

The

Big Shift

**HOW COVID-19 IS DRIVING
THE EVOLUTION OF**

Healthcare Content Strategy

THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC ISN'T CREATING NEW CONSUMER BEHAVIORS; IT'S RAPIDLY ACCELERATING THE TRENDS THAT WERE ALREADY UNDERWAY. HERE'S HOW TO EVOLVE YOUR CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY TO ALIGN WITH THESE SHIFTS AND DRIVE ENGAGEMENT THAT WILL BUILD AFFINITY AND GROW REVENUE FOR YOUR BRAND.



THERE WAS A paradigm shift in progress even before the pandemic. Studies showed customers expected brands to fundamentally transform how they engage and healthcare experts called for more data-driven, personalized content as part of this shift. These dynamics have made content marketing a top priority for healthcare marketers. Nearly 8 in 10 (78%) surveyed for the 5th Annual State of Digital Marketing in Healthcare Report, which was released on the cusp of COVID-19 in February 2020, considered content marketing essential to the organization.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the hourly news cycle has multiplied the demand for healthcare content by orders of magnitude. Between the beginning of the year and March 31st, it's estimated that more than 1,500 articles on COVID-19 were being developed each day.

This demand for timely, accurate healthcare content—and its value to consumers—is demonstrated by recent studies:

- » **HOSPITAL AND HEALTH SYSTEMS** are among the most trusted sources of information on coronavirus, more than the federal government and national news outlets.
- » **NEARLY 7 IN 10** consumers trust healthcare providers for virus information—ranking them second only to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- » **NEARLY 8 IN 10** young adults want to consume coronavirus-related content online to keep themselves and their loved ones informed.

The data sends a clear message: Content is still king—if done intentionally and built around the community served.

Like the market leaders embracing telemedicine and other consumer-centric delivery models, healthcare marketers who purposefully reconstruct their content strategies around the rapidly changing lifestyle habits and media preferences of their audiences will build trust and rise above the competition.

The time to reject business-as-usual healthcare marketing is now. Engaging today's healthcare consumers requires fundamental shifts in how content is planned, developed and distributed.

To guide your efforts, here are four pivotal areas that will make or break your healthcare content marketing strategy during the pandemic and beyond.

THE SHIFT: **STRATEGIC FOCUS**

BEFORE: BRAND AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT HAVE BEEN THE PRIMARY “WHY” BEHIND MOST CONTENT MARKETING EFFORTS. According to our [2019 State of Healthcare Content Marketing report](#), the top content marketing goals were brand awareness (#1) and engagement (#2) taking precedence over the more growth-focused metrics of lead generation (#3) and lead nurturing (#5), with patient loyalty (#4) rounding out the top five.



NOW: While building a strong healthcare brand will always be important, [financial recovery is top of mind](#) for many C-suite leaders, even those with the most altruistic philosophies. Many healthcare leaders are learning that content marketing can simultaneously support financial goals, population health initiatives and community engagement priorities.



TO ALIGN YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY WITH THIS SHIFT:

Focus your content strategy on initiatives and individuals that generate the greatest impact on community and organizational health.

This includes content that conveys the importance of screenings and chronic disease management, communicates why it's safe to seek emergency care, raises the importance of maintaining in-person or telehealth visits and highlights the research and innovations you've invested in to create positive experiences and outcomes.

By identifying key personas for your organization, you can begin to fine tune your content creation and promotion strategy in a way that builds brand affinity and inspires consumers to take action, either independently or with the clinical support of your teams.



