



# Healthcare marketing trends that are driving return on investment

Using digital marketing for patient acquisition and HCP engagement

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# WHAT KEY TRENDS ARE SHAPING HEALTHCARE MARKETING?



It's been a turbulent time reacting as best we could to the twists and turns of the COVID-19 pandemic. As eager as we all are for the pandemic to end, we can't possibly predict when that will be. Meanwhile, it's time to stop reacting and start creating a proactive and successful marketing strategy based on the key trends that are shaping the future of healthcare marketing.

COVID-19 has accelerated some of these digital marketing trends and brought others to the forefront but all are worth keeping a watchful eye on when formulating your marketing strategy. Some of these trends will feel relevant and timely for you right now, while others might not. Healthcare marketing is changing rapidly and you need to be adapting to meet these changes if you don't want to fall behind the competition.

Let's take a look at some of the top transformative trends shaping healthcare marketing today.

# THE CONSUMERISATION OF HEALTHCARE

As consumers, we've grown accustomed to getting what we want, when we want it – all at the click of a button. Whether we're shopping for a pair of shoes or ordering takeout, if an online experience isn't what we expect, we're likely to abandon our search (or our cart) and go elsewhere.

Expectations are also growing when it comes to our healthcare. What started with a rising interest in preventative healthcare and a shift in being active participants in our overall health and wellbeing has snowballed as a result of the pandemic. COVID-19 has driven us online to find out answers about our health and to take action. As a result, we're now seeing a complete shift in the healthcare industry. The healthcare market has been transformed – from being driven top-down (say by insurance companies or NHS trusts) to being driven bottom-up by individual consumers. Put more simply, the patient is now in the driver's seat. Most importantly, we've become empowered to make informed healthcare decisions for ourselves.

## KEY TAKEAWAY:

Your clients want speedy services, zero hassle and custom-made solutions. The healthcare space is getting more competitive and if you want to retain an edge, you need to become more patient-focused. It will be essential to have a clearly defined brand in a consumer-driven market. Meanwhile, the digital marketer will be key in providing a better patient experience across all digital touchpoints, helping to add value to a patient's journey before they even speak to a healthcare professional.





## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICAL TERMS FOR HEALTHCARE MARKETERS?

This shift means that there is greater opportunity than ever before, but it comes with a catch – the competition is also higher than ever. You need to have strong branding to differentiate yourself in the crowd. Meanwhile, consumers want and expect the same easy digital experiences in healthcare that they get in e-commerce, for example. A prime example of the consumerisation of healthcare has been the rise of at-home COVID-19 testing. Why queue at a test centre when you could self-test in the comfort and safety of your home?

*Why queue at a test centre when you could self-test in the comfort and safety of your home?*



## EXAMPLES OF THE CONSUMERISATION OF HEALTHCARE:

- Home testing kits (COVID-19, cholesterol, food testing, etc.)
- Mobile apps for fitness and wellbeing (Fitbit, MyFitnessPal and Headspace)
- Mobile apps for healthcare support like HealthTap and Talkspace
- 24/7 online appointment scheduling like Heydoc
- Telehealth solutions such as Babylon
- Wearable devices (smartwatches, ECG monitors and blood pressure monitors)
- Online pharmacies

# THE RISE OF OMNICHANNEL MARKETING

Omnichannel marketing is a strategic marketing practice that aims to provide an integrated and seamless client experience across both online and offline channels. It's a part of a broader customer experience (CX) strategy that focuses on enhancing relationships at every possible touchpoint with the client.

You might be wondering how this is different from traditional multichannel marketing. The key to omnichannel strategy is that the channels work together to send a unified message that is targeted to the client. Whereas multichannel marketing features primarily static messaging and channels that work independently of each other, omnichannel marketing features adaptive messaging from channels that work together. User behaviour triggers an update which is reflected in the messaging sent by the next channel.

“*The key to omnichannel strategy is that the channels work together to send a unified message that is targeted to the client.*”

## KEY TAKEAWAY:

When developing your digital strategy, think about how your channels will work together to create unified and consistent messaging that complements the overall customer experience. Your patients are expecting timely and targeted messaging based on where they are in the buyer journey. That experience will be difficult to deliver if your channels are run by disparate teams working independently of each other, so make sure you break down communication siloes and get everyone working from the same playbook.



