



# Your Healthcare Blog

The Nucleus Of Your Healthcare Social Media Strategy

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# To blog, or not to blog|

That is NOT the question!

Because your blog – your ongoing opportunity to engage audiences, on their terms, in ways that are important to them – should be the nucleus of your social media efforts.

Also, because your blog can provide differentiating (and energizing) value to your communities, your patients (your prospective patients), their families and friends.

Additionally, there's huge potential of using blogging for SEO. They let you be present on a wide variety of healthcare topics when someone goes searching. Your job as a healthcare marketer is to show up in that search; and your blog can help you do that through smart, interesting, targeted content.

# Caveat: though you should not blog if:

- you don't want your organization to be present or to be found
- you don't want a conversation, and don't want to start one
- you value and want your privacy, and seek seclusion and isolation

# The opportunity is significant.

Particularly given the fact that less than 3% of registered hospitals are regularly engaging in meaningful, potentially life-enhancing and life-changing, dialogue through a blog. This is what the hospital/health system blogosphere looks like today relative to other social media channels.

As of June 2011, Hospital Social Media Accounts\* were as follows:

Out of 1,188 Hospitals-

548 are on YouTube 

788 are on Twitter 

1018 are on Facebook, 

yet only 137 have Blogs 

\* Ed Bennett, Found In Cache

I wrote this e-book  
for two purposes:

For those of you who are already blogging, to provide a resource for what you might do to improve upon your current efforts.

And for those who are not, to compel you (on behalf of your external and internal audiences) to reconsider and act.



Underlying the importance of your blog is change, in the form of “it takes a community to build a trusted, high-energy brand.” It’s the one constant in regard to the future success of your healthcare organization’s relationships.

There are seven outcomes reflective of this change. The one common denominator is that your patients, their families and your communities are calling the shots about how they choose to connect with your organizations and what they want out of their relationships with you.

- |                    |     |                             |
|--------------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| 1. Trust of Others | vs. | Your Healthcare Advertising |
| 2. Engagement      | vs. | Your Interruption           |
| 3. My Terms/Values | vs. | Your Marketing Agenda       |
| 4. Participation   | vs. | Treatment as Followers      |
| 5. Demonstration   | vs. | Your Claims                 |
| 6. Dialogue        | vs. | Your One-Way Monologue      |
| 7. Transparency    | vs. | Behind The Curtain          |



But it all comes down to one thing. Similar to what Billy Crystal said in City Slickers:

*life is about one thing:*

How can you make a meaningful difference in the DAILY lives of your communities and patients? And not just in times of sickness. And not just in the marketing department but across the organization. Such that you grow both the relationship and financial value of your healthcare organization (all else being equal).



But it's vital to remember...that value is defined by them, not you. For your blog to be meaningful, you need to (really):

- understand your audiences
- as people, not as patients
- talking to them, not at them
- showing them (demonstrating through your actions), that you care

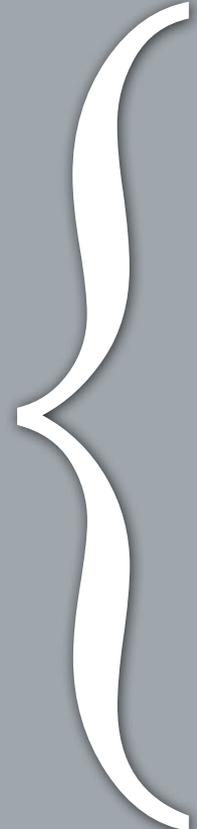


<b>External Goals</b>	<b>Internal Goals</b>
Community/patient education	Connection
Participation in care	Purpose/contribution
Discussion/collaboration	Listen/identify trends
Competitive advantage	Share stories/ideas
Patient engagement	Discussions/collaboration
Improved outcomes	Search engine love
Patient stories	Clinical expertise
Building trust	Recruitment

Specific to your hospital or health system, your blog, as the hub of your social media activity, can meet many different (though clearly not this many) goals, and deliver value in a number of different ways for both your external audiences and your organization – beyond what you can do through your advertising, your website, your newsletters, or any other vehicle in your marketing arsenal.

Goal is to write your content, then feed (and repurpose) that content to your other social outlets.

In summary, the benefits  
of a blog to your healthcare  
organization include:



**Creating Attraction** (starting with search)

**Extending Invitation** (to observe or participate)

**Energizing** (both inside and outside the organization)

**Empowering** (helping people achieve what they can't on their own)

**Building Trust** (lacking yet vitally important to building strong brands)

**Driving Relationships** (beyond the needs-based occasion)

**Transparency** (desired by audiences)

**Creating Separation** (vs. competitors)

So how do you create a compelling blog or strengthen your current one to cut through the noise and meaningfully connect your organization with your audiences.

