

HEALTHCARE MARKETING 2023 TRENDS



In the intro to its 10th annual report, *Healthcare Marketing Trends 2023: Navigating the New Normal*, brand marketer Smith & Jones describes the evolving landscape of healthcare marketing as a “no turning back” scenario, since “COVID’s impact on healthcare systems is here to stay.”

Referencing a variety of dynamics that have surged onto the scene, the firm says the “long-predicted power shift in healthcare” is now the reality:

“Everything we ever knew about consumer behavior and our competition has dramatically changed.”

Such sentiments are also reflected in the title of eMarketer’s August 2022 report, *US Healthcare and Pharma Digital Ad Spending: Adjusting to the New Normal in Digital Engagement*, which outlines some of the challenges healthcare marketers face – including new ways in which patients interact with their providers and the dreaded demise of third-party cookies that lies ahead.

In light of the latter, Salesforce says that 90% of marketers are now taking a different approach to measuring success. And that in our “digital-first era,” two critical priorities marketers are tasked with relate to being the “stewards of customer relationships” while also acting as the “engine fueling growth.”

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In this digital-first era, marketing’s responsibility has evolved around two critical roles: the stewards of customer relationships and the engine fueling growth.

– SALESFORCE

That combo sounds like a pretty daunting task.

But the good news is that as much as things change, some things don’t.

That’s why 2023 should be your year to make sure you have the basics right, so we’ll start with those.

After that, we’ll dig into three major changes to prepare for in 2023; four growing trends expected to have a significant impact; and a long-awaited resource to help measure your results from the Media Rating Council (MRC).

BACK TO BASICS

As things have increasingly opened up over the past year, people have choices again – including how, when, and where they take care of their healthcare needs. Although there are many changes afoot to adapt to, it's important to make sure your marketing foundation is built on what's tried and true.

Here are a few examples of building blocks to consider:

- ✓ Who is your target audience?
- ✓ What does this audience need?
- ✓ Is your branding a fit for your target audience?
- ✓ How can you tailor your content accordingly?
- ✓ Where is this audience?
- ✓ Have you reviewed your marketing channels to make sure they're a fit?
- ✓ Have you matched the right audience to the right platforms?

Those are just a few of the questions that demonstrate the ongoing importance of precision targeting. In this context, audience targeting is key –which is why it's critical to know who your audience is and what that audience needs. For healthcare providers, audience members include patients, prospects, referral sources, and patient influencers – but not necessarily at the same time. Each has different needs and requires a different type of approach.

However, that doesn't mean the content you offer for one can't do double duty and provide a benefit for the other – such as when a provider reads a specialist's post geared toward patients and prospects that demonstrates why that specialist may be a good referral option.

Or when provider-to-provider content pops up in a savvy consumer's online search and impresses the prospect enough to find the office website to schedule an appointment.

Either way, both scenarios start with targeting a specific audience by making the most of marketing basics such as audience segmentation.

If you're a practice, your audience should include:

- Potential patients
- Referral doctors
- Current patients
- Patient influencers (which hopefully include happy patients)

Additionally, as Asana notes in [“16 marketing trends and strategies for 2023,”](#) customers expect a “personalized, tailored experience that speaks directly to their needs,” and marketers need to “understand specific interactions in the customer's entire journey and focus on a complete experience, not a point-in-time campaign.”

In that context, it's important for marketers to have a keen understanding of the patient acquisition journey – which includes the following four stages that can be applied to various healthcare settings:

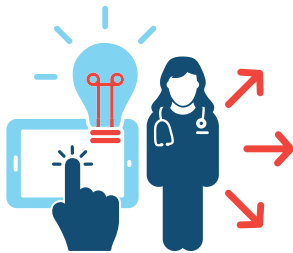
Branding, Engaging, Conversion, and Referrals.



1. BRANDING

Make prospects know you exist with effective branding.