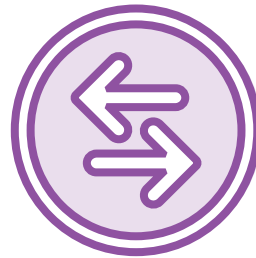
THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING TACTICS:

- » **SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)** research to align content focus and topic planning with health concerns and conditions that are top of mind for target audiences
- » **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**, both paid and organic, that builds community engagement and creates a path to encounter when making a healthcare decision
- » **EMAIL MARKETING STRATEGIES** that keep your organization top of mind throughout the healthcare consideration and decision making journey

THE SHIFT: **CONTENT DISTRIBUTION AND PROMOTION**

BEFORE: HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS ARE NOTORIOUS FOR PURSUING THE “SHINY, NEW CHANNELS” FOR MARKETING AND ADVERTISING. THIS IS EVIDENT IN THE OFTEN MILE-WIDE AND INCH-DEEP APPROACH TO—AND LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS OF—THEIR DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVES.

To illustrate, 50% of marketers surveyed for the State of Digital Marketing in Healthcare report they are currently active or plan to be on the nine major digital platforms illustrated below—with many marketing teams managing multiple accounts per platform. The ability to effectively plan, craft, deploy, measure, optimize and promote content across these channels with the lean teams and limited budgets of most hospitals and health systems is a tall order.



NOW: With an abundance of consumer data and performance metrics to guide decision making, high-performing organizations understand that delivering excellence within a limited number of platforms is best practice. Here are the channels we’ve found to be the most effective for engaging healthcare audiences.

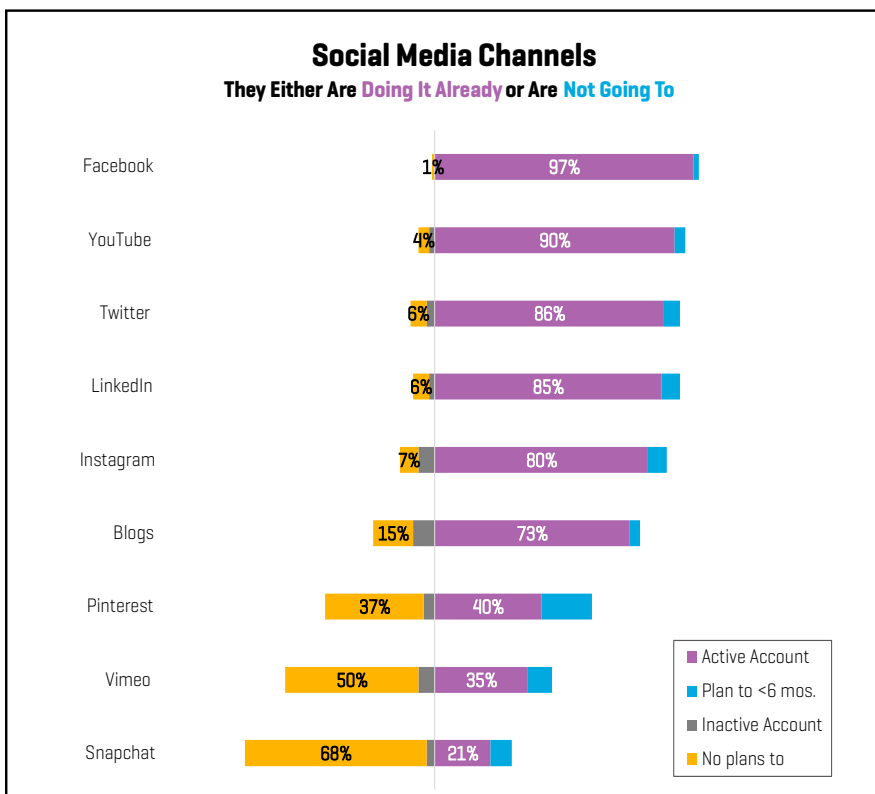
The brand-centric, PR-focused approach of featuring hospital news more prominently than health and wellness information is giving way to a more consumer-centric strategy of delivering timely, educational topics of interest through a blog or content hub. This online source for original and curated content helps your audience discover content that encourages healthy lifestyle choices, showcases your organization’s excellence and shares stories of great patient outcomes. By creating a destination where consumers can experience a wide variety of content formats and sources, healthcare organizations are significantly increasing online engagement with their target audiences.