## Consider identifying the sweet spot of:

- organization, facility or service line expertise and passion
- your served communities needs, desires, concerns
- business and brand goals
- internal resources

Identifying these factors will ensure you serve your audiences in ways that are uniquely yours, based on resource realities.

Then recognize that there are two critical components necessary for success:

- **Great Content:** content has gone from being scarce to ubiquitous. It comes from all of us and can be overwhelming. And often it's just self-serving noise. So you must make sure that yours is relevant and compelling to your audiences. And the best way to ensure this, is to view your blog, and its value, from the point of view of your chosen target audiences.
- **Building Community.** If you don't engage, if you don't reach out to others, and others don't reach out to you, you're going to suffer what is known as "lonely blog syndrome."



It's not pretty, and this is what it looks like. To avoid this malady, respond to those who take the time to respond to your posts. Interact with people on other sites. Comment on others blog posts. Tweet your links. Recognize and publicly thank those who share your content elsewhere. You can be really old school and pick up that thing called the phone. But in a word, socialize.



Part three is about getting your blog up and running.

Hitting the start button, or for some of you, improving upon your efforts. There are six important steps to creating a blog and delivering value back to your organization.

We've all had conversations where we start everywhere but at the beginning.

But your blog should be no different than any other initiative your action in your organization – by starting with your goals and strategies.



## First. What do you want to achieve?

How does your blog fit with your corporate vision and mission; with your business objectives; and alongside other initiatives. Then what do you want to achieve through your blog? Is it awareness of the organization or of specific service lines, website traffic, inquiries, volume, communicating inside/outside.

**Second.** What are the overall platforms you'll use to achieve your goals? Similar to your advertising campaigns, this is the equivalent of the overall theme. And I've identified six to consider:

- 1. Thought-Leadership:** to become a trusted resource – through thoughts, insights and opinions, about a particular healthcare topic or niche
- 2. Engagement:** recognizing your target audience's input and contributions – aimed at creating greater satisfaction, loyalty and resourcing for ideas and feedback for improvements
- 3. Empowerment:** using your blog to create a role for audiences to take active participation in their health
- 4. Day in The Life:** sharing stories of things happening in the daily routine of your organization
- 5. Corporate Culture:** to help people better understand the human-side of your organization (better bonding through blogging)
- 6. Branding:** over time, establishing or strengthening your brand image

The strongest platform for your organization's blog will align with your overall Social Media goals and fit the target groups that it's aimed at.

## A few quick examples of blogs reflecting a few of these platforms:



**Thought-Leadership:** Fierce Healthcare's Hospital Impact: dedicated to providing information for current and emerging hospital leaders, thinkers and enablers. The blog's mission is to answer the question "what will it take for hospitals to be the best run organizations on the face of the planet?"



**Empowerment:** Children's Hospital Boston blog Thrive is devoted to all things pediatric health care and scientific research. They help consumers and reporters touch base with some of the world's foremost experts on topics from sleep problems to autism genetics.



**Corporate Culture:** Tom Quinn, President & CEO of Community General Hospital in Syracuse, NY, provides his insights into hospital progress, philosophies and news.

## 2. Audiences

You have many prospective audiences to choose from, both external and internal (see right). But you can't engage all of them. The more dispersed you become, the less relevant you become. No different than in your marketing and communications. So, go back to your goals and strategies, and

1. Determine/segment the audience(s) that are most appropriate and who will best benefit from your blog.

Then maintain a sharp focus on how to best deliver value to them.

### **External**

Current Patients, Families, Friends

Future Patients

Communities

Caregivers

Donors

Suppliers/Vendors

Health Plans/Payors

Media/Other Opinion Leaders

### **Internal**

Medical Staff

Hospital/System Staff

Employees

Volunteers

# Here's an example of one way you might segment.

Those audiences who have time sensitive needs, and could be important to your organization in terms of acquisition/patient care. Blog could be the doorway into your organization.

Those audiences who require information to better understand and interact with your organization.

Those audiences who have working relationships with your organization. They might visit your blog less frequently, and might require targeted content.

<b>Time Sensitive</b>	<b>Necessary</b>	<b>Operational</b>
Aquisition/Care	Awareness/Access Information	Relationships
Potential Patients Current Patients New Patients Caregivers	Volunteers Donors Extended Families Potential Employees	Media Current Employees Alumni Suppliers/Vendors

## 3. Content

There are three considerations:

**a. direction**

**b. guidelines**

**c. boundaries**

**a. Direction (including):**

**Keywords.** The words or phrases in the content of your blog that someone is most likely to use when searching their desired healthcare topic. Keywords are one of the most basic, yet highly effective things you need to consider

when optimizing your blog for search engine spiders; and letting them know what your posts are about.

