



The healthcare sector is going digital

Step 10 in brand development: Online marketing

Step 1: ANALYSIS

Step 2: POSITIONING

Step 3: BRAND ARCHITECTURE

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Step 10: INTERNET

The last article in our Marketing series provides you with an overview of what has become the most important channel of communication in the healthcare sector: The Internet. Communications planning in healthcare facilities can nowadays no longer do without online marketing. An Internet presence, online PR, social media and the like have become a must-have.

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Worldwide, 1.7 billion people have access to the Internet. In Germany, 68% of adults are already online and these do not just include the younger generations. The largest section of users is made up of 40 to 49-year olds. Germans spend almost as much time online as they do in front of the television. This has consequences for communication, especially media planning. Conventional channels of communication such as television, radio and print are taking a back seat. This is a development that the healthcare sector can benefit from. Not only because it has always been restricted in conventional forms of advertising by the German law on advertising medicinal products (Heilmittelwerbegesetz), but also because the information to be conveyed is generally so extensive that it is difficult to pack it into a 30-second commercial. The extent to which health-related topics are popular on the Internet is shown by an internal survey carried out by Google. Search enquiries on medicines, diagnoses, treatments, clinics, etc. occupy second place behind technological matters. According to consultancy firm Manhattan Research, in 2009 a total of 88% of all Internet users obtained information about health-related topics using the Internet. One third of the users look for information about their symptoms before visiting a doctor, while just under 40% do so afterwards. Those questioned stated as their reason for doing so that they wanted to check the information they had been given and receive confirmation from an objective source. The choice of clinic or hospital is also influenced to a great extent via the Internet.

The following six measures must be coordinated with one another as part of a professional online marketing process:

Website

A clinic's website still remains a central component of online marketing. This is where all activities are explained. It is also where the user finds all important information on the company and the goods and services it offers. It not only serves to create patient loyalty and to acquire patients, but also acts as a



source of information for those who refer patients as well as other stakeholders. Unlike print, the website survives on being absolutely up-to-date. Subjects such as new personnel, the publication of quality reports, specialised publications, patient information events or seasonal health topics such as allergies form an important basis for keeping the website consistently relevant. Tracking is needed to find out what pages are frequented most. Click rates can be easily analysed using special assessment tools such as Google Analytics, etracker etc., enabling you to react in a timely fashion to the different needs of your target groups.

Search engine marketing (SEO and SEM)

To make sure that your website is seen and read, it must be easy to find on the Internet. With the help of search engine marketing (SEM), you can generate the corresponding traffic on your website. This is done either by paying for search engine results in Google (Google Ad-Words), Yahoo (Yahoo Search Marketing), Microsoft Network (Microsoft ad Center) or similar, or by carrying out a search engine optimisation on your website (SEO). In both cases, your website will be listed higher in the search engine ranking with the help of specific keywords that refer to relevant content on the site. Providers of search engines provide databases that help to better assess the significance of individual search terms. Internal log file analyses also show what search terms users selected when reaching your website. In the healthcare sector, there is more competition surrounding the individual terms which means that most search terms have a high rate of hits. That is why it is better if you concentrate on a combination of key words. Word combinations make it easier to land in first place. In this way, the services provided are described in more specific terms and users are not led in the wrong direction, thereby ensuring that only those searchers who actually want to reach your website land on it. In general, the key words should focus on the content that sets you apart from the competition. After ascertaining the relevant search terms, the website is optimised accordingly. This does not mean that the individual search terms have to appear on every page. However, make sure that they are used in the titles of those pages with the relevant content, in headings, in the page contents, in file or directory names, in link texts and in the metadata (document information and instructions for web servers in the heading of each page).

In the healthcare sector, specialist medical portals such as Medführer, Jameda, Docinsider, Helpster, etc. should not be neglected, as these are also used by patients in their searches.

Social Media marketing

Social networks on the Internet such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or Xing now play a vital role in Germany. In addition to these, there are also specialised health forums such as imedo.de or med1.de. These create a network of patients who communicate with one another and with the respective healthcare facility. The digital patient forms groups and collects knowledge about illnesses, treatments and medication in databases that are created along the lines of Wikipedia. The result is that the consultancy monopoly of the doctor is disappearing and the patient often has more trust in other community members than in their physician. According to a survey by Ogilvy Healthworld, already 79% of English patients place their trust in the Internet. However, social networks can also become a curse, particularly when it comes to critical comments. This makes it even more important to find out through



targeted questioning and intensive listening what information patients want and for which symptoms. In this way, the patient and their needs are directly integrated into the marketing process. And not only that - due to the close exchange of information with the target groups, it is also possible to derive useful conclusions about policies concerning what to offer and product placement. You can read about how exactly social media marketing works in practice in the article by Stefan Krojer and Kai Wels in the last issue of KU (November 2010, starting on page 88).

Online advertising

Using conventional online advertising in the form of advertising banners, pop-ups and layer ads also makes sense for healthcare facilities. Especially as you will obtain a clear assessment of the response here, meaning that you can find out directly what impact your advertising measures have had and react accordingly. It is also recommended that you support your campaign with a suitable SEM as part of your integrated communication.

Affiliate marketing

Marketing on the Internet has the advantage that what you pay depends on the success rate, i.e. is calculated on a per click basis. Using the affiliate marketing systems, companies communicate and market their products and services by linking to partner websites. The link conveys by whom and to whom the user has been sent. The clicks can either lead to direct contact or to a direct sale.

Email marketing

The equivalent of sending advertising materials by post is to do so by email. However, this form of marketing is subject to legal restrictions. The law requires that company and legal details must be specified and the addressee must have agreed at some point to receive such advertising. For healthcare facilities, email marketing only makes sense if content is sent that is relevant to the target groups, for example, if those referring patients should be informed about new forms of treatment or other partners about internal company changes.

Unlike in most communications media, the healthcare sector is already often and extensively present in the area of online marketing. Use this channel for your company, but be careful, as the social media branch in particular is also a fast-mover that is hard to control. Promises that are not kept are quickly exposed here and, what is more, are passed on to others. However, in authentic and credible communication, the Internet offers a great deal of opportunity, especially for small budgets.

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