

# DIGITAS HEALTH

## MARKETING AS A SERVICE: BUILDING BETTER EXPERIENCES IN HEALTHCARE



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Frustrations with healthcare are so cliché. Everyone has a story. In fact, everyone has multiple stories—about managed care mayhem, confusing insurance coverage, wait times at the doctor, and those pesky forms you have to fill out in quadruplicate.

That's why it's an exciting time to be in healthcare marketing. There are lots of things to fix, and some of those fixes will come from the outside-in. That is, the social forces that are mandating technological change in every other business vertical out there will in turn empower technologies that facilitate social change with respect to healthcare. And even if the science is still imperfect, at least the overall experience can be better.

That's why I love my job. I build experiences that service real needs, at very precise moments of meaning, during what might be the most important point in a person's life.

We recently passed the 10-year anniversary of Direct to Consumer (DTC) advertising in healthcare. And while the "ask your doctor about" mass-channel spots are still out there, you'll notice the majority of them have a different call-to-action than they did even two years ago... a URL. That's because Rx products are the most information-intensive products in the world. And the online channel facilitates that need for information better than a 30-second spot turned 15-second spot plus "fair balance" (better known as the "side effects include..." part).

But it doesn't end at the product or campaign website. We're building support programs that engage and connect. We're enabling conversations that weren't happening before. We're empowering patients to take control of their own health. We're guiding healthcare professionals out of the systemic mire. We're helping pharmaceutical companies build tools that actually matter to people. We're pushing our clients to market Direct FOR Consumers and not Direct TO Consumers. We're marketing as a service.

In fact, the "marketer" part of the title "healthcare marketer" in the interactive space seems a bit dated. Thanks to search, patients, caregivers, loved ones, and healthcare professionals can raise their keyword-rich hands and be magically served up relevance... sometimes. Once again, the science is imperfect. But our clients are getting better at it. And they're learning quickly that not being there to answer someone's question when their hand is raised comes across as irresponsible and non-credible.

And they're learning the power of transparency. Fear is still a driving motivation for many in the healthcare industry when it comes to the adoption of Web 2.0 technologies. Freeing content from its platform (things like RSS, XML, video embedding), and user-generated content can be viewed as an avenue for off-label promotion or a podium of adverse-event reporting

respectively. Many risky design decisions are swimming so deep in potential regulatory drama, that most pharma brand managers stop trying. We need to make it easy for them. We need to show them how we can make it safe. And most importantly, that change is already happening out there and that they need to regain relevance in a shifting landscape of trust.

Soon arguments like “our audience is 65+ and don’t have mobile phones” won’t hold water anymore. Mobile apps, widgets, real-time filtered content feeds (not a three-month review process), partnerships with social networks, interactive mechanisms-of-action, and transparent product comparisons (difficult as they may be), and the elusive electronic medical record, will become mandates. We’re already designing the experiences. We’re creating helpful moments in time. We’re building meaningful relationships between patients and doctors, doctors and pharmaceutical companies, and all the variations in between.

Whether you’re a creative director, user experience professional, marketer, strategist, project manager, writer, designer, developer, or client partner, we all have mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands, and friends all deserving of a better healthcare experience. The industry is poised on a precipice right now. The frustrations shouldn’t be cliché. They should be discussed openly and solved. They should be researched and core problems should be identified so we can build things to fix them. From the outside-in. The system isn’t a goliath. It’s a series of small solvable problems—some of which offer real opportunities for us as digital marketers to innovate. And in the meantime, maybe help someone sigh with relief, laugh, cry, breath, cheer, or cope.

Because somewhere inside us we all know that despite the imperfections of the healthcare industry, an informed, enjoyable healthcare experience makes everything better. And it’s nice being the ones to help promote change.

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