Three Steps to Innovate Patient Solutions

A t the heart of all of our work is meeting patient needs, so let's take a deep dive into all of the routes currently available to deliver patient solutions. The challenge is to balance the conversation between pragmatism and idealism.

To call out the elephant in the room, there's a big appetite for innovation in the truest sense of the word (new technology/tools/services), but it often doesn't match where healthcare companies are in their digital evolution. And these conversations around innovative patient solutions often don't match where patients actually are, either.

On the one hand, many healthcare companies — big pharma, device, hospital system, etc. — are not yet at the crawl stage of serving up digital experiences that meet users' needs on the devices we all use daily. But there are healthcare companies (even in big pharma) walking the digital walk. That's the great news: it's possible, it just requires a commitment to evolve.

So, although we will jump into the exciting new ways that healthcare is innovating (for some), we're first going to spend some time talking about how to meet the most common user expectations. Even though this article would probably come across as a lot "cooler" if it led with bold claims about the Internet of Things and fun new devices changing our lives, the truth is that's only going to be reality in 2022 for a minority of our patient populations (and almost certainly not the most vulnerable patients).

First, let's talk about how to improve patient solutions in the most impactful ways, then move onto the next steps to innovate patient solutions.

STEP 1: Be Pragmatic

We always want to have our eye on exciting new things that are happening, but we also have to be pragmatic about reach and opportunity.

So before jumping into innovative new tactics, I would encourage you to be sure to ask yourself about the basics.

We'll start with websites because at the end of the day, the website is still the beating heart of almost every brand. Other big — unsurprising — stats need to guide this

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conversation, too: 97% of Americans own a mobile phone,[1] 92% of Americans use search engines[2], 70% of Americans are on social media,[3] and 100% of social media accounts are tied to email addresses. Those are the biggest numbers to ground yourself in for this conversation.

Is your **website just as easy to navigate** (and be successful) **on mobile?** Remember that most users won't open the mobile menu. Is your ISI bigger than most? Are your CTAs ever-present – are you guiding your users toward success, or do they have to hunt for it?

Is your **website accessible?** WCAG accessibility is often looped into conversations by lawyers wary of the 10,000+ nuisance lawsuits filed last year, but accessibility is also absolutely the right thing to do. To put it into perspective, around 1 in 10 people have a disability that impacts the use of a computer or smartphone[4]. That's a lot of your audience, even for an indication without an explicit accessibility consideration.

Do you have **retargeting and personalization rolling for your website and beyond?** If you do, this will sound painfully basic, but many don't. The vast majority of users want personalized experiences[5], but the vast majority of healthcare companies haven't yet made that leap. Once you've invested in getting someone to your site once, retargeting them (ideally with a personalized experience) keeps you top of mind and should nurture that lead forward in their journey. It often feels like a daunting technical conversation, but it improves user experience and boosts your ROI dramatically.

Is there more you could be doing with your website to help serve up the experience your users want? Would your audience be receptive to an interactive quiz that

pops out a custom doctor discussion guide? For a straightforward drug, could you set up a prescription subscription through your site via telemedicine? If there's a challenge finding providers who can provide thorough care (because of familiarity, training, or other hurdles), can you offer patients a finder to identify care near them? Legal and regulatory teams are more receptive than ever to evolving technology for patients – they often just need the right rationale and precedents provided.

Are you serving up content in all the right **languages?** Don't go just by demographic prevalence of diagnosis codes, but also by the demographic makeup of the most serious cases – these are often very different, showcasing the importance of providing better patient solutions earlier. Making your website and emails accessible will allow browsers to translate the site copy, but downloadables/print materials and ads should also be considered.

Are you doing everything you should be doing with **SMS/text messaging?** For example, if adherence is a problem, reminders could be incredibly helpful. Or if an important update is coming soon, are you celebrating that via text? Are you checking in with users to better understand where they are in their journey, to adjust content and cadence?

With user tracking in the crosshairs, are you **investing in email opt-ins?** Email programs aren't just for the email delivery, but also to use that email for targeting on social (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn) and Google products (Search, Shopping, Display, YouTube, and Gmail). Of course, you have to create some email content to satisfy the expectation, but sending emails isn't the entire point of the tactic.

None of the above likely fit under an umbrella of exciting technology advances because they've all been available for nearly a decade, but they're the bread and butter of great marketing and communication. Until these pragmatic tactics are rolled out for your brand, try not to be distracted by the bells and whistles of higher-tech tactics.

STEP 2: Before Being Idealistic, Do Your Research

This tried-and-true adage won't steer you wrong: right audience, right message, right medium, right time.

It all starts with your target audiences, and any "innovation" conversation that doesn't include current statistics isn't a genuinely helpful conversation.