When deciding on the keywords you want to target in your blogs, it's important to think like your communities and prospective patients. Consider the advice of Ian Lurie from Conversation Marketing, *“Burn the thesaurus. Think about the words that people use to find you. Then, as a revolutionary new internet marketing strategy, actually write those words in your copy. You’ll get more traffic. You’ll get more sales/leads/whatever.”*

Use your most important keyword(s) in the title of your blog post and preferably in the first phrase of paragraph. Place the keywords a couple more times throughout in a natural context. FYI, experts generally agree that you should use keywords to between 7-10% of the total copy length.

**Style.** Considered in the context of what's most relevant to your organization, and to your target audience. Style determines the type of content, and the best way your target wants to be engaged. Will it be descriptive, interactive, emotional, controversial. Will it include (and it should) video/audio, comments/polls/surveys, series/related posts, events/competitions.

**Content Outline.** Has to fit with your style and make effective use of your Keyword Ownership. And it's best to start with an outline first (e.g. whether it's an article, conversation, opinions, etc.), to prepare you for what you want to convey inside the post and make the writing flow.

**Your Sources.** Will it come from your organization or from 3rd party sources. Authoritative and/or official or unofficial sources. Examples of 3rd party sources can include news sites, other social media sites and platforms, customers, suppliers and other participants in your business process network, experts, gurus, influencers.

## **b. Guidelines:**

**1. Deliver Value.** Value based on your audience's agenda. You might say to yourself "no kidding." But this is really hard. And getting harder all the time given the content that can absolutely smother and overtake us.

### **2. Engage**

Your goal is to find ways for consumers to contribute, join in and build upon your message. Letting them make your message their message. Building advocacy by building community.

### **3. Think Viral**

Your content should be important enough/unique enough, fill-in-the-blank enough to be spreadable. People should want to share it – because it helps family, friends, colleagues, others like them, to solve a problem.

Here are some ways to deliver value through your posts.

Write something...

Useful

Newsworthy

Insightful

Help People Achieve

Sense of Belonging

Inspiring

Solves a Problem

Saves Time or Money

Resource

Opinionated

And here are a few good examples, in my opinion:



Kerri Sparling's blog SixUntilMe. For those of you who may not be familiar, SixUntilMe relates to the fact that her first symptoms of diabetes presented themselves when she was six years old. Six years until diabetes. Kerri blew me away the first time I heard her speak.



Mayo Clinic's Stress Management blog about Positive thinking: reducing stress, enjoying life more, overcoming negative self-talk.



Kaiser Permanente's Dr. Maring blog: who began to shop at farmers markets more than 30 years ago, and who brought his personal passion into his profession in 2003, when he founded one of the country's first-ever hospital-based farmers markets at Kaiser Oakland Medical Center. Today, Kaiser has 30 farmers markets and farm stands in four states. Locally grown produce is also part of patient meals at 20+ Kaiser regional hospitals.

### **c. Boundaries.**

They'll help your organization to better plan your resources for content generation. It also sets up a guide as to how to respond to content provided by 3rd parties and how to manage risk.

There are three important ones to pay attention to.

**Legal Implications.** degree of sensitivity in content type (financial info, IP...); treatment of confidential information (like patient information)

**Authenticity** – relates to the source of your content, its originality, etc

**Internal Participation** – is your effort embraced by senior leadership and facility/service line leadership, in concept and in terms of time requirements; who makes up your content team; what are the ground rules for comments, etc.

Single or Multiple

Silo or  
Shared

Organization  
or Service Line

Staff, Physicians,  
Nurses, Patients

## 4. Voices

So your organization's ready to start blogging.

But who will be powering your blog. Will it be represented across the organization. Which multiple voices or single voice. Senior organization leadership or service line leadership. Again, it goes back to your goals and your platform. No one right answer.

Regardless, it should be personal. It should have personality. Conveyed in a more informal, human voice. Not sounding like it was written by committee.

## 5. Execution

There are two sides to Execution. Your Content (or posting) and Community (or commenting).

This in and of itself is a huge topic. But here are the cliff note tips.

Your Title, according to SEO Expert Steven Bradley, is the most important piece of writing you'll do. Engines consider your page title to be indicative of what can be found on the page.

In regard to **Keywords**, be your consumer. What problems are they facing? How can you solve them?