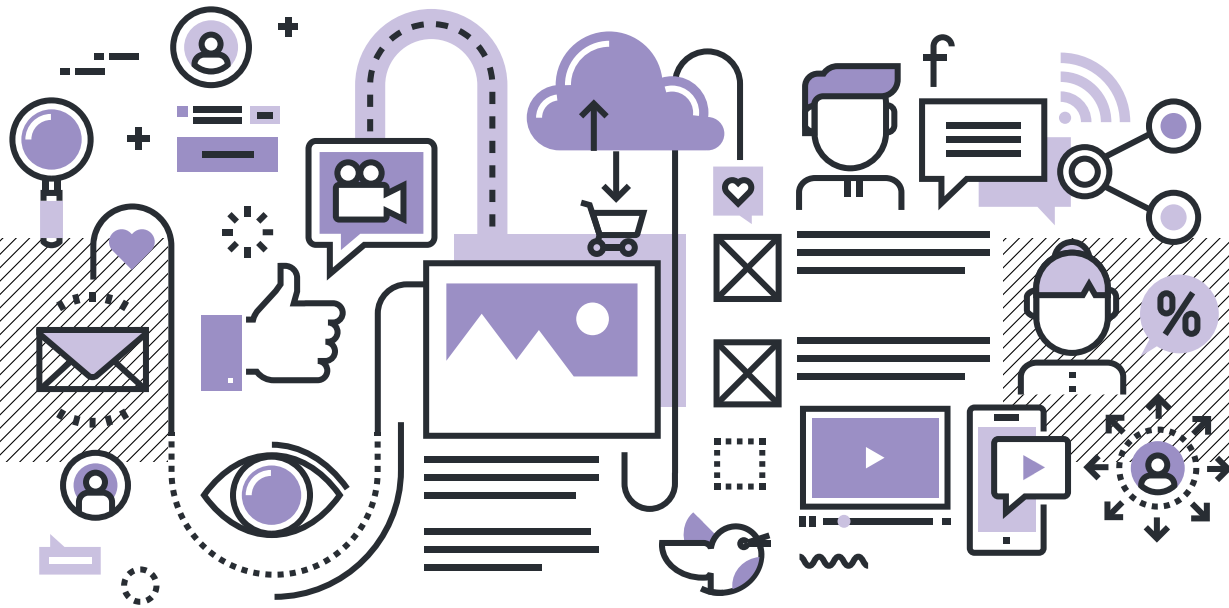
YouTube, Instagram and Facebook are, for healthcare marketers, the best social media channels for building relationships with consumers and inspiring action. Video content drives engagement with a wide variety of audiences and can be shared via a variety of channels. Both Instagram and Facebook can have a wide variety of applications, such as promoting blog content, driving lead generation priorities, highlighting healthcare heroes, promoting foundation priorities and more. When done well and with intention, a single social channel/account can effectively highlight all of the above and drive engagement with consumers, providers, donors and employees alike.

A few sources of inspiration:

- » [VANDERBILT HEALTH](#)
- » [METHODIST HEALTH SYSTEM](#)
- » [BOSTON CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL](#)

Instagram has been challenging for many healthcare marketers, but more and more of the critical 25-40-year-old female demographic is using the channel as their primary social media outlet. Promoting healthcare heroes and events can be great, and using the Stories feature to share listicles, tips and tricks can be highly effective.





A few sources of inspiration:

- » **CLEVELAND CLINIC**
 » **NEWYORK-PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL**
 » **ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL**

Pinterest should not be entirely forgotten about. In communicating information about health and wellness programs, weight management programs, concierge medicine and mental health, actionable and useful content shared via Pinterest can generate high levels of engagement. This can be as simple as creating an account to post your recipes, fitness content, home remedies for various ailments, and providing opportunities for consumers to share your content to their personal boards.

