



Applying the
4 Stages of Patient Acquisition
to Optimize Practice Success



Since patient growth is key to long-term success, it is essential for healthcare providers to embrace effective **patient acquisition and retention strategies**. The indications of an effective strategy in this context extend well beyond the bottom line to the ripple effect created if a provider lacks the patient population needed to keep its doors open.

If this occurs, the impact can be far reaching—from the employees who are at risk of losing their livelihoods to the patients in the community who may face health risks and burdens associated with lack of access to local healthcare services.

When framed in that context, the need for a robust and effective patient acquisition strategy is even more apparent. An important part of such a strategy is the adoption of communication techniques to effectively “engage, inform, and attract current and prospective consumers.”

In a **recent report**, EY describes how current and maturing digital health technologies “will deliver new ways in which to understand and interact with patients, families and caregivers” and cites “participatory health” as a “profoundly disruptive force for change in health care.”

EY notes that increasingly, healthcare consumers engage in “self-service” by conducting online research to find information about health and treatments.

Equipped with that kind of empowerment and the bounty of online health information available in today’s **omnichannel environment**, patients have plenty of choices for finding the





right healthcare provider. As a result, many consumers are transforming the traditional patient acquisition process by engaging with the web through ISO—aka, “In search of...”

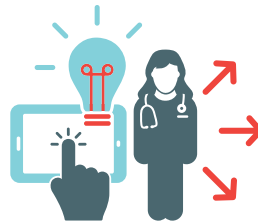
By understanding how prospective patients use digital tools, healthcare providers can integrate this knowledge into strategies that lead to effective patient acquisition. Here, we examine what recent research reveals in this context and how your organization can apply it to the four stages of patient acquisition:

1. BRANDING



Knowing You Exist

2. ENGAGING



Researching Your Expertise

3. CONVERSION



Booking the Appointment

4. REFFERALS



Creating Patient Ambassadors



1. Make sure prospects know you exist with effective branding.

Everyday potential patients are asking their friends, family, and social media contacts for provider recommendations. In that light, will anyone recommend your practice? If they do, will your brand be recognizable?

Branding is defined as “the assignment of names, logos, slogans, and related elements of identity to institutions and their product offerings for the purpose of conveying desired images to target audiences.”



In the healthcare industry, establishing an effective and consistent brand is essential to attracting and keeping new patients. Since branding lays the foundation for the marketing communications process, it is 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 is essential to understand the influence of patient experience regarding how a brand is perceived.



According to Press Ganey research published in *Consumerism: The Role of Patient Experience in Brand Management and Patient Acquisition*, patient experience is “a key predictor of brand loyalty and is more influential than traditional marketing strategies for managing brand perceptions.”

Specific findings revealed:

- ◆ “Patient experience is five times more likely to influence brand loyalty than other marketing strategies.”
- ◆ “The majority of consumers research a physician on the Internet, even after receiving a referral from a primary care provider.”
- ◆ “Consumers specifically seek out and are influenced by patient ratings and reviews.”

Results like those underscore the need for healthcare providers to optimize their branding and online presence and to ensure the availability of credible and positive online reviews.





2. 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.

For instance, a marketing strategy may include various types of digital advertising to increase the visibility of a brand. Once a prospect views and gains interest in learning more, the next step may be to check out online reviews to see what others have to say. An additional option is to search for online articles authored by the provider to assess thought leadership, level of expertise, and willingness to engage with others.

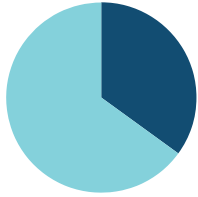
This type of content marketing plays an important role in the patient acquisition process and may include posting informative articles on the provider’s blog or social media channel; and/or creating guest posts for related sites to increase visibility and create backlinks to the provider’s site.

The power of this approach is supported by the EY research highlighted earlier which found that “consumers actively seek health information using the internet to search for general content on health, wellness and healthy living and to research a diagnosis or condition.”

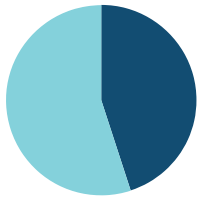




Among survey respondents:



35% reported they “specifically search online for diagnostic or treatment information to discuss with their care provider.”



45% “with an ongoing health condition searched for information to discuss with their care provider.”

Findings like these underscore the opportunity for healthcare providers to engage with prospects searching for information related to their specialty and demonstrate their expertise through a robust online presence.

Utilizing targeted keywords can increase the effectiveness of online outreach efforts to achieve search optimization goals. Additionally, accurate audience segmentation with customized messaging can help to ensure that the right content is delivered to the right audience for maximum effect.

