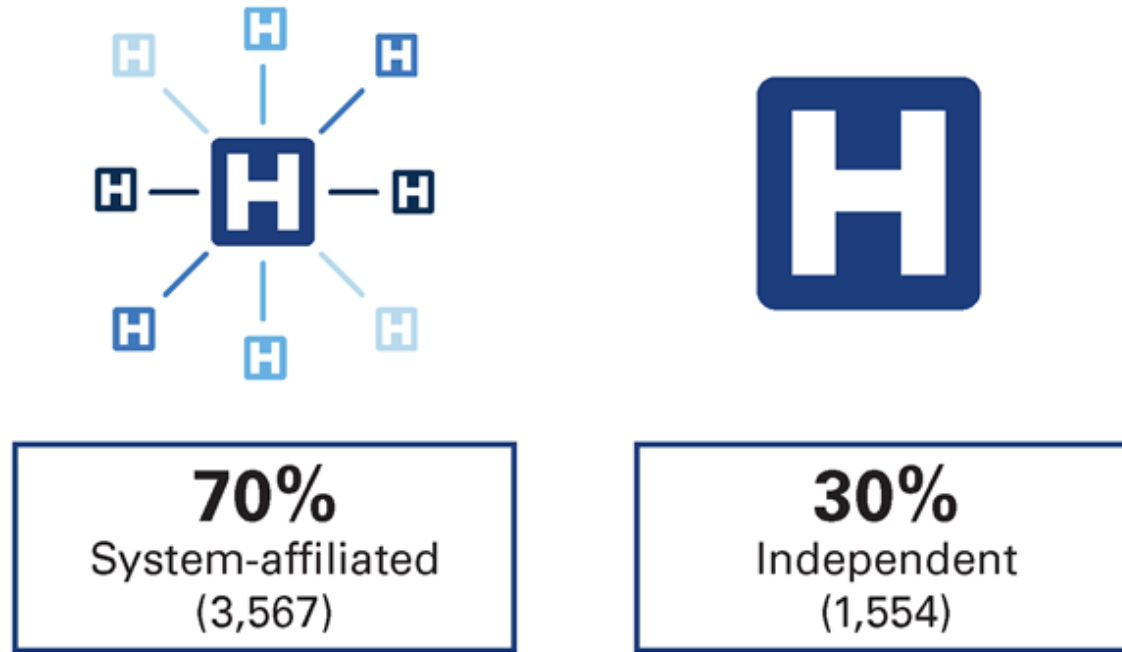
Do you expect this work in the next three years?

Why This Matters Now

Healthcare consolidation is accelerating, yet acquisition does not automatically create trust, preference or growth.

Fast Facts on U.S. Hospitals, 2026

Two-thirds of Community Hospitals are System-affiliated



Community Hospitals by System-affiliated vs Independent (Total 5,121), FY 2024

Source: American Hospital Association. Fast Facts on U.S. Hospitals, 2026,
<https://www.aha.org/statistics/fast-facts-us-hospitals>
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Six integrations. Two perspectives. We've been on both sides.