Since branding lays the foundation for the marketing communications process, it's important for healthcare providers to take a comprehensive approach to developing branding collateral to be effectively integrated into the overall marketing strategy. Even more, it's essential to understand the influence of patient experience regarding how a brand is perceived.



2. ENGAGING

Engage prospects with your expertise through digital channels.

Although the digital tools now available have changed everything in the marketing world, the foundational principle of placing the consumer in the center of the marketing strategy remains key. In the healthcare world, that “consumer” is the patient who providers need to deeply understand in order to effectively match their offerings with current needs



3. CONVERSION

Make it easy for prospects to book an appointment.

When a patient is ready to book their appointment, they must be able to find you quickly and easily. That means having a presence on social media, in search results, and through digital advertising.

As far as the scheduling process itself, the more seamless it is, the greater the chances that prospects will convert to patients by booking that critical first appointment. For many patients, that means being able to schedule an appointment online.



4. REFERRALS

Transform your happy patients into brand ambassadors to help create referrals.

In an era in which patients have a growing array of options to meet their healthcare needs, it's more important than ever for providers to adopt an effective digital marketing strategy to both attract and keep them.

THE ONGOING IMPORTANCE OF SEARCH

eMarketer refers to search advertising as “a tried and true lower-funnel tunnel” that “thrives amid uncertainty.” In the [executive summary](#) of its report, U.S. Search Ad Spending 2022, eMarketer describes the sustained importance of this marketing strategy: “These days, search advertising is anything but the shiny new penny. While other formats may claim rising star status, paid search is a bedrock, accounting for more than a quarter of total media spending between general search and the ecommerce channel.”

For healthcare providers, search holds a critical role, since today’s digital consumers who are accustomed to immediate results hop online to find them.

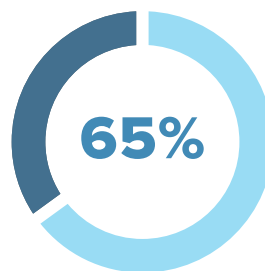
As noted in a [CharityRx survey](#), “Today’s consumers have been conditioned to expect instant answers and solutions, largely as a result of the expediency we’ve grown accustomed to in nearly every aspect of our lives. When it comes to managing one’s health, Americans have embraced this instant gratification mentality by turning to sources of influence online.”

Survey results indicated that among the 2,000 U.S. adults surveyed:

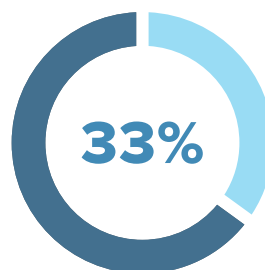
- 65%—“Turn to Google first before consulting their doctor”
- 33%—“Turn to YouTube first before consulting their doctor”
- 37%—“Turn to influencers for health advice because they are easier to access than medical professionals”

That’s a great reminder of the need to ensure your results pop up when a patient or prospect enters “in search of...” for the services and offerings you provide.

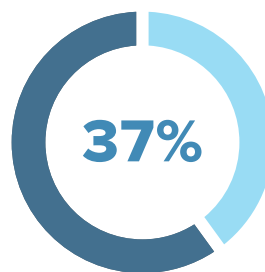
Those are just some of the back-to-basics that are important for healthcare marketers to keep in mind. Next, we’ll dig into the shifting landscape of healthcare marketing that will continue to evolve in 2023.



Search Google before consulting their doctor



Search YouTube before consulting their doctor



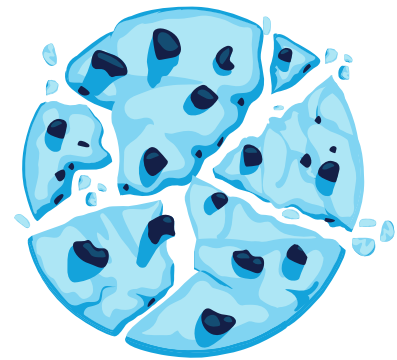
Look to influencers for health advice because they are easier to access than medical professionals

CHANGES AHEAD

As 2023 approaches, we'll hear a lot about what will be changing in the year ahead. The following provides an overview of new changes that are anticipated to help you prepare. For more detail, we encourage you to check out the links and additional related resources.