With the tracking ability enabled by digital marketing, those who make use of these tools can easily adjust the approach as needed based on analytics that measure audience response and engagement.



3. Make it easy for prospects to book an appointment to support conversion.

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.

The findings of a survey of 1600 patients published by Doctor.com in *Customer Experience Trends in Healthcare 2020* underscore the need for a robust online presence and positive patient reviews:

- ◆ "Patients use the web 2x as much as referrals to find a doctor."
- ◆ "88% of patients will even read online reviews about a referred provider."
- ◆ "Half of all patients will decide not to see a provider if they have inaccurate or incomplete listings online."



As noted in the report, "Patients are making healthcare decisions long before they step foot into a doctor's office."

However, despite all the digital tools available, feedback also indicated that over 50% of the patients surveyed felt the patient journey was still difficult,



with one of the leading frustrations being “finding enough information about a provider online.”

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, as evidenced in the report: “60% of patients prefer digital scheduling over a phone call.” The report authors note that in their 2018 survey, only 36% of respondents indicated the same.





4. Transform your happy patients into brand ambassadors who help create referrals.

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

Concurring with other sources cited here, recent research from Software Advice indicates the number of people who use online reviews to check out a healthcare provider continues to grow. Key findings from its 2020 survey include:

- ◆ 90% of respondents indicated they use online reviews to evaluate physicians.
- ◆ 71% of respondents indicated online reviews are the “very first step to finding a new doctor.”
- ◆ 43% of respondents indicated they “would go out of their insurance network for a provider with favorable reviews.”

The Doctor.com survey mentioned earlier reported similar results, finding that the majority of respondents made use of online provider reviews—with over 50% indicating they wanted to see 4- or 5-star ratings.

With online dynamics like these in play, it's clear that an effective approach to patient acquisition goes well beyond the initial conversion to an enduring relationship of trust. When that happens, brand loyalty builds to enable patient



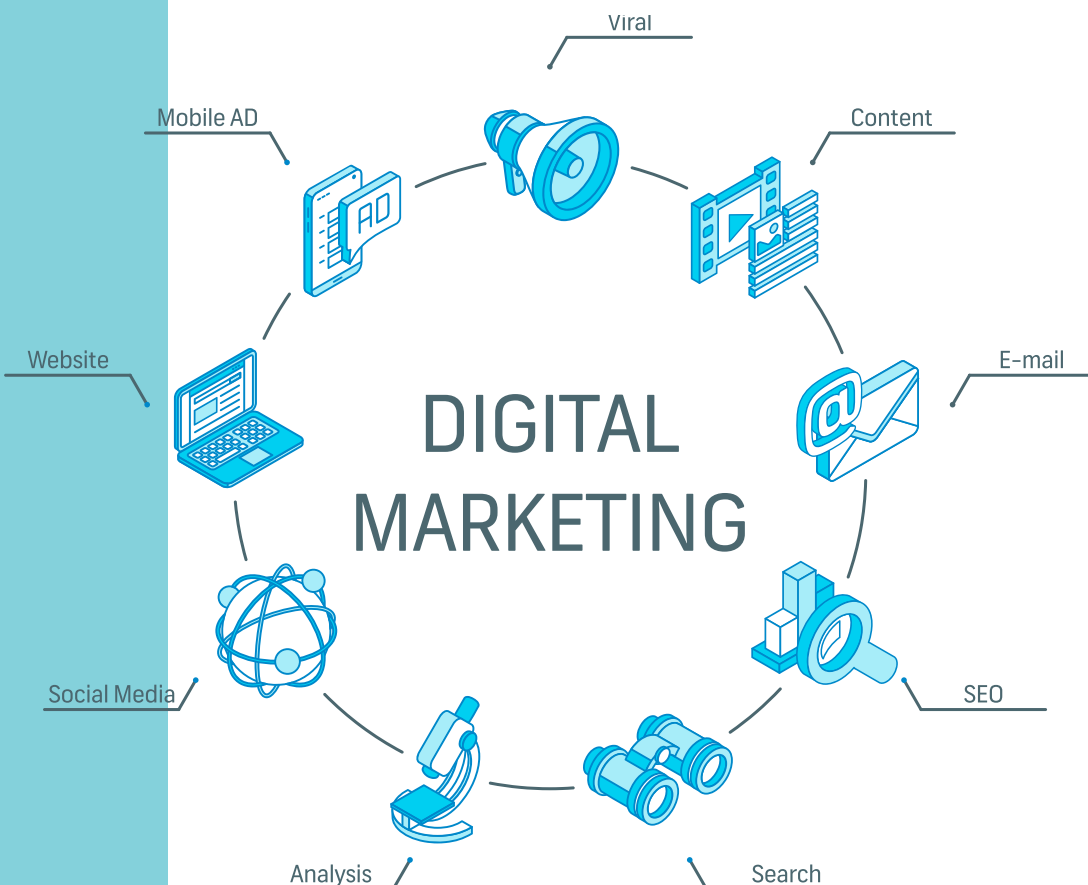


retention and the creation of practice ambassadors who bring in new referrals as they share their satisfaction with family members and friends.

