



5 New Dynamics in Healthcare Marketing

Unlocking new opportunities
with the power of participation

The last decade has seen a **seismic shift** in the healthcare landscape.

Technological innovation has transformed care, empowering audiences with information and experiences to take control of their health journey.

Patients and providers alike are more informed, connected and engaged than ever... but healthcare marketing remains stuck in the past.

In today's world of interactivity, integration and authenticity, it's clear that the old healthcare marketing playbook is obsolete.

Healthcare marketers are either clinging to the conformity of 'what used to work' or hiding behind the perceived roadblocks of external or internal regulations. Few are successfully capitalising on the opportunities created by a change in healthcare dynamics.

79%

of people don't notice marketing messages.

58%

of healthcare decision makers rank conversations with others, as highly important.

4 in 5

trust people they're connected with, over brands.

70%

of HCPs trust their peers for new product recommendations.

“ Only healthcare brands that create valuable experiences and find creative ways to be part of the decision-making process will survive. ”

The *healthcare buyer's decision process* has never been more complicated.

There are more stakeholders involved, representing more areas of the business. More independent research is being done, taking longer, through a more diverse range of channels. Every decision is now more complex, convoluted and consensus driven.

Healthcare marketing has historically been repetitive, clichéd and one-way. However, in this complex decision-making landscape, brands are failing to cut through the noise to drive meaningful behavioural change. As healthcare becomes increasingly consumerised, we need **intuitive and personalised brand experiences** to keep up with recalibrated customer expectations. It's as true in healthcare as in other industries – people want to be engaged in a way that is genuinely compelling and entertaining.

We focus on driving **word-of-mouth advocacy** over one-way, didactic communications – we call this approach **“Participation”**. Participation brands authentically connect with communities by harnessing the power of mutual exchange: incentivising customers to interact with our brand – and each other –, by providing something of value to them. Participation is how we break the silos across the decision-making process, creating a network of influence and driving interaction and advocacy.



This document outlines **5 New Dynamics in Healthcare Marketing** that will help you breathe new life into your marketing and ultimately, move your business forward.

1 *Activate the network of influence*

Healthcare decisions are not made in silos, but rather a network of individuals engaged in the purchase decision, each with diverse needs and priorities.

Decision-making in healthcare can be a nuanced and lengthy process. Instead of a single decision-maker, multidisciplinary teams converge, peers debate new data, and executive boards consider their options. Purchasing decisions are evaluated for clinical value, but also financial, operational, and business value, to understand the holistic impact of a new solution. A 2023 study showed that almost a quarter of buying decisions for lab equipment are made through a committee vote (data on file).

The key to driving a decision lies in creating a consensus. For example, an oncology workflow solution may involve the Medical Director, the Heads of both Oncology and Pathology, the Chief Financial Officer, Clinical and Laboratory Operations, Legal and Procurement. It's clear the old approach of direct persuasion through one-to-one relationships is too limited. Incidentally, healthcare professionals rank congresses higher than any other channel for finding information (data on file) – nothing beats the in-person community-building and networking opportunities of a congress. Considering that **70% of HCPs trust peers** when it comes to new product recommendations (Iris research, 2024), stakeholder advocacy is a significant opportunity to drive growth.

The number one driver of first choice consideration is **peer to peer influence**, be that through direct recommendation or wider social proofing. We can infiltrate this '**network of influence**' by creating content that sparks conversations or discussions between these stakeholder groups. Instead of feature-overload to persuade the individual, it is vital that brands create content that drives Participation across the entire network of influence.

There are parallels in sectors outside the remit of healthcare, such as the complex B2B buying decisions in technology. We hosted **Samsung's Open Economy** event to drive debate on innovative approaches to corporate security, and how this investment can enable positive business outcomes. It's a great example of how to spark meaningful conversations within a community.



2

Cut through the noise

Healthcare marketing tends to follow a standard formula; repetitive, clichéd, one-way communications. It's all vanilla and brands are failing to differentiate effectively.

The healthcare marketing tone of voice tends to be homogenous; brand messaging feels repetitive; and visuals seem endlessly familiar. Several factors contribute to bland healthcare marketing, ranging from internal barriers, hesitancy around regulatory compliance, and a culture of “we’ve always done it this way.”

From a customer perspective, healthcare brands generally feel undifferentiated. This is an important consideration, as the correlation between distinctiveness and top of mind awareness is 95%. For brands to maintain ‘share of mind’, they need a **distinctive character** that can survive when being translated through intermediary channels and still cut through.

That means avoiding industry clichés and developing an **original story** and **brand character, distinct visual assets** and a **unique set of brand behaviours**. In B2B, brands generally seen to be ‘provocative and challenging’ were most likely to be both recognised and recommended.

Roche needed to break through the noise of the feature-driven Comprehensive Genomic Profiling landscape, where dull competitor comms were putting audiences to sleep. By embodying a bold brand character, we showed cancer researchers working together to ambitiously scale the genome, celebrating the relentless determination, collaboration and dedication of the cancer research community.