## OMNICHANNEL MARKETING IN ACTION



### The strategy

Your omnichannel marketing plan includes a robust content marketing strategy that offers your audience personalised, educational content.



### How it works

When a visitor views a page on your website, they would then be retargeted on social media with relevant ads.



### The result

You've created targeted and relevant interactions that add value before someone has become a customer or patient.



# THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA PRIVACY AND THE NEED FOR FIRST-PARTY DATA

## THE DAYS OF THIRD PARTY DATA ARE NUMBERED

As we've seen in our omnichannel marketing example, when a client interacts with one channel, the subsequent interactions reflect new and updated messaging that takes into account user behaviour. This requires that data is at the heart of omnichannel marketing. To do this well, you must ensure your data is up to scratch.

## AND THEN

Although Google has announced a delay in the deprecation of cookies until 2023, the days of relying on third-party data are numbered. Meanwhile, recent changes to iOS14 are already having an impact on tracking mobile behaviour. The data privacy landscape is shifting quickly and marketers' ability to collect and use data is becoming more and more limited. If you aren't already thinking about your strategy for a future without cookies and mobile IDs, then now is the time.

## COLLECTING FIRST PARTY DATA IS KEY

Despite widespread concerns about data privacy, users are expecting increasingly personalised experiences online. How can marketers address this challenge? One of your key strategic aims should be to focus on building up a body of first-party data. Strategic marketing is driven by quality data. First-party data is key to understanding your audience and providing them with the personalised, omnichannel experiences that they expect.

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

Don't wait to prioritise first-party data capture. Consumers are willing to share their data in exchange for meaningful, valuable experiences.

Traditional lead capturing and nurturing is coming back to the forefront, and when done well, you have an opportunity to build a relationship based on trust and brand loyalty that allows for better, more personalised marketing.