**Frequency.** While there's no hard and fast rule, I'd say you should be blogging 1-2 times a week. Which shouldn't be too much of a burden. The fact of the matter is that search engines love content. The more you're out there, the more you increase your odds of finding visitors looking for specific, relevant information.

**Images.** Speak louder than words (or at least amplify your words). Lead with, and integrate images into your posts.

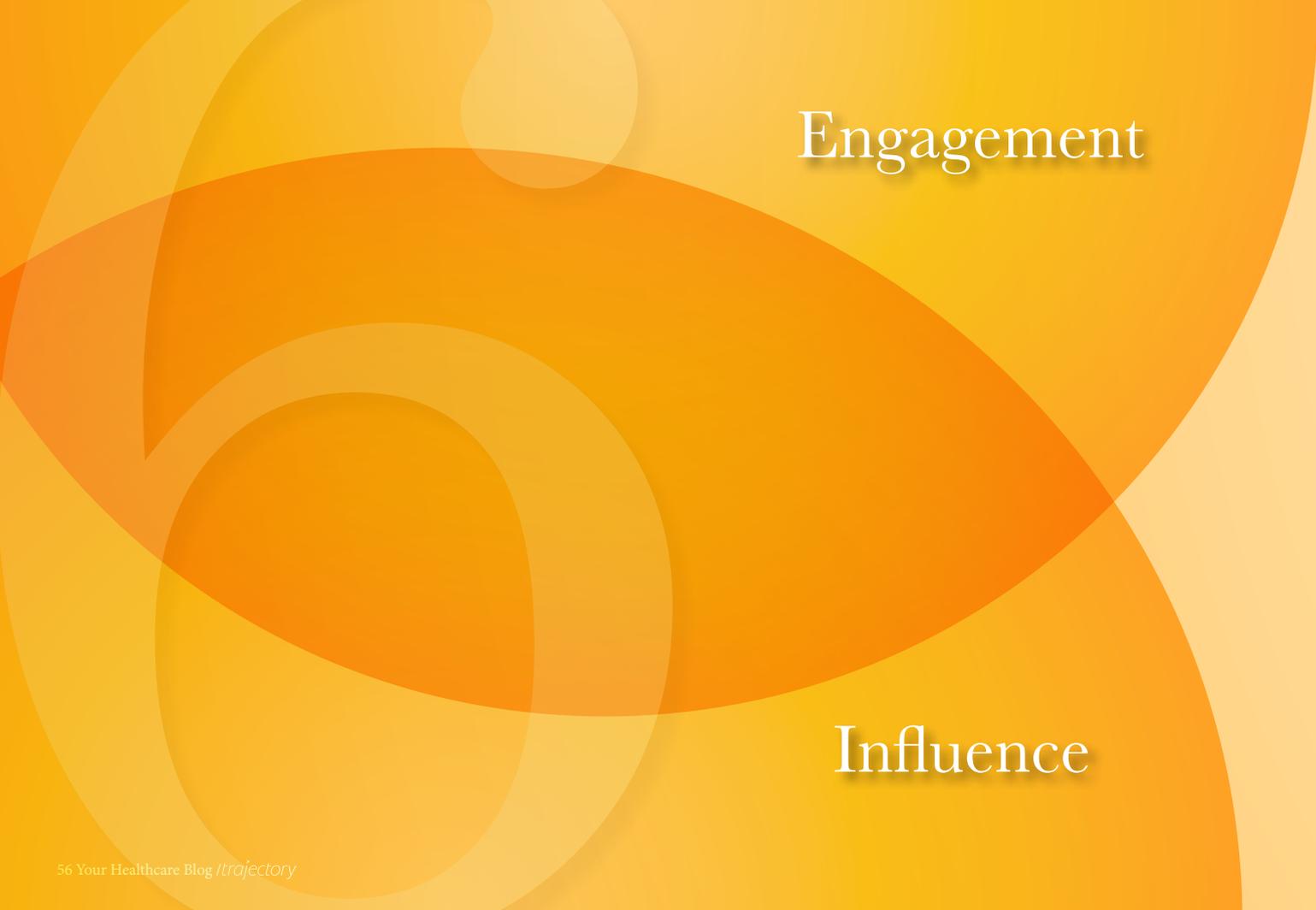
**Links & Trackbacks.** A traditional SEO strategy is very dependent upon links. And content creation becomes the most important tactic in driving good, credible links. As link expert Deborah Mastaler says, “I believe credibility in the content creation tactic is the key driving force for securing links.” In other words, the more content you create, the more content is seen, and the more opportunity you have to drive good links.