3

Convey the value

In healthcare marketing, feature-led communications reign supreme. But, it's the marketers who can connect their offer to the underlying customer needs that will establish true product value.

Healthcare marketers tend to think about their audience from the context of their role alone; they assume the Lab Director is focused solely on turn-around time and the CFO is focused solely on cost-cutting. However, **personality-based segmentation** can help humanise your audiences and ground all brand activities in your audiences' realities; are they ambitious or conformists? Visionary or pragmatic? This can then influence the engagement approach to win their trust and attention.

Many healthcare marketing programmes immediately delve into the functional features, leaving the audience overwhelmed with product-overload and information fatigue. Considering that only 14% of HCPs "strongly trust" their current brand (Iris research, 2024), it's clear that purely functional messaging isn't working. A consumer advertising parallel: people don't need your power drill, they need a hole in the wall – and beyond that, they need a shelf to display their book collection! What's the underlying motivation that our product enables?

In healthcare contexts, this can become a **value beyond the individual**; it may be a broader societal good, a motivating purpose or a strongly held belief. By aligning your brand to this emotional value, we're positioning as true partners to our customers, elevating our customers' role to a more visionary place in order to drive brand Participation.

By taking this approach, we switch from selling a product to customers, to understanding their needs and providing a solution that goes beyond the functional to more of an emotional value. This approach has a strong business rationale, as customers are more willing to share their data with brands that **'enhance their passions and interests'** (95% correlation).

Healthcare audiences are people, not statistics – and as an industry, we need to move beyond generic 'B2B speak' and adopt the real language of the customer. The only way to do that is for marketers to immerse themselves in the worlds of those customers, really getting to grips with their pain points and unmet needs.

4

Harness the power of mutual exchange

Healthcare brands often fail to incentivise brand interaction. What is your audience gaining from engaging with your brand? The quality of these experiences determines the extent to which they will reciprocate.

All audiences want to be **engaged**, **intrigued**, and **genuinely entertained**. If they invest their time in you, they expect something as a result – be it utility, knowledge or even a simple ‘smile in the mind’. An ongoing litmus test for healthcare marketers is to ask this question:

“If I came across this content... why would I read on?”

This is the power of **‘mutual exchange’** to drive Participation; we offer brand experiences that **incentivise interaction**. This might be an entertaining activity, sharable content, a topic to debate with their peers, a new perspective on the category, a way to communicate effectively with their patient. As ideas spread in this way, they generate potential business value for brands, in the form of brand Participation; online clicks, “likes”, shares – which drive engagement, conversion and advocacy.

When building your tactical plan and mapping out your engagement touchpoints, consider what your audience is gaining from each brand interaction, and how you’re driving active Participation. Hint: it’s not bombarding them with marketing messages!

DiaLog, a laboratory application portal, needed to communicate the day-to-day value that their digital solutions provided to Lab Directors. So we developed **LAByrinth**, an interactive game where players overcome the chaos of a busy diagnostics lab with various DiaLog digital solutions. Processing samples earned points, while hitting certain targets allowed them to power up. Players saw the benefit of DiaLog in real time... and had fun doing it.



5

Keep up with accelerated expectations

Parallel to the rise of consumerism in healthcare, audiences are increasingly expecting more sophisticated brand experiences.

The digitalisation of healthcare has paved the way for an increasingly consumer-inspired healthcare landscape. In the past, allowances were made for healthcare lagging behind in customer experience – the sector has historically been slow-moving, cautious and highly regulated. However, in today's more digitised health sector, audience expectations are increasing.

In 2024, patients and providers alike expect brand experiences to be intuitive, personalised, and fully integrated, with seamless information transfer between touchpoints. Content should be highly relevant to not just their role, but their specific interests and needs. Brands that make the experience of exploring their offering more **relevant** and **enjoyable** are winning the hearts and minds of their customers –and reaping the benefits of active brand Participation. As functional performance becomes harder to distinguish between brands, the new battleground is in degrees of customer experience.

Decision makers are more likely to pay more for brands who 'make the process of researching their products more enjoyable than others'. And they are more likely to choose brands who '**create experiences** I want to be part of'. Regardless of category, customers have had their expectations recalibrated by brands who make the whole experience seamless and enjoyable. Customers demand **value**, **ease** and **enjoyment**, and in return will be prepared to pay a premium for the brands that deliver it.

Summary

The way ideas travel has changed. Healthcare marketing has entered the networked age.

A new kind of decision-making process has emerged, and marketers need a new set of skills to help them infiltrate it, to drive true Participation.

The healthcare brands who create valuable experiences and find creative ways to influence decision making will unlock disproportionate returns.

To discuss how your business can leverage the **5 New Dynamics in Healthcare Marketing**, contact:

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Iris is the Participation Agency.

We're a network of over 1000 marketing experts, in 10 offices around the globe. We work with some of the world's biggest B2C and B2B brands – with specialisms in Health, Technology and Finance. We have 15 years of bringing this marketing expertise to healthcare.

We deliver competitive advantage through progressive, more creative communications that reimagine what healthcare brand experiences can be.



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