A few sources of inspiration:

- » **ST. LOUIS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL**
 » **DIGNITY HEALTH**
 » **MD ANDERSON CANCER CENTER**

Twitter is another social channel that can advance your healthcare content marketing strategy. Unlike those designed to build community as part of a conversion path, Twitter is most effective when used as more of a news and conversation tool that supports PR and advocacy efforts. Many hospitals find success in sharing hospital updates, thought leadership content, promotion of events and foundation priorities, and more on Twitter. Many of the top healthcare Twitter accounts are actually leading C-suite executives, physicians, infectious disease specialists and other individuals—in contrast to organization level accounts. Keep in mind that effectiveness on Twitter requires a high level of engagement and conversation from the account owner.

A few sources of inspiration:

- » **RENOWN HEALTH CEO DR. TONY SLONIM**
- » **JEFFERSON HEALTH CEO DR. STEPHEN KLASKO**
- » **CARDIOLOGIST DR. ERIC TOPOL**

And finally, an often-overlooked channel that consistently outperforms the rest is email. In fact, [Litmus research](#) found that email marketing returns \$38 for every dollar invested, and healthcare consumers love email so much they'd even [be willing to pay per interaction](#) with a physician. With 99% of consumers [checking their email every day](#), a well-crafted email strategy is critical for healthcare marketers.

TO ALIGN YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY WITH THIS SHIFT:

Streamline your content marketing efforts to focus on the distribution channels that drive the most value for the audience and financial impact for the organization.

→ THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING TACTICS:

- » **IMPLEMENT A PRECISE APPROACH** to targeting the right consumers with each piece of content, particularly via Facebook
- » **MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF** all of your content deployment efforts to continuously learn more about what consumers want from you and fine tune your approach accordingly
- » **IDENTIFY THOUGHT LEADERS** or prominent voices within your organization that you can help implement Twitter and build a following, feature in Facebook and Instagram live videos, and rely on for support during crises
- » **INVESTMENTS IN CONTENT HUBS** and other distribution vehicles to house stories and enable interactions with your brand

THE SHIFT: CONTENT TOPICS AND TYPES

BEFORE: EARLY IN THE PANDEMIC, HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS WERE PLAYING IT SAFE WITH FEEL-GOOD CONTENT CELEBRATING #HEALTHCAREHEROES AND PROMOTING THE HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE, RATHER THAN INDIVIDUAL BRAND IDENTITY, BY CONVEYING IDEAS LIKE #INTHISTOGETHER. OVER THE YEARS, WE'VE OFTEN SEEN ONE EXTREME OR THE OTHER—FEEL GOOD AND FLUFFY CONTENT AT THE VERY TOP OF THE FUNNEL, OR CONTENT SOLELY FOCUSED ON LEAD GENERATION.

NOW: People are tired of the soft piano music, platitudes and other ubiquitous elements in every marketing message seen, heard and read the past few months. [This Fast Company headline](#) says it best: We have hit peak pandemic advertising, and now they're all just annoying." At the same time, organic content is reaching a smaller audience than ever before, as [less than half of Google searches](#) now result in a single click and organic posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter [reach less than 2% of followers](#). One the other hand, consumers also aren't responding well to a hard-sell approach, feeling it's tone deaf and/or impersonal in today's climate.

TO ALIGN YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY WITH THIS SHIFT:

Focus content on target keywords along with your organization's unique voice, competitive advantages and differentiating capabilities. Offer helpful, practical advice on current issues like mental health, kids, screenings and other relevant issues that guide their healthcare journey and position your healthcare brand as the provider of choice when the time comes to seek treatment.