Creating an Effective Patient Acquisition Strategy

With so many factors to consider and digital marketing options to deploy, it can be challenging for providers to know where to start to make the most of the marketing communications mix.

Within this mix, advertising is one method used to engage both current and future patients. After all, it matters little how much expertise and cutting-edge technologies healthcare providers offer if those who can benefit aren't aware of them.



Advertisers have many options for getting a message across, and it's important to plan and implement it in a strategic way to effectively reach the intended audiences.

Along the same lines, the availability of multiple marketing tools and platforms makes it important to ensure that each component deployed in a patient acquisition campaign complements all the others—which is where integrated marketing communications (IMC) comes in.

This approach is essential to present “a cohesive picture to target audiences.” Defined as “the coordination of all of



the marketing communications efforts of an organization for the purpose of ensuring the consistent presentation of promotional messages to target audiences,” IMC helps to prevent fragmentation, wasted resources, and the potential for ineffective outreach.

Since an effective IMC approach requires great attention to detail, healthcare providers often rely on a team of marketing experts who can provide the planning, coordination, and oversight needed to create and monitor the effectiveness of patient acquisition campaigns.

As Laurie and Mortimer note, IMC “is based on the premises of consistency, collegiality and synergy. It requires people to work together, across the client organisation and across the various external stakeholders, so that all brand touch points are integrated, and the customer journey is smooth and effective.”

They also cite research indicating that IMC is largely viewed as “the most effective process to adopt in the present complex multi-channel digital environment” and “there is growing evidence that IMC results in a strong positive impact on brand and financial performance.”

IMC and Advance Healthcare

The importance of IMC to optimize both patient acquisition efforts and marketing ROI underscores the need for a partner with deep marketing expertise; access to cutting-edge technologies; and an extensive network of resources to deploy both.

Advance Healthcare is such a partner.

Through our vast media network, we reach the largest healthcare audience in Alabama.



Our practice marketing efforts enable providers to:

- ◆ Tell their story from a local perspective.
- ◆ Reach more patients through AL.com, Alabama's largest and most trusted local news source.
- ◆ Increase performance through digital ads and sponsored content on AL.com—which drive better results over digital network advertising.
- ◆ Tightly target relevant audiences using HIPAA-compliant patient targeting data.

The potential to reach targeted audiences is underscored by our recent data that reflects the number of procedure-specific patients within the Birmingham area within the time period specified:

