



2015: HEALTHCARE'S YEAR OF TRUSTABILITY

Can healthcare make over its opaque image?

The three giants driving America's \$3 trillion healthcare economy—health insurers, hospital systems, and pharmaceutical companies—all face the same dilemma: how to engage customers effectively to earn trust and improve the consumer healthcare experience. This is no easy task at a time when consolidation and oligopoly-type market domination describes today's healthcare landscape:

- The 10 largest health insurers now control more than 60% of all Americans' health benefits; Blue Cross Blue Shield organizations alone cover almost 100 million Americans. In 45 states two health insurers have combined market share of 50% or more.
- More than half of the 5,724 U.S. hospitals are now part of multifacility health system. Add to this mix a new face of today's physician: 42% of doctors are practicing as salaried employees of corporate hospital-owned systems.
- The top 10 global biotech and pharmaceutical companies have combined revenue of approximately \$443 billion. Total spending on medications in the U.S. was \$329.2 billion in 2013, fueled by more than half of all Americans taking at least two prescription medications.

It should be no surprise that earning trust among today's consumer is a tough job. Entire industries have seen reputations tarnished and public trust eroded as a result of missteps and inadequate controls—data breaches, automobile recalls, government corruption, and most recently, politicization of Ebola.

As the nation's healthcare is being defined by personal accountability, bigger isn't always better. Buying health insurance is now a retail shopping experience, in-store and online, but not close to Nordstrom or Amazon. Hype regarding price "transparency" confuses the most sophisticated consumers as they attempt to navigate the complexities of the cost of a medical procedure or prescription drug. And understanding definitions of certification, accreditation, and "quality clinical outcomes" leaves consumers frustrated and paralyzed in their decision making.

Value and respect

People need to sense that they are valued and respected. When surveyed about what they want from a healthcare company, customers agree on these priorities:

- 1 Put me before profits.
- 2 Be there when I need you.
- 3 Communicate with me clearly and honestly.
- 4 Provide customer service I can depend on.
- 5 Do the right thing when it comes to my health.

Healthcare's giants face an enormous challenge in changing the way customers think about them. Consumer engagement has not been a core competency. Today's healthcare consumer lifecycle is often a series of disconnected, fragmented events. Communications have been an outbound monologue rather than an integrated, mutual value exchange.

Engagement should encompass every aspect of a healthcare consumer's experience with your services, products and people—the sum total of everything they see, hear and experience as part of their dealings with an organization. It means interacting with them on their terms and through communication channels they prefer.

Relationship of trust

A relationship of trust grows out of leveraging individual motivators as well as emotional and rational drivers that work to change behavior. It takes a personalized dialog with each customer throughout their healthcare journey—from awareness to acquisition to activation

to resale. The payoff is a superior user experience, high satisfaction ratings, and better retention.

Healthcare enterprises able to reverse the tide of negative consumer perceptions will realize significant competitive advantage:s:

- **By being honest and authentic about what you can and cannot help people with, customer communications will reach a more receptive audience willing to respond to suggested actions.**
- **By being compassionate and empathetic in your interactions customers will be more satisfied with their experience, reinforcing their purchase decision and building a more proactive base of customer loyalists.**
- **By being an advocate and a knowledgeable champion on issues such as healthier behavior, cost containment, and improved condition management, you will be met with greater acceptance and confidence.**

Trust is an outcome. Consumer-centric healthcare companies that demonstrate respect for their customers' time and individual needs will see greater "stickiness" throughout the

shopping process and generate significantly better customer LifeTime Value. Those that proceed with a sense of urgency, and deliver a customer experience with meaningful market-facing interactions, will emerge as industry leaders. Trustability is fundamental to the future of America's healthcare.

Relevant engagement yields customer respect. Customer engagement encompasses every aspect of a healthcare consumer's experience with your services, products and people. It's the sum total of everything they see, hear, feel and experience as part of their dealings with an organization. It means interacting with them on their terms and through communication channels they prefer. Ask the central question: how well does every brand touchpoint respect customers' needs, drive engagement and promote trust? ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR ■

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