Content Strategy For Healthcare

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Are you doing everything you can to make your healthcare organization's digital content compelling, valuable and persuasive?

If you run a healthcare-related website, or oversee the professionals that do, then you know that content is often neglected. The result? Organizations everywhere are losing the opportunity to attract and retain patients through their Web content. Eighty-five percent of all healthcare searches online are initiated for a loved one, which means that potential patients and their families are genuinely invested in finding content that will help guide their medical decisions. They're seeking detailed information about your physicians, facilities, surgical procedures and advanced diagnostics and treatments—yet content like this is often treated as a low-priority detail of any digital project.

Of course, anyone who works with content knows it is actually the opposite.

What is content strategy?

Content strategy is a formalized, digital publishing strategy that includes four phases: **plan, create, publish** and **manage**. All organizations must think of themselves as publishers who are responsible for educating, informing and persuading customers with their content.

Content strategy holds the promise of mapping your efforts and goals in a systematic, organized fashion. The process offers return on investment because it creates digital content marching orders for your organization—orders that increase efficiency and take the guesswork out of execution. The end result? Effortless content development that allows creativity to flourish.

Phase I: PLAN

You can create a content strategy for your entire website, or for just one clinical service line's website. Whether you are developing new content or working with existing content, planning is vital. Give yourself enough time to be thorough and ask all the right questions—those answers will inform the other three phases of your content strategy.

When planning a content strategy, you will want to perform the following activities:

1. **Understand your organization's business strategies and overall goals:** Review the business plan and talk to your hospital's leadership to clarify priorities.
2. **Align content goals with those of the organization's overall strategy:** Once you understand the objectives, you can decide how to spend your content resources.
3. **Identify and learn as much as you can about your users:** Review your pertinent data: site analytics, information from call centers, focus groups and usability testing.
4. **Perform a detailed content audit:** This will include cataloguing and inventorying all the content on your site, including page titles, URLs, content types, interactive tools and the last date each piece of your content was updated. To make this task more manageable, you may want to prioritize by strategic service line.
5. **Create a workflow map:** Understand how content is prepared within your organization and how new ideas are generated. Identify the people responsible for overseeing the creation of content, caring for the content once it is live, and analyzing reports on content performance.
6. **Set benchmarks of how you will measure success:** Perhaps the goal at this point is just to map workflow. That's a great start; it may be too early to set measurable goals like page views and unique visitors.
7. **Document what you have learned in a creative brief:** The brief should detail as much information as possible about the project, goals, business objectives and other valuable information. Even if you are the only person who looks at it, it will serve as a valuable guide.

10 Questions to Ask Before Planning Your Content Strategy:

- Do you have a formalized, written plan in place for how content is created and moved to a digital publishing platform, like a website, blog, etc.?
- Can you describe your current content creation process?
- How are goals about content and revenue communicated to staff?
- Do you link content creation to revenue using a direct formula?
- How often do you look at user analytics? Do you distribute to staff?
- What type of Content Management System (CMS) do you use? Can you describe how the content staff interfaces and uses the CMS?
- Do you have any of the following?
  - Editorial Guidelines
  - Editorial Calendar
  - Style Guide
  - Search Engine Optimization Guidelines
  - Copy Decks or Templates
- Do you have a plan or guideline for how you manage outdated content?
- Can you state three measurable goals you would like to achieve with a content strategy?
- Does your social media strategy directly relate to your content creation process?

Phase II: CREATE

Creating content (written, photographs, podcasts, video, etc.) can often be the most fun part of a content strategy. It is like entering an art studio and beginning to paint, craft or sculpt. But, without a strong framework for how you create content, the process falls apart, right at the moment you need the content to populate your gorgeous new site—delaying launch yet again.

1. **Revisit the creative brief, user goals and benchmarks:** Understand why you are creating content and for whom.
2. **Carefully analyze the workflow:** Make sure you have the right people in the right roles. This will change over time and depend on the type of content you are producing.
3. **Source the ideas and find narratives that align with content:** In a hospital, this might mean approaching physicians for the facts to write different content pages, or identifying patients who will contribute testimonials.
4. **Create a user-friendly Information Architecture:** Ensure you are calling pages by names that patients use, like high blood pressure, instead of hypertension.
5. **Follow the workflow:** Identify who performs well for assigned tasks and where you might need additional talents and resources.
6. **Note how content can be repurposed**: How can a health condition article become a blog post? Could a podcast be turned into a "What to Expect" guide? This will be important when you create a social media strategy (*page 7*).