2014 Mansfield Hospital
2014 Shelby Hospital



2019 Berger Hospital
2023 Southeastern Medical Center
2023 Van Wert Hospital
2025 Morrow County Hospital



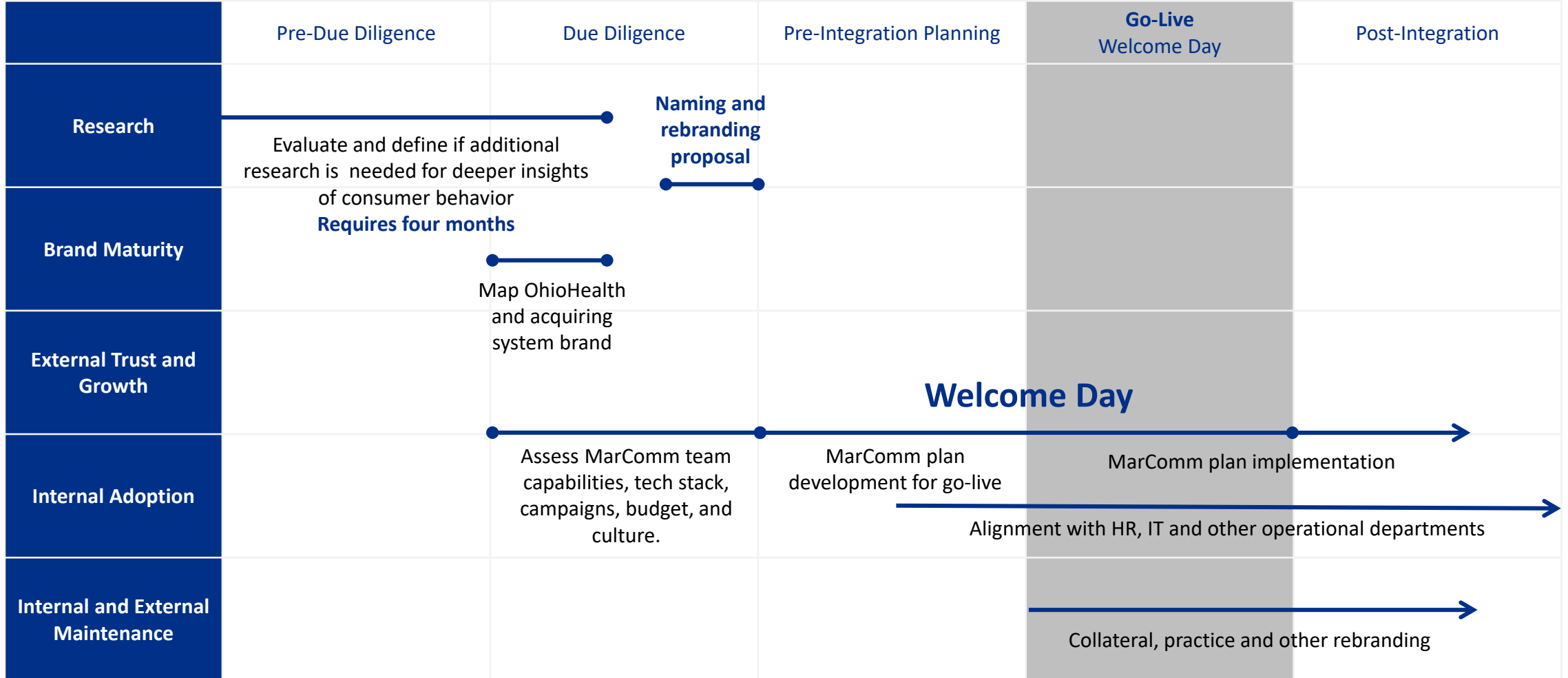
Brand Awareness & Timing Dynamics

Year	Location	Previous Relationship	OhioHealth Brand Awareness	Integration Timing	Staffed Beds
2014	Mansfield Hospital	None	Low	5 years	257
2014	Shelby Hospital	None	Low	5 years	25
2019	Berger Hospital	Strategic Partners 2015 to 2019	High	3 years	83
2023	Southeastern Medical Center	Managed 2018 to 2023	High	2 years	86
2023	Van Wert Hospital	None	Low	2 years	28
2025	Morrow County Hospital	Managed 1984 to 2025	High	2 years	25

Acquisition is an event.

Acceptance is the outcome between.

Research and Transaction	Internal Adoption	External Trust and Growth	Internal and External Maintenance
Research Gain market and audience intelligence: - Existing brand - Consumer & CRM - Digital - Associate engagement Brand Maturity Map the baseline for both brands: - Brand equity - System familiarity - Preference & loyalty - Readiness for change	Internal Brand Critical that both systems work together to blend voice and reach audiences. - Understand similarities and differences - Review engagement data - Prepare and share messaging - Introduce the feel and expectations of the acquired system - Use existing communication channels of acquired system; gradually transition to acquiring system's channels	External Brand Introduce the acquiring brand to while protecting existing local trust. Define: - Messaging - Timing - Channels - Naming - Digital presence - Advertising - Community activation	Post-integration Measure how brand understanding and acceptance develop after go-live and adjust the strategy accordingly. Track: - Awareness - Preference - Sentiment - Engagement



Research and Transaction

Start with the market, not the brand.