Understanding which tactics currently have high adoption shows which have real po-

tential of being welcomed now and in the near future. As of fourth-quarter 2021, here are the most generally common new technologies being considered for patient solutions:

- ▶ YouTube is consumed by most Americans — 81%[6]
- ▶ Connected TV is in 80% of American homes[7]
- ▶ Telehealth is used by 76% of American hospitals[8]
- ▶ Gaming is in 73% of American homes[9]
- ▶ Smart home devices are in around 40% of American homes[10]
- ▶ Voice searches are done by 40% of Americans[11]
- ▶ Fitness trackers or smartwatches are worn by 20% of Americans[12] — these have implications for many areas, but especially cardiac
- ▶ Voice searches account for 20% of searches
- ▶ VR/AR (virtual reality/augmented reality) will be accessed monthly by 17%-28% of Americans[13]
- ▶ Continuous tracking of glucose is 51% among type 1 diabetics and 17% among type 2 diabetics in the US[14]
- ▶ Reddit is used by 18% of Americans[15]

The next step is to invest in some quantitative research to determine whether your particular patient population has high adoption of this tactic. That research can also dive into uncovering deeper opportunities for brands within those tactics (like gaming influencers or voice searches worthy of investing in voice landers).

Then the additional layer for pharma companies is to consider limitations within the tactic that will impact targeting and content. It's an unfortunate but true fact that we just can't tap into all the possibilities of every tactic as a healthcare company — there are often restrictions.

Finally, we recommend a subjective layer of consideration: are you willing to do the work to stretch your creative comfort level to build content that fits within that tactic? If you're advertising in gaming, a peaceful couple gazing into the sea isn't going to grab attention. If you're making ads on YouTube, there's nothing more important than your first one or two seconds (considering visuals and audio). Healthcare companies who are used to compromising on content and feel at the whim of regulatory teams may consider it daunting, but we've had tremendous success with pushing content to dramatically improve in this way.

At the end of the day, the opportunity size, channel possibilities, and appetite for appropriate content all need to be considered, along with the cost to build and support the tactic.

There are companies that explicitly make space in brand-planning budgets for tactics that are "innovative" (belonging in Step 2), understanding that they will likely not have the ROI of the bread-and-butter tactics discussed in Step 1. That's a very smart way to approach it.

STEP 3: Don't Forget Integration!

Ultimately, the patient experience should always take center stage, so pressure-test whether there are consolidated ways to communicate to your audience to avoid them being bombarded with too many touches from your brand. A quick example: if you add telehealth, feel free to announce it with a blast, but longer term it's likely best to mention it in all your pieces versus generally promoting it in siloed, committed content.

We also want to note that for some of these new tactics, they don't work like "Field of

Dreams" — if you build it, they won't necessarily come. For example, with telehealth and smart devices, be sure to pull promotion back through the channels that are dependably in front of your audience (website, social, email, SMS, banners, print materials, downloadables, etc.).

These three steps lay out the roadmap for success in healthcare marketing: looking toward the future idealistically, layering in appropriate considerations to measure the true opportunity, while committing to level up pragmatic best practices and proven tactics. ⓟⓥ

Notes:
[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/#:~:text=The%20vast%20majority%20of%20Americans,a%20cellphone%20of%20some%20kind.
[2] https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2011/08/11/who-uses-search-engines-92-of-adult-u-s-internet-users-study/
[3] https://www.statista.com/topics/3196/social-media-usage-in-the-united-states/#:~:text=With%20over%2070%20percent%20of,increase%20to%20approximately%20243%20million.
[4] https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb12-ff16.html
[5] https://www.3ds.com/newsroom/press-releases/ces-2020-survey-cite-research-dassault-systemes-consumers-want-personalized-products-wont-wait-them-and-expect-cost-benefit-their-data
[6] https://www.statista.com/statistics/296227/us-youtube-reach-age-gender/
[7] https://www.leichtmanresearch.com/80-of-u-s-tv-households-have-at-least-one-connected-tv-device/
[8] https://www.aha.org/factsheet/telehealth#:~:text=Currently%2C%2076%20percent%20of%20U.S.,of%20video%20and%20other%20technology
[9] https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2019-10-08-npd-group-73-percent-of-americans-play-video-games
[10] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1247351/smart-home-device-us-household-penetration/
[11] https://www.oberlo.com/blog/voice-search-statistics
[12] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/09/about-one-in-five-americans-use-a-smartwatch-or-fitness-tracker/
[13] https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-virtual-augmented-reality-users-2021
[14] https://www.desang.net/2021/03/diabetes-tech-gains-momentum/

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81% YOUTUBE is consumed by most Americans	**80%** CONNECTED TV is in American homes
76% TELEHEALTH is used in American hospitals	**73%** GAMING is in American homes

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