The Death of the Cookie

In its [August 2022 report](#), eMarketer notes that digital marketers in the healthcare industry are faced with significant challenges in the year ahead.



“If we don’t diversify our approach to the market, soon we’ll be operating by the equivalent of candlelight... The industry risks losing \$10 billion in annual sales – without a serious plan for what happens when everyone’s in the dark.”

– ANGELINA ENG, VICE PRESIDENT
MEASUREMENT AND ATTRIBUTION
PROGRAMMATIC+DATA CENTER
IAB

The executive summary puts it like this: “The pandemic upended everything in healthcare, even advertising. Spending on digital channels surged in 2020 and again in 2021. Now, marketers are grappling with a new landscape where consumers access treatment through video visits, mobile apps, and text messages. But what’s top of mind for healthcare and pharmaceutical marketers wasn’t caused by the pandemic – it’s the impending deprecation of third-party cookies, even after Google postponed its rollout until late 2024. ...”

And though it may be tempting to procrastinate, the Interactive Advertising Bureau’s (IAB) [State of Data Report](#) released in February of 2022 warns about the consequences of doing so.

“IAB’s State of Data Report is raising alarm bells, indicating that advertisers are on the brink of losing their ability to measure advertising campaigns with no industry consensus about what to do next,” according to the press release.

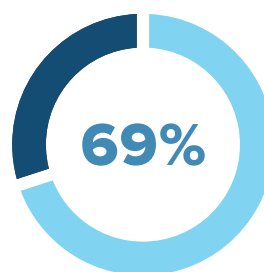
“If we don’t diversify our approach to the market, soon we’ll be operating by the equivalent of candlelight,” said Angelina Eng, Vice President, Measurement and Attribution, Programmatic+Data Center, IAB. “The industry risks losing \$10 billion in annual sales – without a serious plan for what happens when everyone’s in the dark.”

The release notes that IAB commissioned Ipsos to execute a quantitative and qualitative analysis “to examine how privacy legislation, deprecation of third-party cookies/IDs, and cross-media addressability constraints and innovations are impacting advertising measurement.”

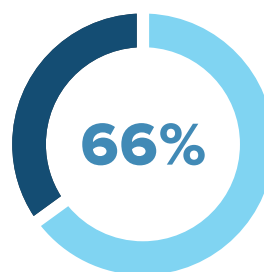
Although “advertisers trust that publishers and ad tech will find workable solutions,” it “simply isn’t happening,” the release said, citing study results:

- “More than two-thirds (69%) of the industry are not increasing their use of AI over last year.”
- “66% are not adjusting their measurement strategies.”
- “While first-party data was what everyone talked about non-stop in 2021, surprisingly it’s spending on third-party data that actually continues to grow. Nearly 60% are not increasing their investment in first-party data.”

According to IAB, “This study found that while nearly 60% of industry leaders expect ad campaign measurement to be impacted by the loss of third-party cookies/IDs, less than half the industry has a real understanding of Google’s Privacy Sandbox (46%), never mind other proposed solutions like The Trade Desk’s Unified ID 2.0, and Microsoft’s Parakeet. Just 15% of ad tech and publishers have adopted IAB’s Open Measurement SDK tech standard signal checks – which are integral to standardized, privacy-compliant video and app measurement.”



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What is GA4 and why is it needed?

When desktops and laptops reigned supreme, Google Analytics – which only measures website activity – was enough to provide the insights businesses needed.

But as smartphones became ubiquitous and the app revolution hit the scene, Google created an additional platform – [Google Analytics for Firebase](#) – to provide insights into user behavior and activity on company apps.

Like many who have both websites and apps, you may be burdened with the need to use both. And even when you do, it might be pretty difficult to capture a comprehensive picture of how users are engaging across your offerings. Plus, there are all the evolving privacy issues that must be taken into consideration.