Before introducing the system brand, diagnose the market by assessing:

External

- + Brand preference
- + Local loyalty
- + Patient behavior
- + Community sentiment
- + Digital and search behavior
- + Competitive dynamics

Internal

- + Internal culture
- + Readiness for change and change tolerance
- + Critical relationships and dynamics
- + Communication channels
- + Similarities and differences

Prescribe the strategy based on the health system and the community.

Research Workstream Data



Quantitative

NRC
CRM

Brand Health Metrics
Baseline



Qualitative

Community Leader
Community Member

Positive, Neutral, Negative
Uncovers the Truth and Realities

Research and Transaction



Van Wert Hospital

Two Hours from Riverside
Private transaction
Relationship started at RFP
Outside of our primary DMA

Brand Starting point:
0% Top-of-mind Awareness
0% Preference



Morrow County Hospital

45 minutes from Riverside
Public transaction
Managed the hospital since 1984
Within our primary DMA

Brand Starting point:
72% Top-of-mind Awareness
48% Preference

The first questions are emotional.

When a hospital joins a system, people ask:

Will this still be our hospital?

Can I keep my doctor?

Are services staying local?

How will this impact jobs?

Will decisions still feel local?

Is this better for us, or just bigger?

The first barrier is not awareness. It is uncertainty.

Clarify what changes and what does not.

What changes now.

Joint messaging alignment, leadership visibility, and brand introduction.

What changes later.

Signage, web migration, benefits, service growth, and operational systems (i.e. policies and IT systems).

What does not change.

Local care teams, community commitment, and patient relationships.

Ambiguity creates the rumor mill and an us vs them mentality.



90-Day Playbook.

More than an event.