# HOW TO PERSONALISE YOUR COMMUNICATION

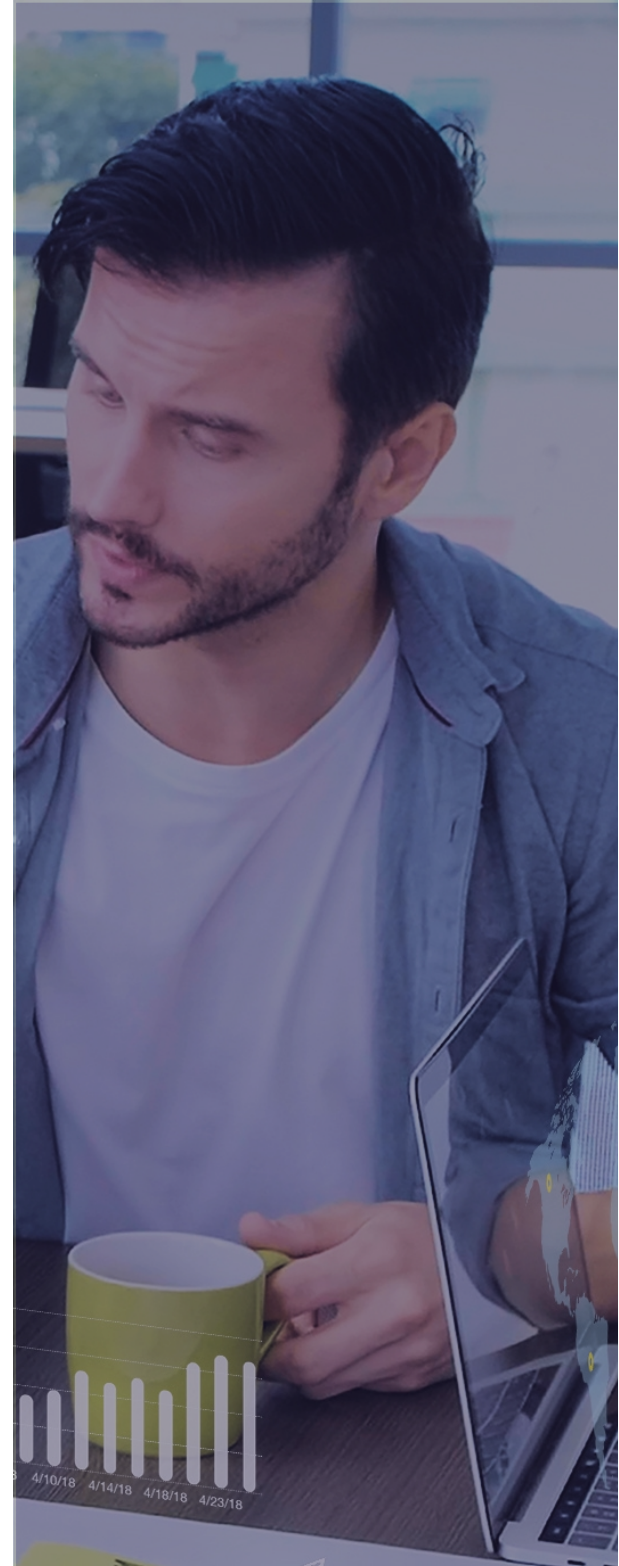
## CONTENT FOR EVERY JOURNEY

Personalisation is so much more than receiving an email addressed to you by first name. When it comes to health, patients don't want to feel like a number in a crowd. You need to talk to your patients in a way that recognises them as an individual. It's critical that you create user experiences that are relevant and personalised to their needs.

## PERSONALISATION FOR EXISTING PATIENTS

One of the most important things you can do is ensure that your marketing is optimised to provide content and communications that recognises where the patient is in their user journey. You don't want to risk turning off a returning patient with impersonal, top-of-the-funnel content. Likewise, you want to ensure prospective patients are warmed up with the appropriate content and CTAs. You can design your website's journeys and automated email nurture campaigns with this in mind.

With existing patients, you have the opportunity to increase your personalisation efforts and improve customer loyalty. Patient portals and apps allow patients to access their information and records. In addition to personalised appointment reminders and follow-ups, you could create customer retention campaigns using educational content that focuses on preventative care that is relevant to them. For example, a patient with type 2 diabetes could receive a personalised email informing them of new information shared on the blog from one of the practice's nutritional experts.



## KEY TAKEAWAY:

You need to walk a fine line between respecting data privacy and creating relevant, personalised experiences for your new and existing patients. The key to gaining access to your users' first-party data is by delivering personalised experiences that create value for them. When patients get personalised marketing experiences based on their preferences, you are nurturing patient loyalty.