It will take about a year to get content creation right, unless you are producing volumes of content every week. Be patient. Content development isn't a rote, repetitive cycle—it's a creative process that will change depending on the project. Treat every project as a learning experience—you will learn more about how to streamline the process for the next time.

Avoid the Sea of Sameness with Your Content

So many healthcare organizations sound like a broken record: We care about you! We are the best! Patients are looking for real, specific voices in their digital content so they can make intelligent, informed choices about their healthcare. To break out of your content rut:

- Play up your strengths, and how they will affect patient care
- Use patient stories and testimonials to illustrate how your organization helped patients overcome challenges
- Create "What to Expect" guides using pictures, slideshows and videos
- Take time to talk about the amenities, parking and visitor needs
- Consider creating content marketing campaigns for clinical service lines

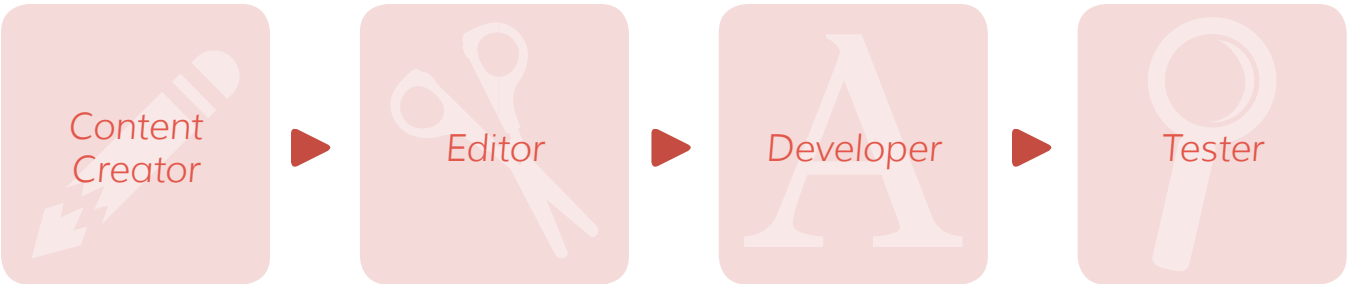
See more in my short video:
5 Rules for Avoiding Boring Hospital Content at
www.ahamediagroup.com

Phase III: PUBLISH

Regardless of how many pages your hospital's website has, it is essential to understand who has power over your CMS, and whom you need to talk to when content needs to change or links are broken. PUBLISH is not only about getting content up on your website, it is about understanding who manages that entire process.

1. **Map your publishing workflow:** Understand how finalized content moves through the publishing queue to going live online.
2. **Create an editorial calendar:** Look at a year-long plan and create an editorial calendar around daily, weekly, monthly and project-based content to move away from the "just change this one page" model. This should include a publishing calendar so everyone is aware of anticipated work.
3. **Test the content:** Assign someone to verify that all the links work and the content reads well.
4. **Run regular reports:** Establish a framework for analyzing how your content performs and if your audience is receptive to new content.
5. **Decide on channel distribution:** Speak to those responsible for social media about how to distribute and announce your new content.

An example of a workflow map.



Phase IV: MANAGE or GOVERN

Governance of digital content is an essential piece of content strategy that every organization finds challenging. If you think of your website as a garden, then governance is like pulling weeds, watering flowers and trimming hedges. Good governance will demonstrate that someone is paying attention to your website.

1. **Create a shared document where you can build the style guide as a team:** Style guides keep everyone on the "same page" and by sharing this document it stays living and fresh.
2. **Follow your editorial calendar for archiving content:** When you create new content, you should also decide on the shelf life for that content.
3. **Create archiving and content management standards that are living documents:** Everyone on the team has access to the files and they can edit when new ideas or processes are implemented.
4. **Create guidelines for how often you should review and share analytics:** This means everyone on the team is able to review and analyze traffic patterns on the site.
5. **Consider training classes:** Explain analytics so people on the team truly understand what they mean and how they can affect content decisions.