Pre-Transaction

Welcome Day

Leader rounding

Manager talking points

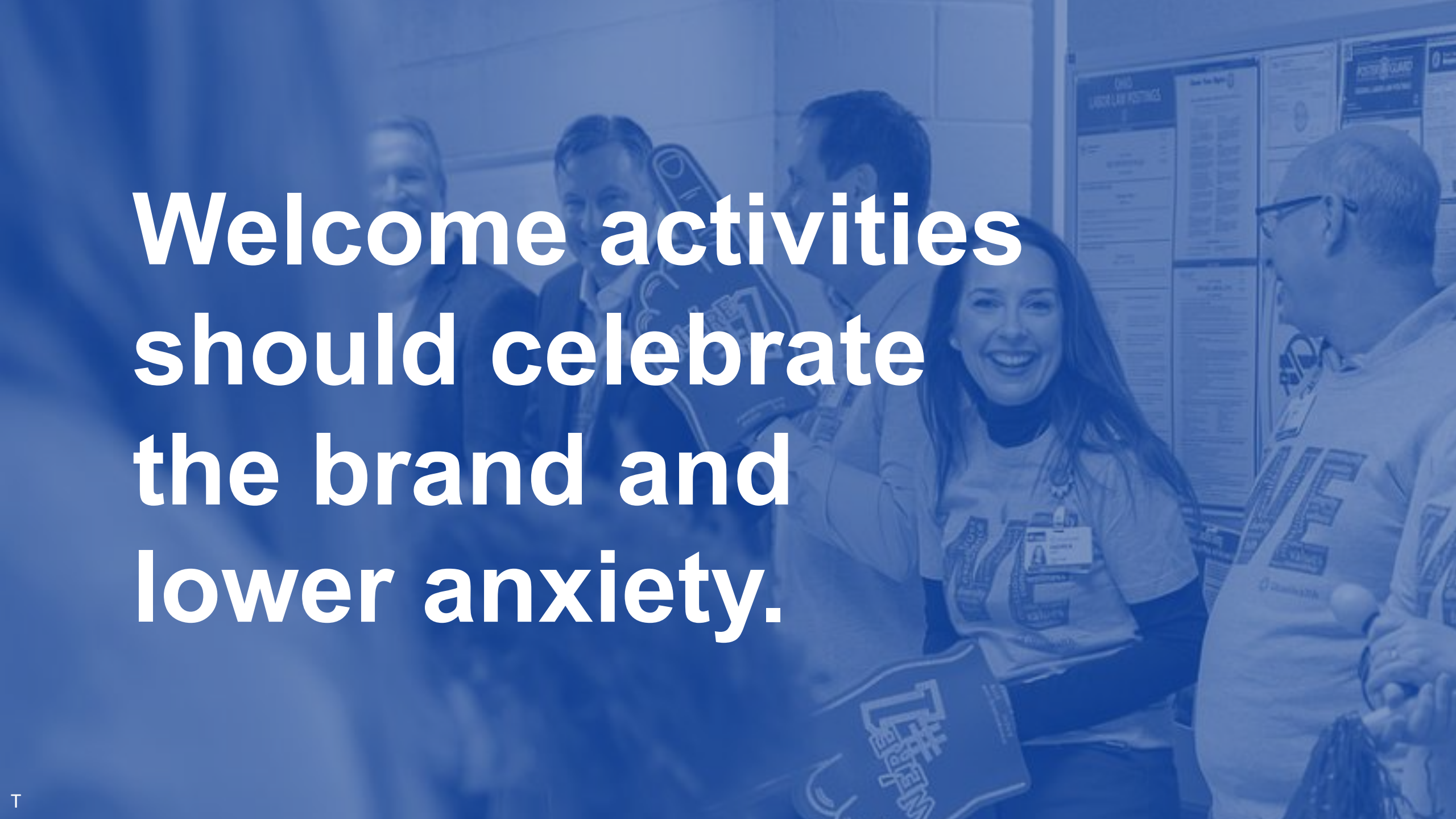
Integration FAQs

Local media plan

Social listening

Website updates

Associate communication

A group of people, including men and women, are smiling and interacting in a hallway. The image is overlaid with a blue filter. In the background, there are posters on the wall, one of which is titled "OHIO LABOR LAW POSTINGS".

**Welcome activities
should celebrate
the brand and
lower anxiety.**

Research and Transaction
Internal Adoption
External Trust and Growth

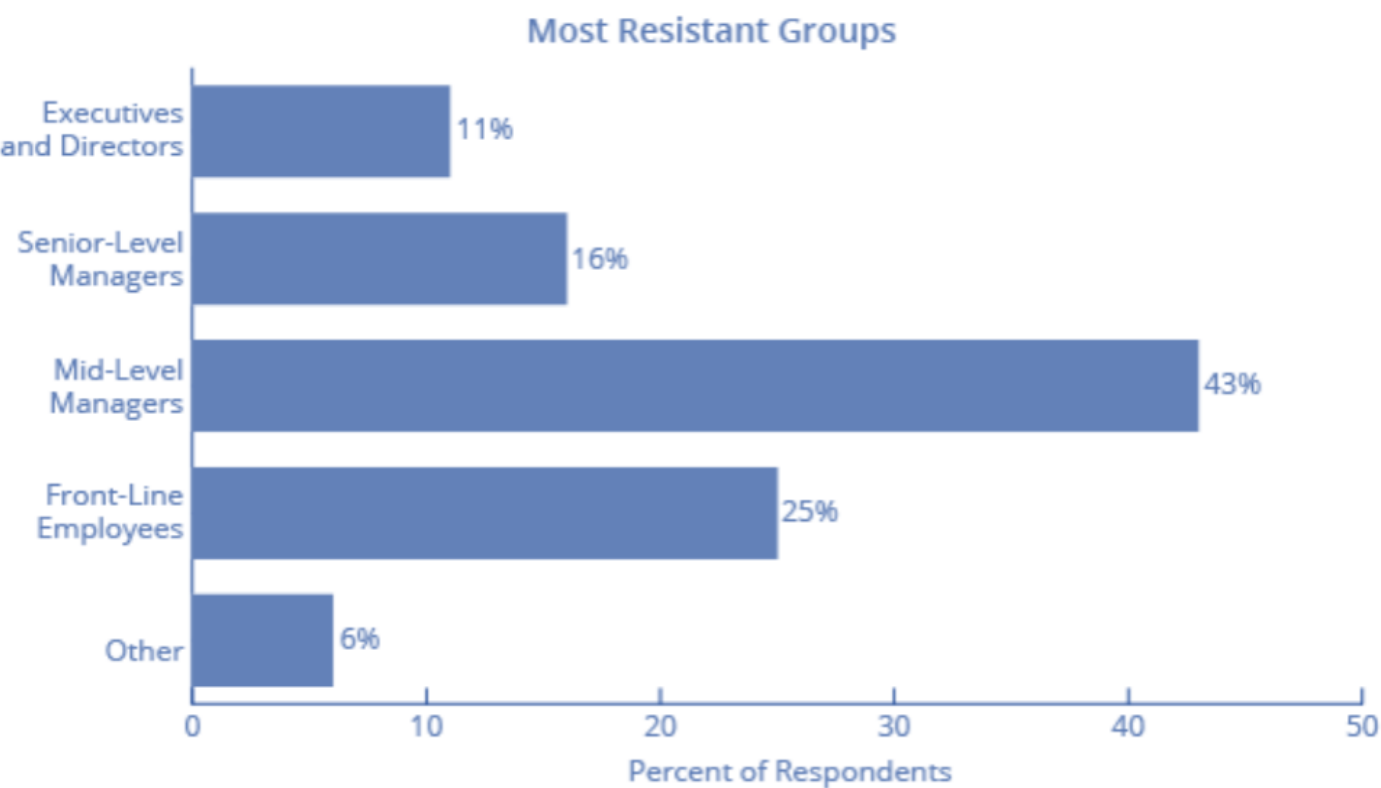
The community will not believe a story associates cannot tell.