# OPTIMISING YOUR WEBSITE - AN ITERATIVE PROCESS

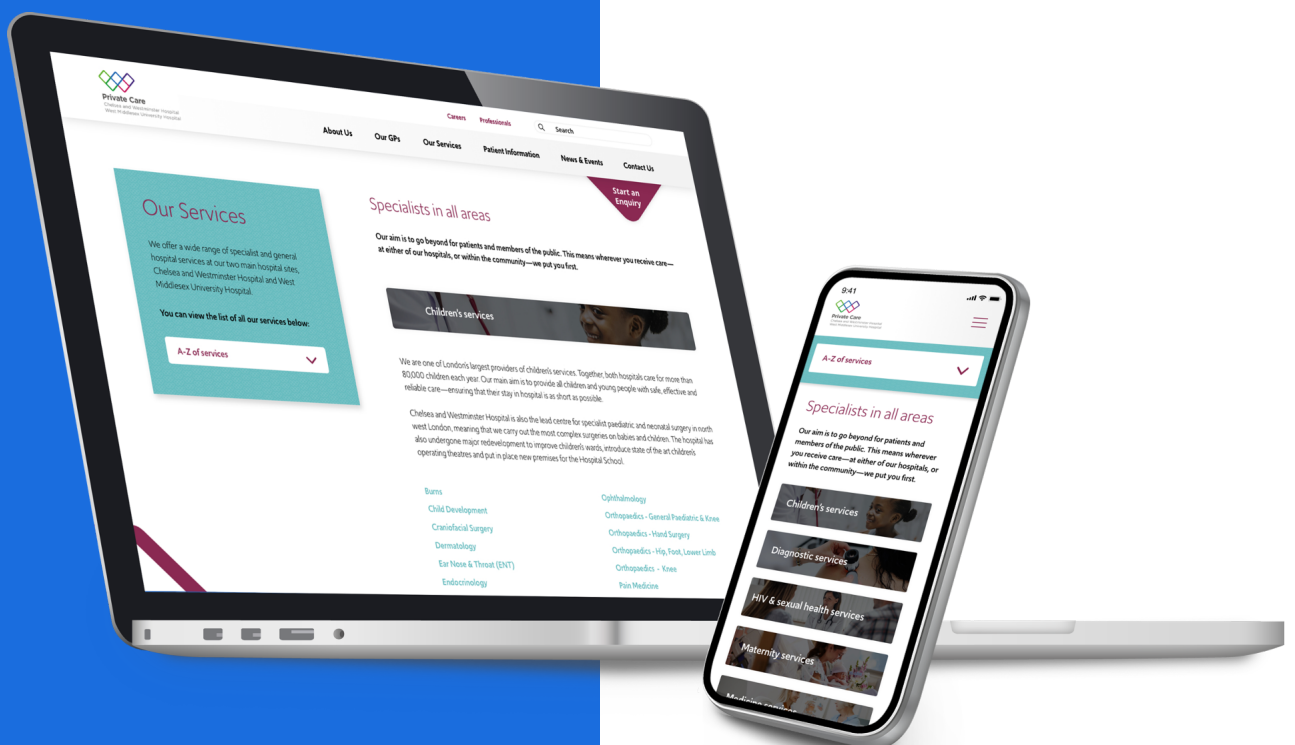
In the age of consumerism, user experience (UX) has never been more important. Expectations are higher than ever, and if your website is difficult to navigate or isn't properly optimised for mobile, you will lose clients to your competition.

## DESIGN FOR MOBILE FIRST

It should come as no surprise that mobile traffic is on the rise. According to Stat Counter, 54% of all internet traffic is now mobile. That's why mobile optimisation just isn't enough anymore. Properly optimising your website means designing for mobile first. Design your website with most mobile screen width limitations in mind. This puts content at the heart of the design - which is what users are there for anyway.

## KEEP YOUR USER IN MIND

The best place to start with website optimisation is to consider how you can better cater to your users' needs. For clinics and practices marketing direct to patients, consider implementing 24/7 online appointment booking. For B2B marketers, think of how your website can better serve clinicians who want to move away from in-person ordering. By showing inventory of medical devices and implementing a self-service e-commerce solution, you could solve a key pain point for procurement professionals and increase your market share at the same time. It's these types of win-win website improvements that will help you capture and retain more business.



## BIG WINS FOR YOUR WEBSITE:



Mobile-first



Clear site structure and navigation



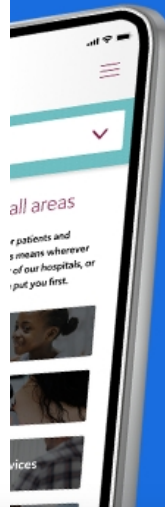
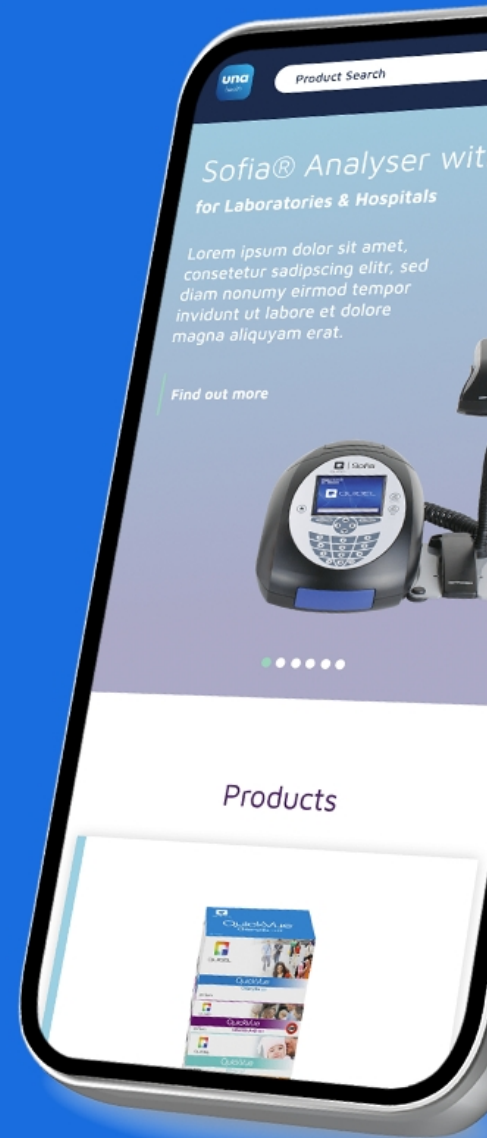
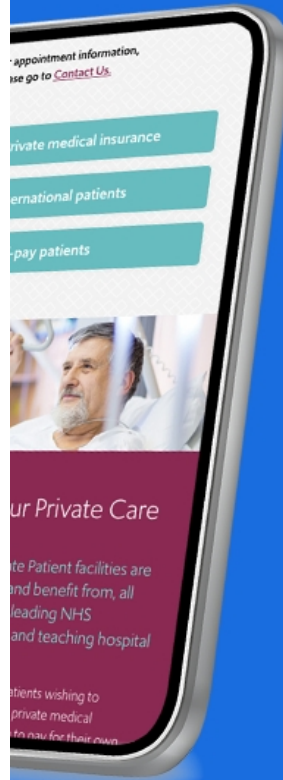
Speed