Cancer/oncology: 128,167

Cardiac care: 227,878

Corrective eye surgery: 111,094

Cosmetic surgery: 39,276

Dental implants: 6,810

Maternity care: 94,483

Mental healthcare: 146,226

Neurology: 132,343

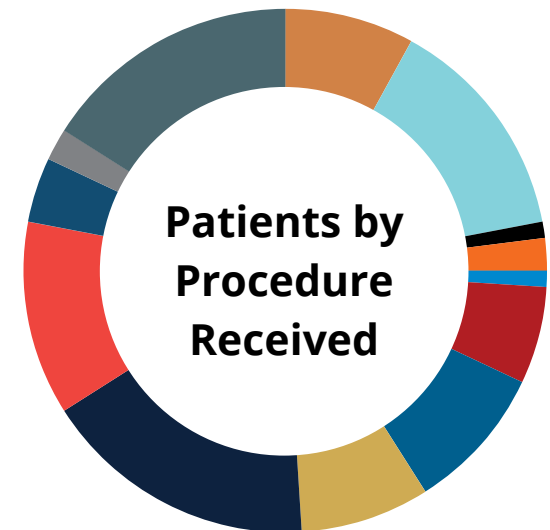
Orthopedics: 259,648

Pediatrics: 191,522

Teeth whitening, veneers, etc: 56,279

Drug abuse, smoking, and more: 28,398

Any overnight stay procedure: 246,585



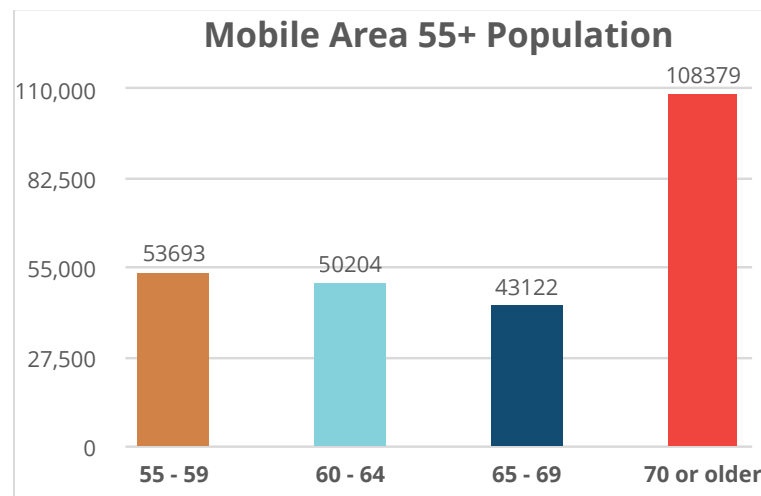
**Market/Release: Birmingham, AL 2020 Release 2 Total (Jul 2019 - Aug 2020), Medical services HHLD received past 3 years (HHLD)*



Perhaps data like that is reflected in the age trends of the population in areas we serve. For instance, here's a sample of this variable in the Mobile region:

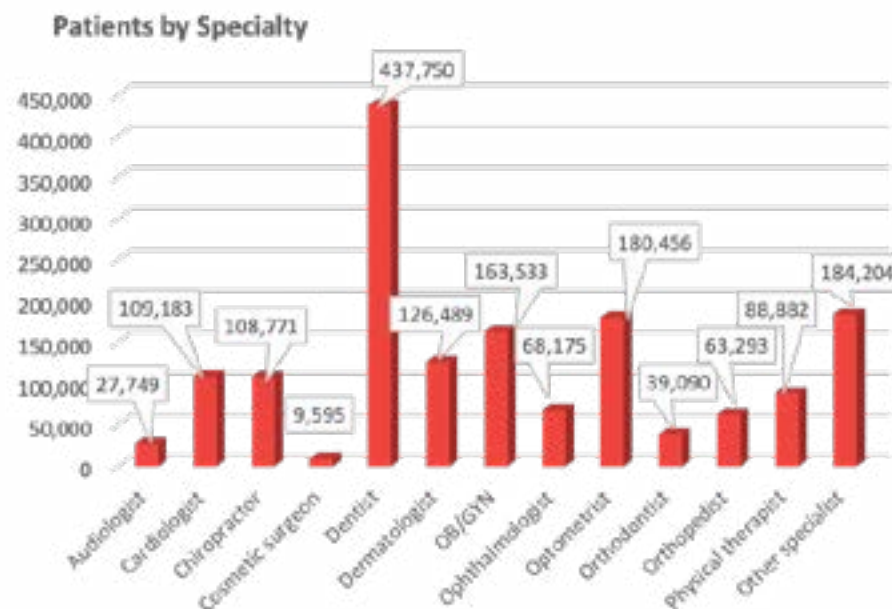
- 70 years of age or older: 108,379
- 65 - 69 years of age: 43,122
- 60 - 64 years of age: 50,204
- 55 - 59 years of age: 53,693

**Market/Release: Mobile, AL/Pensacola, FL 2020 Release 1 Total (Mar 2019 - Mar 2020)\ved*



The graph below reflects the number of procedure-specific patients within the Huntsville area within the time period specified:

- Audiologist: 27,749
- Cardiologist: 109,183
- Chiropractor: 108,771
- Cosmetic surgery: 9,595
- Dentist: 437,750
- Dermatologist: 126,489
- OB/GYN: 163,533
- Ophthalmologist: 68,175
- Optometrist: 180,456
- Orthodontist: 39,090
- Orthopedist: 63,293
- Physical therapist: 88,882
- Other specialist: 184,204



**Market/Release: Huntsville, AL 2020 Fall Total (Spring 2020 - Fall 2020), Specialists used past 12 months*



ADVANCE + HEALTHCARE

Since marketing strategy is unique for every healthcare business, at Advance Healthcare, we develop a healthcare marketing plan through a process that is intimate, unique, and tailored to your needs.

Once we understand your business and your goals, we can build a strategic marketing plan to reach the right patients with compelling creative content and messaging. Your marketing efforts should deliver effective, measurable results—and we have a track record of providing exactly that.

Contact us today to discuss how we can help you devise your healthcare marketing strategy.