Here’s [how Google frames it](#): “In today’s measurement landscape, businesses need to navigate new challenges to understand the complex, multi-platform journeys of their customers – all while prioritizing user privacy.”

Enter GA4. ➡

The following snippets from Google describe some of the high-level benefits it provides:

- “...Google Analytics 4 operates across platforms, does not rely exclusively on cookies and uses an event-based data model to deliver user-centric measurement.”
- “...Google Analytics 4 is designed with privacy at its core to provide a better experience for both our customers and their users. It helps businesses meet evolving needs and user expectations, with more comprehensive and granular controls for data collection and usage. Importantly, Google Analytics 4 will also no longer store IP addresses. These solutions and controls are especially necessary in today’s international data privacy landscape, where users are increasingly expecting more privacy protections and control over their data.”
- “Google Analytics 4 has the flexibility to measure many different kinds of data, delivering a strong analytics experience that’s designed for the future. It allows businesses to see unified user journeys across their websites and apps, use Google’s machine learning technology to surface and predict new insights, and most importantly, it’s built to keep up with a changing ecosystem.”

Google says specific benefits include the ability to:

- ☑ ***Understand your customers across touchpoints:*** “Get a complete view of the customer lifecycle with an event-based measurement model that isn’t fragmented by platform or organized into independent sessions. ...”
- ☑ ***Improve ROI with data-driven attribution:*** “Use data-driven attribution to analyze the full impact of your marketing across the customer journey. ...”
- ☑ ***Measure engagement and conversions with business and compliance needs in mind:*** “With new country-level privacy controls, you can manage and minimize the collection of user-level data – like cookies and metadata – while preserving key measurement functionality. ...”
- ☑ ***Get greater value from your data:*** “Machine learning generates sophisticated predictive insights about user behavior and conversions, creates new audiences of users likely to purchase or churn and automatically surfaces critical insights to improve your marketing.”

- ☑ ***Easily activate your insights:*** “Expanded integrations with other Google products, like Google Ads, work across your combined web and app data, making it easy to use Analytics insights to optimize your campaigns.”
- ☑ ***Address your enterprise measurement needs:*** “New sub and roll-up properties in Analytics 360 allow you to customize the structure of your Google Analytics 4 properties to meet data governance needs.”

What’s needed to get ready for GA4?

Since this Google deadline of July 1, 2023 is one that isn’t expected to change, now’s the time to get moving so you can begin building historical data in GA4.

As Google notes, “All standard Universal Analytics properties will stop processing new hits on July 1, 2023, and 360 Universal Analytics properties will stop processing new hits on October 1, 2023. After that, you’ll be able to access your previously processed data in Universal Analytics for at least six months.”

For additional resources, from Google, check out “[Universal Analytics will be going away](#)” and “[Make the switch to Google Analytics 4](#).”

And from one of our own AMG experts, Joshua Dana Swindle, check out “[Google Analytics – Intro to GA4](#).”

If you need support, we’re here to help you understand the changes and help make the transition for you – just [reach out](#) and let us know.

GROWING TRENDS

Although the following trends aren't necessarily new – the momentum they're gathering means they'll likely have a growing impact in the year ahead.

The Rise of Short-Form Video

TikTok continues to enjoy rapid growth, and its influence has created a new space for Instagram reels and other short-form video on all platforms.

As Asana notes, "Video-based content is becoming a key focus area in social media marketing because it can capture a viewer's attention for a longer amount of time compared to static posts. From TikToks to Instagram reels, marketers are using bite-sized videos to drive engagement and increase brand awareness among millennials and Gen Z."

So how can healthcare marketers help ensure more views of their short-form videos?