24/7 online booking



Authoritative content that adds value



## KEY TAKEAWAY:

First impressions are created in mere seconds, and your clients are accustomed to seamless UX on major e-commerce websites like Amazon. If your website doesn't live up, you're going to lose out to the competition. The key is to audit your site through a patient lens to ensure you own the customer experience. Make sure your website is designed with your users' needs front and centre. Your website must provide a slick, personalised experience that is in line with their high consumer expectations.





# STRONG SEO IS A FOUNDATION TO ALL OTHER MARKETING CHANNELS

Search plays a crucial role at every stage in the life journey of a patient. From googling symptoms and self-diagnosing to comparing local healthcare providers and even verifying their doctor-given diagnosis, patients are using search to evaluate their healthcare options and make crucial decisions. HCPs are also turning to online sources for medical information, including pharmaceutical research, diagnosis confirmation and treatment.

“**48% of physicians report that Google is their initial search point.**”

HCPs are also using search to keep up-to-date with the latest news and updates in their field, with 48% of physicians reporting that Google is their initial search point. That’s why a good SEO strategy must be a core part of your overall digital strategy. SEO can seem confusing and technical but the underlying principles are actually quite simple.

## YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE

Google is always updating its algorithms, trying to make search better for the end-user and adapting to browsers’ changing and evolving needs. The introduction of new guidelines for YMYL (Your Money or Your Life) websites is one such recent development that’s particularly important for healthcare marketers. YMYL sites are those that contain content that can impact users’ health, happiness, safety or financial stability. Misinformation or bad advice given by a YMYL website can have a serious impact on the very life and livelihood of an individual. Therefore, stringent guidelines apply to YMYL websites, i.e., Google holds your healthcare site to a higher set of standards than say, a movie review website. The good news is that Google has been transparent about what these standards are. YMYL sites must have the highest levels of E-A-T, which stands for Expertise, Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness.



## HOW CAN YOU ESTABLISH E.A.T ?

One of the most important things that you can do right now is to take a critical look at your content to ensure it demonstrates the highest levels of E-A-T. Do you have great landing pages with content that adds value and answers your patients' questions and concerns? If targeted to healthcare professionals, is your site a source of clinically researched and validated information? Is your content establishing you as an authority in your field? Does your overall website experience inspire trustworthiness? If you can't answer these questions with a resounding yes, it's time to get to work. You can add value for patients and HCPs and improve your SEO by adding trustworthy, authoritative content in a diverse variety of formats including video, infographics, podcasts and ebooks

## STICK TO THE BASICS OF GOOD SEO:



Content quality



Domain authority



Relevance



Speed



Mobile optimisation

## KEY TAKEAWAY:

Healthcare providers have been slow to adopt and implement effective SEO strategies despite the many strategic gains to be made by improving their SEO. Paid search can be hugely effective in the short term, but it can be challenging to overcome Google's stringent healthcare advertising regulations. SEO offers an easy solution around these and provides you with a cost-effective return at every stage of the funnel. By focussing on your patients' needs and creating EAT-worthy content that answers their questions and needs, you can convert new clients from search, establish your expert authority for prospective and existing patients and improve your Google search rankings – all at the same time.

