Modern Healthcare

Content-marketing Best Practices: Empathy is essential ingredient

By Natasha Madov, Advertising Age | October 30, 2015

Put yourself in their shoes. Understanding your target audience and their needs is the key to a successful content marketing campaign for healthcare.

"You have to take an empathetic view and know your customer," said Ellen Hoenig Carlson, founding partner at biopharma consultancy AdvanceMarketWoRx. What constitutes the good days, the bad days, what they tell (or don't tell) their doctor and even their cognitive level are important to understand in planning and designing a successful content strategy.

Some auto-immune or neurological ailments can impair a patient's ability to understand writing, per example. In those cases, it's necessary to develop the content in a way that can be consumed by the target audience. "No rivers of words, use chunks of information, tell it and retell it, use white space and visuals," said Melissa Andrews, vice president of client services at Targetbase, about what the agency learned from working with lupus patients and their caregivers. To achieve the campaign's goal, Targetbase also partnered with a behavioral psychologist.

A constant dialog with the client to make sure the content is scientifically accurate is a fundamental part of the process, said Joe LaMountain, vice president at Reingold. "It is an art and a science," he said. Sometimes physicians need to be reminded that although the content should be peer-reviewed, it is not going to a medical journal, but to a layman's e-mail inbox. "Once you show doctors the search volume for 'nose job' in opposition to 'rhinoplasty,' it becomes apparent that they don't need to be so indoctrinating."

Other things to be mindful of when planning content campaigns is also the way the message is delivered. "Your intended audience might feel more comfortable receiving the information from their doctor," Carlson said.

Other best practices for content marketing:

- **Dig in deep and research your target audience.** If it's patients, for instance, make sure you understand all their needs for information and how your client can fulfill those needs.
- **Identify the gaps in support.** Scour what is already offered by government and not-for-profits and determine the unserved markets your brand can reach.
- **Don't limit the support.** Develop partnerships with other entities when it's in your audience's best interest.
- **Compliance, compliance, compliance.** All materials need to follow federal regulations. That means agency and client need to cooperate in an agile manner to make sure all materials follow rules under the Food and Drug Administration and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.
- **Optimize for major search engines.** Patients still rely on Google for information and they need to find information about the brand.
- **Pay attention to the user experience and design.** Some design tweaks can help increase referrals and sign-ins significantly.
- **Don't separate the campaign from the main website.** A hotsite weakens your authority in Google and the organization will lose people who could search for content. It's best to redesign the site to include the campaign while it is running.
- **Your work is never done.** Content management is an ongoing process. Once the campaign is out there, listen to the feedback to refine and iterate.

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