Here are a few strategies to consider, some of which align with any type of content you create:

- Know your target audience.
- Make sure the video content is relevant to their needs.
- Ensure the platform/channel you're using is what your target audience prefers.
- Tap into your strengths as a provider – including authenticity and compassion.
- Keep it short. The length may be impacted by platform constraints, so be sure to know what those are before creating your masterpiece.
- Consider integrating user-generated content, which is growing in popularity.
- Tap into influencers as appropriate – since their importance is growing, as noted next.

short-form video

- ✓ audience
- ✓ relevance
- ✓ platform/channel
- ✓ authenticity
- ✓ keep it short
- ✓ user-generated content
- ✓ influencers

THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF INFLUENCERS

As [Smith & Jones notes](#), social proof is especially powerful in healthcare because trust is such a big deal—and social media platforms (and others) are fertile ground for happy patients to tell others how wonderful you are.

Just consider the following stats provided in the company's report:

- “Over 80% of buyers recommend brands they follow on social media.”
- “Over 90% of consumers read online reviews before buying.”
- “Over 80% of U.S. shoppers seek referrals from their networks before making purchases of any kind.”

And who are those consumers listening to?

Yep, influencers.

Influencers may include patients and/or family members who've had a great experience with your brand; other healthcare providers who admire your expertise; or someone with a public persona who has a more formal relationship to help tout your offerings.

While respondents also noted that they don't always trust influencers and therefore fact check their endorsements, two interesting stats from the [CharityRx study](#) reveal the growing impact of influencers:

- “Nearly 1 in 5 Americans trust health influencers more than medical professionals in their community.”
- “1 in 5 Americans turn to TikTok before their doctor when seeking treatment for a health condition.”

“While medical experts and influencers are both mostly considered credible due to their accreditations and experience in their designated health field, some of the modern factors that make health influencers unique is their relatability to a shared personal experience or their triumph over a health condition,” CharityRx says. “This is likely why people also tend to turn to health influencers for areas that have more ‘gray area’ around successful treatment options, such as anxiety, weight loss and depression.”

influencers

- ✓ patients
- ✓ family members
- ✓ other healthcare providers
- ✓ public persona

The Challenge from New Healthcare Competitors

Another trend identified in the [Smith & Jones report](#) is the need for healthcare to optimize the experience of patients who are accustomed to rapid everything from the retail world. This is even more important in light of the fact that a number of retailers such as Walmart, Amazon, and even Dollar General are joining CVS and Walgreens by pushing “deeper” into the healthcare space.

“They want to meet the patient’s needs in places where hospitals and health systems lack the resources to do the same,” Smith & Jones says. “Most of these retailers are working aggressively on a variety of multi-channel initiatives including expansions in existing stores, construction of free-standing stores, telehealth, and the delivery of primary care, medical services, lab work, and products that you used to have to go a hospital, doctor’s office, or clinic to access.”

In this context, Smith & Jones lists some of the most important strategies healthcare providers can embrace to remain competitive in this evolving marketplace, including:

- Patient Experience: “Brands are built on their experience, and how well that institution meets expectations and delivers a positive one. ...”
- Authenticity: “Your roots are deeper than retailers. Many patients are hesitant to go all-in on retailers for their healthcare and are skeptical of their motivations. ...”
- Technology: “... As you plan for the years ahead, embrace technology and make it a priority for your organization. Then, implement the wraparound technologies such as the marketing automation ideas we mentioned, and nurture those patient relationships to beat the big box stores at their own game.”

new competitors

- ✓ patient experience
- ✓ authenticity
- ✓ technology

Although many healthcare marketers are still playing catch-up due to the pandemic's upending effect on the industry over the past two years, 2023 promises to be a year for which you should buckle up.

With so many evolving trends to adapt to—as well as the major changes in data access, analytics, and privacy legislation ahead—it can be easy to become overwhelmed.

But, like we said, the good news is that as much as things change, some things don't. And those fundamentals are both the low-hanging fruit that can optimize your efforts—as well as the foundation needed to ensure you remain on solid ground.

Want more good news?

You're not alone.

Advance Healthcare is here to help you adapt to coming changes and make the most of evolving trends.

Reach out and [contact us](#) anytime. We'd love to hear from you.