# THE FUTURE OF TELEHEALTH

After years of slow uptake, telehealth (often called telemedicine) saw a rapid increase in adoption during the height of the pandemic. Although uptake has since decreased, it's clear that telehealth is here to stay. In a global survey, 63% of respondents who had used telehealth during the pandemic indicated their preference to continue using telehealth services.

## ANYTIME, ANYWHERE HEALTHCARE

COVID-19 necessitated and accelerated a new model of “anytime, anywhere” healthcare that is made possible by improvements in virtual health technologies and the rise of wearable medical devices and remote monitoring of health. Given the global shortages of primary care physicians, logistical constraints on patients and physicians and the potential for increased access to expert second opinions and an improved continuum of care, the long-term benefits of telehealth are myriad

## WORKING HYBRID MODELS OF IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL CARE

For healthcare providers, the challenge is how to create and implement a working hybrid model of in-person and virtual care. Healthcare marketers must step up and help ease this transition by ensuring that telehealth is seamlessly worked into the entire end-to-end patient journey.



## HOW CAN MARKETERS SUPPORT EVERY STAGE OF THE TELEHEALTH JOURNEY?

From helping to secure new patients through the use of search and SEO to creating post-visit workflows, marketers play an essential role at every stage of the telehealth journey. You must consider the needs and concerns of your patients in the entire process. For example, consider your patients and their familiarity and comfort with technology. Put all helpful content and guides on a relevant landing page. Consider content that will help them overcome any resistance or potential snags with technology such as FAQs, step-by-step guides and video tutorials. Design pre-visit workflows providing patients with relevant information and a way to check their technology before their appointment.

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

With the rise of wearables and improvements in virtual health technologies, the future of healthcare is hybrid. Your patients have high hopes that new technologies and new solutions can improve their health outcomes. Your telehealth offering must meet their expectations. This means thinking about the entire end-to-end experience and making it as frictionless as possible for your patients.



# WHY ATTRIBUTION IS BUSINESS CRITICAL

Marketing attribution is the process of understanding which user events and marketing actions drove conversions. Understanding your attribution gives you a better idea of which marketing campaigns and channels are working for you and which ones are not. This is particularly challenging for those HCPs with distributor audiences with longer buying cycles and disjointed funnels. Faulty or flawed attribution makes it difficult for marketers to refine and improve their campaigns and make decisions about where to focus marketing efforts and spend resources.

With the disappearance of cookies and mobile IDs, attribution is becoming even more difficult for digital marketers. Data is becoming more and more fragmented with much of it locked behind closed platforms, or 'walled gardens'. All this necessitates new models of attribution.





## RETHINKING ATTRIBUTION CHALLENGES

This might sound pretty doom and gloom, but don't despair yet. Newer, more accurate attribution models will emerge once you have established your first-party data capture. Meanwhile, we can implement creative solutions to help us solve the attribution challenge. Don't underestimate the power of leveraging the existing tools and systems that you use, including your marketing automation tools, booking systems, CRMs and other platforms.

Meanwhile, it's always a good idea to take a step back and look at your campaigns from a 360-degree angle. If you focus on individual channels in isolation, your current attribution model might cause you to devalue a channel that's actually playing an important role in your overall campaign success. For example, social prospecting may not have a high ROI, but those leads that you're getting from different channels may have been influenced by your social prospecting ad. Just because your ad has poor attribution doesn't mean it isn't making an impression. Therefore, your best strategy for attribution is to complement your view of the data with a well-thought-out view of typical user behaviour.



**Look at your campaigns from a 360-degree angle**

### KEY TAKEAWAY:

Whilst always a challenge, measurement is set to become even more difficult in the rapidly changing data landscape. Make attribution a key part of your campaign strategy stage by deciding measurement metrics that matter to you upfront. Meanwhile, don't delay in implementing your first-party data capture!

