

MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Can't We All Just Get Along?

In today's turbulent healthcare environment, a new partnership between marketing and communications will be essential to achieving improved business performance and brand management.

Historically, marketing and public relations or corporate communications departments have not always played well together. Different skill sets, work priorities, and even separate leadership structures have often created a gulf between the two disciplines. More recently, the pervasive use of web, social media, and mobile technologies, by everyone from patients to physicians to business partners, has resulted in increased

tensions between the disciplines as to ownership of communication channels, messaging, audience engagement, and other aspects of marketing and communications management.

In many organizations, the traditional roles of both disciplines have proven to be roadblocks to productive working relationships. Historically, marketers were engaged primarily in one-way promotion to consumers to build brand strength and drive service line volume (the classic 4 Ps) and revenue, whereas public relations professionals engaged more in dialogue with internal and external stakeholders (e.g., employees, physicians, news media, civic leaders, the community) to educate, manage reputation, and cultivate support.

Training and skill sets for each discipline also tend to differ. Marketers typically have business backgrounds, including strong financial and analytical skills, while public relations professionals often possess journalism backgrounds and have superb communication skills.

Whatever the source of discontent, when the two disciplines collide rather than collaborate, performance is suboptimized,

resulting in weakened brand performance, missed business opportunities, disjointed messaging to stakeholders, misaligned investments, and underperforming operations.

A New Era: Innovation, Performance, and Accountability

Across all industries, the disciplines of marketing and communications are increasingly viewed as core business competencies, critical to driving growth, innovation, customer loyalty, and better business performance. Changing competitive dynamics, global markets, and web and mobile technologies are transforming marketing and communications practices.

Further, the line between marketing and public relations is blurring. Complex, competitive markets and the emergence of web, social, and mobile technologies require greater cross-functional collaboration across the marketing and public relations/communications disciplines. Traditional competencies, tasks, and accountabilities are more intermingled than in the past. New and blended competencies and skills will create a more synergistic capability that can better leverage the technology

How One Health System Tackled the Marketing/Public Relations Culture Clash

The MetroHealth System is an academic health system in Cleveland, Ohio. It is the public hospital for Cuyahoga County and is celebrating its 175th anniversary in 2012. MetroHealth operates in a hypercompetitive healthcare market that includes Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals of Cleveland.

For much of the late 1990s and early 2000s, MetroHealth faced very challenging finances. A new CEO joined MetroHealth in 2008, and since then the organization's financial standing has improved dramatically.

But the financially challenged years affected MetroHealth's marketing and communications budget. The communications function was understaffed and had few resources. As a result, market research showed that MetroHealth had no real image and was mostly recognized as a trauma center. A communications audit completed in 2010 showed that MetroHealth needed an expanded media staff, greater web presence, additional publications and collaterals, and more external events. As a result, new communications staff was hired to fill these needs.

Concurrently, MetroHealth began its market development campaign in the fall of 2009. With an overriding goal of growth, the campaign consisted of four strategic initiatives: development of an

ambulatory network, development of a stronger physician network, expansion of the narrow-network health plan offered through MetroHealth Select, and implementation of service line marketing. New marketers were hired to implement the campaign. They had aggressive business development and new growth goals.

The stage was set for a culture clash. The new market development staff was hired from competitor organizations and brought with them different perspectives and working models. They were new to the culture and capabilities of a public hospital. The two departments were merged with the intention of developing more shared goals and realigning along service line priorities to increase patient volumes and establish more accountability.

Two strategies were used to quickly attack and diminish the culture clash. The first and most powerful was the creation of shared goals to increase volumes and rebrand MetroHealth. The second was a reorganization of staff functions around service lines. Market development service line staff were aligned with dedicated communications staff and asked to meet regularly as a team.

Rebranding MetroHealth was one of the first cross-functional projects that involved the entire group. The initiative was designed to increase relevance and credibility. It started with five people in communications, expanded to marketing staff, and ultimately included 40 "brand ambassadors" throughout MetroHealth to operationalize the brand. An advertising campaign built around the theme "Proud Sponsor of the Comeback" focused on priority service lines.

platforms required for today's marketing and communications strategies.

New and improved requirements for marketing and communications professionals include:

- market intelligence and business analytics skills,
- brand building and management competencies,
- market and customer creation abilities,
- customer engagement proficiencies,
- social commerce and community management,
- cross-channel content management processes,
- new-media fluency (web, mobile, social, etc.), and
- real-time responsiveness.

In healthcare, innovations in technology and the changing nature of competition, driven largely by healthcare reform and consolidation, are creating new demands for marketing and communications performance. New capabilities, new skills, and a new partnership will be essential to achieving improved business performance and brand management. The MetroHealth System faced just this challenge when it restructured its communications and market development functions to focus on building the organization's brand and improving its business performance (see sidebar).

The New Imperative: Cross-Functional Collaboration

For the foreseeable future, healthcare organizations will be operating with competing and somewhat conflicting objectives as they attempt to optimize commercial volumes for core clinical programs while simultaneously building accountable care systems and capabilities. Marketers and communicators must step up in partnership to help their organizations improve competitive performance by:

- building powerful, relevant, differentiated brands to attract and retain customers, staff, physicians, businesses, and insurers.
- cultivating relationships with physicians and driving successful growth of more

tightly integrated physician enterprises.

- developing highly targeted growth strategies for core service lines and businesses encompassing physicians, ambulatory sites, and inpatient programs, and creating future-ready models of care that optimize profitability under healthcare reform.
- building support for strategic growth initiatives that include expansion into new markets and new lines of business through strategic acquisitions, mergers, and partnerships.
- creating a customer-centric service culture differentiated by an experience that delivers on the brand value proposition.
- cultivating and maintaining proactive relationships with key constituencies and influencers (e.g., federal, state, and local governments; business and civic leaders; news media, etc.) during a period of rapid change and reform.
- leading organizations in the adoption and use of web, mobile, and social technologies, both to build the brand and to engage consumers in health practices and decision making critical to the success of the new care models emerging from reform imperatives.

To do this, marketing and public relations leaders will need to come together around a shared vision for their roles and accountabilities. They will need to work together to develop a marketing and communications management infrastructure that is aligned with the organization's strategy, one that better leverages marketing and public relations resources in terms of capabilities, economics, and desired outcomes.

Transforming the Disciplines

In an era of healthcare reform and the resultant transformation of delivery systems, marketing and public relations professionals have an unprecedented opportunity to create capabilities that proactively address the changing basis for competition and support execution of strategy. Three key factors will drive success:

- First and foremost, clear alignment with the organization's unique strategic vision and goals. If the marketing and communications functions are not

viewed as business competencies that are strategy-critical to achieving those goals, they will continually be challenged and inadequately resourced.

- Second, the ability to help organizations understand and address the new, competitive dynamics of restructuring markets and intensifying competitor activities in anticipation of reform and other industry pressures.
- And, third, the ability to proactively address the transformation of marketing and communications practices driven by web, social, and mobile technologies. Building new-media fluency is certainly a priority not only for the marketing and public relations functions, but across the entire organization.

This transformation of marketing and public relations roles requires a shift in thinking about the two disciplines. Both should be viewed not as tactical operations but as disciplines that are strategic, cross-functional, and bottom-line oriented. When marketers and communicators are focused on opportunities that move the health system into the future, they can drive alignment across the value network (operations, IT, physicians, contracting, etc.), understand changing payment and business models, and deliver on revenue growth and profit targets.

It's a challenge that will require a purposeful, comprehensive, and collaborative approach. And the timing couldn't be better. ☺

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