Internal clarity must come before external credibility.

Leaders, associates and physicians need to understand:

- + Why this is happening
- + What it means for them
- + What they should do (or say)
- + The reason
- + The impact
- + The timeline
- + The permission to ask questions

Who needs the most support during the transition?



Equip the people to reinforce the message.

Do not let local leaders invent the integration story.

Equip them with:

- + Elevator speech
- + Leader talking points and FAQ
- + Acquiring system's jargon
- + Integration timeline

Give leaders a voice. Weave their institutional knowledge into messaging.

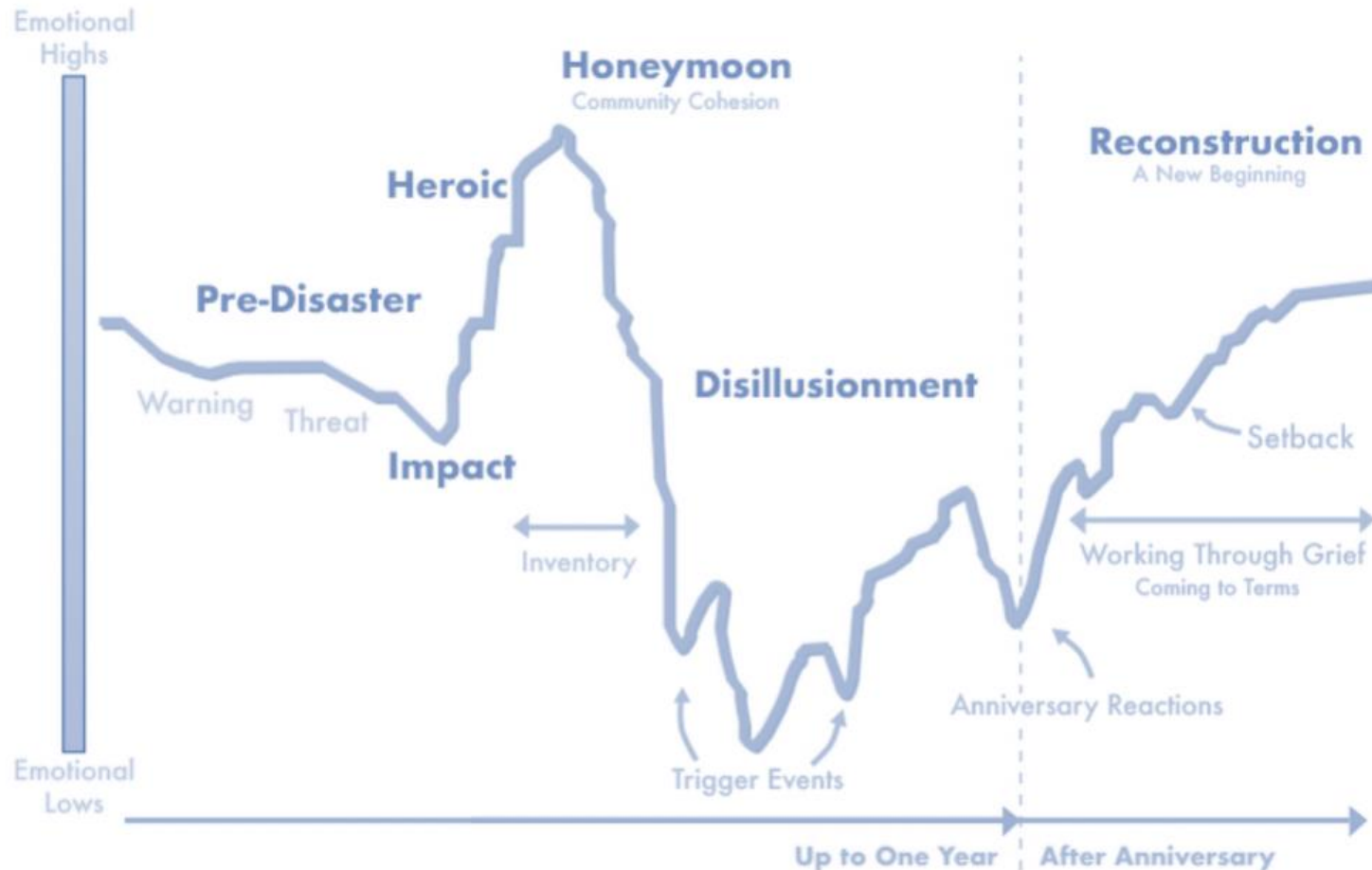
Build trust through relationship building and consistent messages.