# STAY ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF REGULATIONS

Consumer concerns about data protection and privacy are at an all-time high. Regulatory bodies have passed a number of landmark data protection laws that protect individual rights. You've probably already taken measures to ensure compliance with the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in the EU (and the UK GDPR post-Brexit) and HIPAA (Health Information Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) in the United States.

But GDPR and HIPAA are just the beginning. Healthcare marketers have to contend with many other regulations that govern their marketing activities in content marketing, advertising and retargeting. If you want to market prescription-only medications (POMs), you must comply with the strict rules of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) which outlines its healthcare-related regulations in section 12.12. Marketers in the EU and the UK who want to promote medical devices must also take note of the new Medical Device Regulation (MDR) which governs the promotion and advertising of medical devices since May 2021.

## REGULATING BODIES' ACRONYM CHEATSHEET:

- GDPR** General Data Protection and Privacy (EU)
- HIPAA** Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (US)
- ASA** Advertising Standards Agency (UK)
- MDR** Medical Device Regulations (EU & UK)



**Non-compliance can be costly, therefore it's essential that you know your regulations and stay on the right side of all those that apply.**

[Read more](#)

If those weren't enough, all the major advertising platforms have strict policies that govern paid advertising of healthcare-related content. For example, Google doesn't allow healthcare providers to use custom audiences, whereas LinkedIn doesn't allow ads related to medical devices for home or consumer use. Across all platforms, any ads you do run must not include any content about prior knowledge of any personal medical condition. The rules for retargeting are complicated and difficult to navigate, but when done properly, retargeting can be highly effective.

Google doesn't just hold YMYL websites to the highest of SEO standards, it also puts into place stringent healthcare advertising regulations for those healthcare organisations it deems "speculative and experimental medical treatments," such as psychoactive medicine and PRP therapy. For some healthcare providers, a good SEO strategy as outlined in our previous section is the best and only solution for abiding by these regulations.

### **KEY TAKEAWAY:**

In the healthcare sector, it's all about trust. By offering valuable, non-promotional content and being transparent about consumer privacy upfront, you help to build consumer trust and stay on the right side of the regulations. As far as paid advertising goes, there are a lot of potential pitfalls and mistakes can be costly, so ensure you know the rules before hitting the 'send' button.





# CREATING A STRATEGY THAT WINS

With all these disruptive changes occurring in the healthcare space, it might feel as if you have your work cut out for you to keep up. The truth is that the healthcare industry has lagged behind other industries in adopting digital technology and you might very well have a daunting road ahead of you. Just remember that although there is a lot of competition, there are big gains to be made.

## FOCUS ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

After two years of just trying to keep up with challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the best thing you could do is to take some time to sit down and come up with a well-thought-out digital marketing strategy that takes into consideration the healthcare digital marketing trends outlined in this ebook. Don't feel as if you have to tackle every single one of these trends right now. You might not be ready to expand your telehealth offering or dive into the world of wearable technology just yet and that's alright. The important thing is to focus on the fundamentals. Understand your target audience and their needs and think of how you can make their experience better. This should inform every aspect of your strategy from implementing content marketing and personalised omnichannel marketing to forming the foundation of your SEO and paid advertising efforts.



## USE SOME EXPERT INSIGHT

Given the complexity of many of these strategic trends and the high cost of non-compliance or mistakes, you might well decide that you could use some expert insight. When looking for outside expertise, be sure that you aren't just throwing one more disjointed puzzle piece into the mix. Now is the time to break down those silos and ensure that your marketing efforts aren't disjointed and isolated. A full-service healthcare marketing agency can help you with everything from strategy and planning to execution and evaluation.

If there is one thing that we know, it's that healthcare is transforming for the better. Patients are taking advantage of their increased access to care and information to ensure they are getting the best possible health outcomes for themselves. Meanwhile, those medtech companies that adapt their services for the new future of healthcare and prioritise digital transformation are those that will enjoy a strategic advantage in the rapidly changing healthcare landscape. If you're ready to gain your audience's trust on the journey and bring your marketing to the next level, we'd love to hear from you.

Contact us today