



# Embracing Healthcare 2.0: Is it Time?

## Small steps to move forward in a Web 2.0 world

Marketers who discover how to engage patients in online conversations openly, honestly and respectfully will build trust and strengthen relationships, as well as reach and influence new constituents.

By Liz Kay

Our industry is abuzz about healthcare 2.0 – healthcare’s unique reference to Web 2.0. But despite the talk, there seems to be very few answers and infinitely more questions. The first and most obvious question is, “What is it?” While there are varying definitions of Web 2.0, it’s largely seen as the evolution of the Web to an online platform where people can easily share, collaborate and participate – think YouTube, Wikipedia and del.icio.us. It’s also marked by a culture of openness and transparency and, due to growing bandwidths and new technologies, rich user experiences. Once we have a sense of what Web 2.0 is, we then have to figure out how to integrate it into our communications, while maintaining balance and keeping all our stakeholders in mind.

As healthcare marketers, we may not be ready (or willing) to adapt and change to this next generation Internet. There are many legal and regulatory questions that make becoming more open and giving up control of content challenging. The reality is, though, that those who figure out how to engage patients, consumers and all key stakeholders in online conversations openly, honestly and respectfully will build trust and loyalty, strengthen relationships, as well as reach and influence new constituents.

While there aren’t any tested methods or proven roadmaps yet, there are some things you should consider when shaping your healthcare 2.0 plans.

### Three Cs: Collaborate, Cooperate and Comply

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The first and perhaps most important step in developing a healthcare 2.0 platform is to form an internal team with representation from management, clinical, medical, legal, regulatory and marketing. The goal of this team is to develop a shared vision of compliance in a socially-networked world. This team can help develop guidelines not just for marketing, but for all company employees. Areas to cover include:

- Whether company-owned online properties can solicit or accept user-generated content/feedback; and if so, how that content is administered.
- What content can be posted by employees in online forums, such as blogs, message boards, wikis and other third-party sites?
- Who from the company is monitoring third-party content (blogs, wikis and other forums) and how is it monitored (including steps for handling adverse events or off-label promotion)?
- Most important, the guidelines can clearly state the company’s culture of compliance and remind employees that all communication, both online and offline, must adhere to company standards.

For the GlaxoSmithKline weight-loss product, alli (www.myalli.com), fostering an open culture began with a candid admission about the challenges of communicating in a regulated industry. Visitors to the discussion area are greeted with a statement that explains that, since myalli.com is subject to FDA regulations, visitors must respect the limitations of what can be posted online. Myalli.com is upfront about the need to delay visitors' posts by up to 24 hours so they can review and answer each comment. Most people don't mind; they're more concerned about getting honest answers to their health questions than being able to participate in an open blog. Myalli.com then follows through by posting answers that, from what we can see, are fair-balanced and compliant but don't feel canned.

### Social software and the patient journey.....

The social phenomenon at the heart of healthcare 2.0 is also what is inspirational: getting patients and consumers actively engaged in their own healthcare for better outcomes and overall well-being. Social media is an exceptional communications channel because it provides unprecedented opportunities to reach and interact with those who have self-identified. This is what we marketers have lived for, right? The ability to provide the right message to the right patient at the right time, when the patient is ready to hear it. But to harness this amazing opportunity, we need to listen carefully to the patient and identify where they are in their healthcare journey so that we can align messaging that connects and resonates, ultimately moving the patient through the journey to take action.

A good example is denial around obesity. For most overweight people, it's not about eating too much, but rather the underlying issues. If a doctor says, "You need to lose weight," an obese or overweight person may simply not be ready to hear it or to commit to the lifestyle change this requires. The myalli.com site provides a strong example of patient support with its "Am I ready?" section, which includes easy-to-use tools such as a self-assessment survey (which helps move the consumer through denial) and a readiness quiz that helps the consumer understand and visualize the commitment they will have to make to take the first step.

People who engage in social media have already self-identified, to some degree. When we align educational and supportive messaging with the patient at each step of their journey, we'll be doing a better job of making healthcare more effective for everyone.

### Rich user experiences.....

With Web 2.0 comes the opportunity to deliver rich user experiences. One way to deliver such an experience is to allow patients to submit real stories (reviewed first by a moderator) to your Web site and allow others to rate the stories. Peer-reviewed content allows good, useful information to rise to the top, becoming more accessible to others. It provides a voice for others to raise their hand

in acceptance or disagreement and create input. This also helps marketers learn more about the types of content their audience is most interested in.

Incorporating video and audio – whether it's personal stories, symptom management tips or how-to videos – makes for a rich user experience and creates a human connection. Making them available as podcasts or Web casts provides an additional way to provide messaging to patients when they are ready to hear it. This type of rich media experience also helps increase search engine marketing and provides audience interaction through Q&A, surveys and polling.

### Search supports it all.....

The "if you build it, they will come" adage might work in movies, but not in the competitive online community. Search engines remain the primary entry point for patients and consumers looking for health information. Make search an important part of your marketing strategy, and keep it finely tuned. Find new terms through associations, third-party content providers and patients, and integrate these terms and phrases into search engine marketing to boost its effectiveness.

Peer-edited sites like Wikipedia.org often come up in the top 10 search results, and many times in the golden top three for healthcare searches online. Working with legal and regulatory (see Three Cs above), we need to make sure our disease states are appropriately represented on a peer-edited site, such as Wikipedia. It may be appropriate to connect products/treatments to the appropriate disease state, but be careful to remain completely factual as the goal is to simply inform the reader (who is most likely recently diagnosed).

### Ramp up relationship marketing programs.....

Allowing patients to opt-in to e-mail communications may sound like a baby step, but it can be effective in creating conversations, building communities and driving to therapy. Incorporating chat-back channels such as polls, surveys, feedback and discussion boards can be a great way to engage and learn from patients. Build a dashboard that allows you to analyze open rates, click-throughs and opt-ins. Measurement will help you understand and build out content most valued by readers and will foster continuous improvement in the program as a whole.

We are well-positioned to benefit from healthcare 2.0. Patients are more voracious for high-quality health information. As providers, we have an opportunity to respectfully provide education and support to help a patient find a path to better health. Ultimately, this will extend the reach and influence of our brand, while we remain a valued partner in healthcare excellence. ■

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