There are two sides to every integration.

Acquiring Brand	Acquired Brand
Welcome	Understand
Explain	Advocate
Listen	Adapt
Support	Engage
Invest	Trust
Both must have patience.	

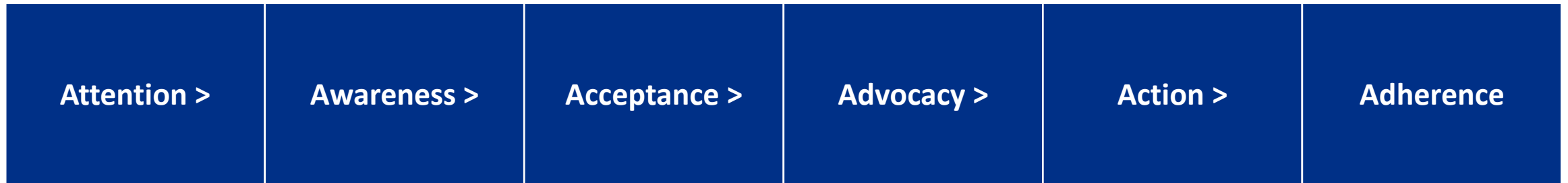
Integration succeeds when both sides are aligned with how they see themselves in the future state.

There will be ups and downs. Trust the process.



Source: https://emilms.fema.gov/is_2905/groups/92.html

Internal brand adoption is a journey.



Internal Adoption

Attention

Noticing the brand promise.

Display mission, vision, and values.

Awareness

Understanding the brand promise.

Share how to live the mission, vision, and values.

**WE
BELIEVE**

Internal Adoption

Acceptance

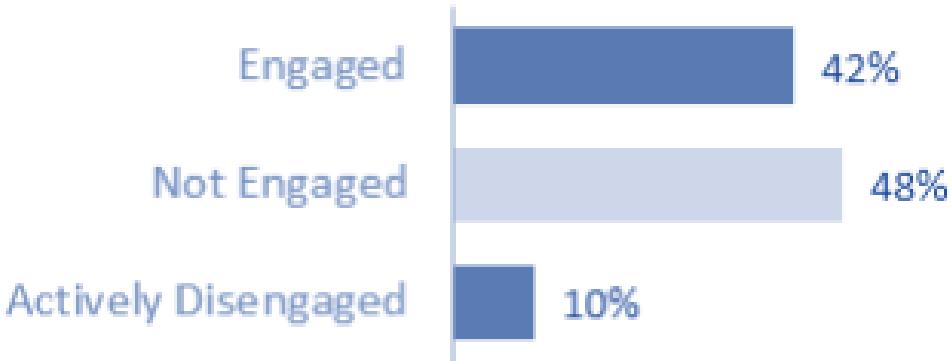
Believing in the brand promise.