Bring more of your priority service lines into the mix, too. Share information on cardiovascular conditions and screenings, encouraging support for managing chronic conditions and creating more content that connects to specific health issues.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE TACTICS CONTENT MARKETING TACTICS:

- » **THOUGHTFUL CONTENT PLANNING** around topics that are seasonally relevant, specific enough to be useful and actionable, and in line with organization priorities
- » **ACTIONABLE INFORMATION THAT INSPIRES** a consumer to take action, whether on their own or with the support of your clinical staff
- » **CONTENT CALENDAR DEVELOPMENT** that includes topics that consumers are searching for (based on SEO research), content you want consumers searching for, and the stories you want to highlight from the front lines and that shows a dedication to engaging with each of the diverse audiences you serve

THE SHIFT: MEASUREMENT AND CALLS TO ACTION

BEFORE: WITH BRAND BUILDING PREVIOUSLY SEEN AS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR CONTENT AND SOCIAL CHANNELS, CONTENT MARKETING CAMPAIGNS WERE DESIGNED TO GENERATE ENGAGEMENT AND PRIMARILY MEASURED BY LEADING INDICATORS LIKE IMPRESSIONS, OPEN RATES AND LIKES/SHARES ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

NOW: Healthcare marketers are looking for ways to drive revenue and demonstrate an impact on patient volumes, often streamlining their approach and better coordinating brand and service line campaign strategies.

TO ALIGN YOUR CONTENT STRATEGY WITH THIS SHIFT:

Engage target consumers early in their research for options and accelerate the journey from awareness to consideration to action through your marketing campaigns. For screenings, chronic disease management and other immediate conversion opportunities, provide a path to online scheduling solutions or other frictionless ways to make an appointment. In many cases, you may be able to promote telehealth utilization for injuries and illnesses, mental health support and more.

For elective procedures and other priority services, direct candidates to virtual seminars, pre-op visits via telehealth, health risk assessments or downloadable guides that will fill the funnel with qualified leads.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE CONTENT MARKETING TACTICS:

- » **CONTENT DEVELOPMENT THAT PROVIDES** practical advice and options for clinical support when appropriate
- » **SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO REVIEWING** engagement and action data and subsequently optimizing your approach to content strategy
- » **TARGETED DIGITAL AND SOCIAL** campaigns that reach the right consumers with the right content





THE SHIFT STARTS NOW

IN THIS FLUID ENVIRONMENT, HAVING A CLEAR AND UNBIASED VIEW OF THE PANDEMIC SITUATION AND A VISION FOR THE PATH FORWARD WILL SEPARATE THE ORGANIZATIONS WHO CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE FROM THE ONES THAT COME OUT STRONGER.

It's critical to implement (or optimize) your content marketing strategy now to start generating quick wins and understanding your audiences even more so that you can pivot as the climate evolves. The marketing teams who wait will most certainly see their competitors pull ahead in building brand affinity and loyalty.

Of course, these shifts can't happen overnight. Here are a few steps you can take now to start refining your focus and facilitating longer-term transitions:

- » **CONDUCT AN AUDIT OF** all content marketing initiatives that were in place prior to the pandemic
- » **CONSIDER HOW YOUR COMMUNITY'S** needs are evolving through conversations/interviews with patients and consumers, and a review of existing performance analytics
- » **CONNECT WITH THE C-SUITE**, foundation leaders and other stakeholders on a regular basis to ensure marketing investments align with immediate needs and long-term priorities
- » **REACH OUT TO PARTNERS** for ideas and strategic guidance based on your unique goals, market and other elements
- » **CREATE AWARENESS AND ENTHUSIASM** for marketing's progress by celebrating wins throughout the process

By focusing on these four areas that align with both customer needs and organizational goals, your content strategy will be effective now and moving into the "new normal" for healthcare marketing.



LET'S CONNECT

**LET OUR HEALTHCARE CONTENT MARKETING EXPERTS
HELP YOU NAVIGATE THESE SHIFTS.**

CONTACT VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
JANE CROSBY AT 218.280.2306 OR JCROSBY@TRUENORTHCUSTOM.COM.

truenorthcustom.com