CHECKLIST

PHASE	✔	DUE	TASK	DESCRIPTION
PLAN			Creative Brief	Detail how your business strategy aligns with the content you are creating or editing for this new site, or site redesign.
			Content Audit	Inventory your content using qualitative and quantitative audits. Quantitative audits count the number of pages and content types; qualitative audits examine the quality of your content.
			Workflow Map	Understand and map how content is prepared, sourced and created within your organization.
CREATE			Review the Creative Brief	If you are working with a clinical service line, make sure their goals align with yours. Use their goals to create ideas about content types, important topics and questions patients want answered.
			Information Architecture	Decide on file structure, page names and content types that fit in with the overall business strategy and goals.
			Visual Design	Designers signal the user with visual cues. If you are working within an existing design, make sure the content types you have chosen are appropriate for your design and/or CMS.
			Content Creation	This comes in many forms—text, video, audio, slideshows, PDFs, etc. Use freelance content creators if you don't have internal staff that can help you craft standout content.
PUBLISH			Publishing Workflow	Understand how content is published to your website and how many hands have to touch it before it can go live.
			Editorial Calendars	Plan for publishing your content so everyone on the team understands the workflow. Align content creation with other marketing campaigns.
			Quality Assurance	Test your content on different browsers when it is posted so you know links work and videos download.
			Channel Distribution	Pick different social media tools to alert users about new content.
MANAGE			Style Guides	Use an accepted style guide, like The Associated Press Stylebook, or create one of your own to make sure language on your site is consistent.
			Archiving Guidelines	Make sure content has a shelf life so your pages remain fresh and relevant.
			Analytics Reports	Share and analyze analytics reports on a regular basis so your team knows how your content is performing in the real world.
			Training	Read blogs and articles and consider training classes in writing, creating, publishing and managing content.

Social Media Strategy for Hospitals

Many healthcare organizations have been reluctant to dip their toes into the metaphorical "social media" space. Legal, organizational and resource challenges abound for hospital marketers, and social media may seem like a "flash in the pan." But if someone had told you 10 years ago not to build a hospital website because your audience may not be visting the Internet, would you have listened?

Social media is really about engaging your audience and building relationships through sharing content online. Most hospital marketers don't realize they are sitting on a gold mine of underused content.

When creating your content strategy, look carefully at your content audit from the planning phase. Aren't there many newsletters, patient testimonials and healthcare articles you could post on Facebook or tweet about on Twitter?

To begin using social media, consider designing a social media campaign around one clinical service line—or better yet a multidisciplinary group, where you can use varied types of content to speak about their expertise.

Don't be afraid to experiment with social media—just be sure you have the resources to continue to manage and update your pages and presence online.

Thinking Ahead: Mobile Content Strategy

For hospitals, it is the future: Think about how to use and capture the mobile audience. Start planning how to give your patients, families and future employees needed information easily through their mobile device. In return, they will reward your efforts with positive word of mouth about their fantastic experience receiving treatment and care at your hospital. Some quick ideas:

1. *Use Foursquare or Facebook Places to make them feel welcome.*
2. *Use QR codes:* QR codes, shorthand for "quick response," are bar codes in which you can embed parking information, cafeteria menus and an interactive map of the hospital.
3. *Use Facebook Charity Deals*: When a user checks in to Facebook Places using their phone, send them the option to give a dollar donation immediately to any department or doctor of their choice.

Learn more at my blog post: How Hospitals Can Use Facebook Places, Foursquare and QR Codes

@aha MEDIA GROUP, LLC

Aha Media Group, LLC offers digital strategy and content creation solutions for healthcare clients. We are based in the Washington, D.C. area.

Our staff provides:

- Content strategy solutions
- Writing of Web, digital communications and print content
- Workshops on content strategy and digital writing

Content strategists can help you:

- Organize your thinking around your content
- Inventory and analyze your content—online, print and social media
- Align your content to your business objectives
- Manage your content
- Repurpose your content
- Create a content methodology for your organization

About Ahava R. Leibtag, Principal of Aha Media

Ahava has more than 15 years of experience in writing, messaging and marketing. Her unique specialty is creating content designed to reach your end-user, no matter how intricate your subject matter.

Ahava is the principal of Aha Media, a Web consulting firm founded in 2005. Aha Media's team includes content strategists, writers and project managers. Clients include Johns Hopkins Medicine, Wake Forest Baptist Health, Washington Cancer Institute, St. Anthony's Medical Center, Georgetown University Hospital, Franklin Square Hospital Center and Montgomery General Hospital.

Online it ALL Matters: 5 Healthcare Blog Posts

- 5 content strategy tools your hospital should be using right now
- Content Strategy for Hospitals: Make your health pages stickier
- How health literate is your hospital's website?
- Why no one really cares about multidisciplinary medicine
- Plain Language: Using "you" or "the patient"