I identify with it and accept it.

Segmenting into brand ambassadors (engaged) and antagonists (actively disengaged).

Gallup Engagement Index (engaged, not engaged, actively disengaged)

ENGAGEMENT INDEX



Internal Adoption

Advocacy

Believing that they are positively affecting someone or some cause.

Feeling that the strategy is part of their work.

Gallup Engagement Survey Question 8: The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important

Internal Adoption

Action

Knowing what to do to deliver on the brand promise.

Quality metrics, Press Ganey results, DAISY awards and Patient Experience awards

Adherence

Reinforcing and supporting the brand by creating the right environment, culture, recognition, systems and processes.



Internal Adoption

Culture before campaigns.

If people feel respected, they can advocate.
If people feel erased, they resist.

Build a bond by:

- + Connecting to the mission and shared values
- + Being as transparent as you can
- + Honoring the past
- + Recognizing what will stay the same
- + Acknowledging that change isn't easy
- + Sharing accomplishments and reminding of progress

Brand acceptance starts with respect.



Research and Transaction
Internal Adoption
External Trust and Growth

Acceptance is earned.

Acceptance happens when the associates and community **experience value.**

- + Not when the announcement is made
- + Not when the logo changes
- + Not when the website is updated
- + Not when the campaign launches

Brand promise is more than words. It's an experience.

Local identity and system strength.

We are not replacing your hospital.

We are strengthening it.

Preserve	Introduce
Local trust Local relationships Local relevance	System access Clinical depth Brand credibility Operational support Growth investment

The strongest message is local confidence backed by system strength.

Activate the brand across channels.

Brand acceptance is built through connected touchpoints

Connected touchpoints

+ Advertising, Website, Search, Social, Email, Direct, Media Relations, Community Events

Every channel should answer the same question:
“Why is this good for our community?”

A photograph of an outdoor event for Mission Mountain Outfitters, overlaid with a blue tint. In the foreground, a wooden crate with the company logo sits on the ground. Behind it, a large tent is set up, and a wooden signpost on the left points to 'MISSION MOUNTAIN', 'CANTEN', 'CAMPFIRE', and 'ENTER'. To the right, a person stands near a sign that says 'BASE CAMP'. The background shows more tents and trees under a cloudy sky.

The Integration Playbook: What We Would Teach Others.

The Integration Playbook: What We Would Teach Others.

What we would repeat.

Lead with
culture.

Conduct
research early.

Localize and
align messaging.

Prepare leaders.

The Integration Playbook: What We Would Teach Others.

What we would improve.

Earlier access to data.

Post-integration measurement.

Better distinction between welcome and long-term adoption.

Focus on acceptance throughout the transaction.

The Integration Playbook: What We Would Teach Others.

Three key
takeaways.

**Build internal
belief before
expecting
external trust.**

The Integration Playbook: What We Would Teach Others.

Three key
takeaways.

**Diagnose the
market before
prescribing the
brand strategy.**

The Integration Playbook: What We Would Teach Others.

Three key
takeaways.

**Standardize the
framework for
rapid
deployment.**

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Questions?

Please be sure to complete the session evaluation on the mobile app!



Biography

Cody Albert

Advisor, Regional Marketing
OhioHealth

Cody Albert serves as an Advisor of Regional Marketing at OhioHealth, supporting the system's rural hospitals and newly acquired facilities. He leads strategies that build awareness and preference during early integration, helping communities connect with OhioHealth's mission and services. Known for his collaborative approach, Cody strengthens visibility and engagement across evolving markets while ensuring a smooth introduction to the OhioHealth brand.



Biography

Christina Thompson

Advisor, Communications
OhioHealth

Christina Thompson, M.A., Communications Advisor for OhioHealth, leads communications strategies for large-scale change initiatives that impact 35,000+ associates and providers as well as for newly acquired hospitals. She has a way of distilling complex information into a simplified way for each audience she serves. Her experience, advocacy and empathy provide a bridge to advance operations and culture.



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