**Length.** While there is no magic number to how many words a post should be, many suggest it should be between 200-500 words. But it can certainly be less. This suggestion helps you keep your posts short, simple and to the point

without stressing over an unrealistic word count. As long as you are effectively answering the searcher’s questions and providing clear direction of next steps the reader should take, no blog post is too short.

**Calls To Action.** Your goal is to engage. Compel someone to respond. To start a dialogue. So, ask a question. Seek their point-of-view. Ask them to sign-up, download or request additional information. If you don’t ask, you won’t receive.

On the other side is Community. And it can be summed up with two words – Be Social.



Engagement

Influence

## 6. ROB (Return on Blog) Metrics

Although measurement may not always be exact, it is still useful to provide your organization with a gauge to guide and refine your activities; and to link measurements to objectives set for your initiatives.

Compared to conventional marketing where measurements can be expensive and often complex, social media metrics are more straightforward and less expensive, and offer strong insights about your target market, their response and their behaviors.

## **A few things as it relates to metrics:**

1. Simpler is generally smarter.
2. There's no definitive BEST WAY/ONE WAY to measure your efforts.
3. You should adopt metrics that make the most sense to your organization based on your objectives and that will allow you to benefit strategically from your measurement. The most important thing is being able to use them as a basis for management to make decisions, take actions and harvest value from the conversations.

Here are two “macro” types of measures to get you going. Certainly not meant to be a comprehensive list – but representative of the kinds of measures available.

**The first one is Engagement** – what happens between you and your readers **at** your blog

**The second is Influence** – your place among your readers/communities **beyond** your own pages.

And here are a few dimensions within each.

Again, not an exhaustive list, but enough to inform, guide, learn and adjust.

Engagement	Influence
Traffic	Tags & Bookmarks
Time Spent	Inbound Links
Comments #'s/Quality	Search Optimization
Subscribers	Other Feedback

## Engagement

**Traffic:** number of people visiting your blog

**Time Spent:** average visitor stays on blog

**Comment Numbers:** useful for gauging interaction

**Comments Quality:** subjective; additive to post vs. “nice post.”

**Subscribers:** level of subscribers to a newsletter, for example; a bump indicates you might have struck a chord with readers; could also be response to polls, or other calls to action

## Influence

**Tags & Bookmarks:** A tag in a blog is like a label that allows somebody to search blogs for that label and therefore find a blog with that label in it. You can have tags in your blogs or attached to your blog.

Bookmarks are simply links to sites that you visit frequently or want to keep handy for reference later. There are a couple ways you can bookmark Web pages. In your browser or in a social bookmarking site – if you want to access your bookmarks from anywhere and share them with others

**Inbound Links:** from external sites back to your blog, and which are a major factor in climbing the rankings in search engines. Inbound links can bring new users to your site, and when the links are merit-based and freely-volunteered as an editorial choice, they're also one of the positive signals to Google about your site's importance.

**Search Optimization** – how high your blog ranks in search engines for different keywords.

**Other Feedback:** interactions beyond the blog, e.g. emails, IM's, Trackbacks

**Search Engines:** type in “link:domainname” into Google and you can get a good quick picture of the incoming links that search engines have indexed for your blog

**Blog Indexing Services** – like “technorati” offer services to monitor what other bloggers are writing about you

**Social Bookmarking** – getting linked to and ranked well on social bookmarking pages like del.icio.us and digg.com (to name just two).

# Blog Suicide Prevention

Plan

Long-Term

Authenticity

Their Agenda

Social

SO, how not to shoot yourself in the foot.

Lead with a **Plan**: why you're blogging, who you want to attract, what's your story.

Thinking **Long-Term**: because like all things worthwhile, blogging takes time to pay off

**Be Authentic**: based on your passions and expertise.

Reflect **Their Agenda** (whichever audience group this is): the more you cater to their needs, the more important your blog can become. The more you give, the more you get.

Think **Social**: facilitating/encouraging dialogue: connections, questions, feedback.

# So why blog?

Because traditional one-way tell and sell marketing isn't a sustainable strategy for creating your future relationships. Rather, the future of marketing is about doing things and saying things with people. Sort of like when doctors made house calls.

When relationships were collaborative, helpful, personal and honest (not that I remember this).

## Social Media Audiences – on Anna Farmery's The

able to build large audiences around a brand – by  
to surprise and unfold over time, and that  
want to be a part of.

a begin as follows (giving you just enough for you to  
parallels):

ut reflect the growth...

character...  
e those slight gaps for the audience to fill in...  
a story within a story...

n't you think? Involving your consumer in an evolving  
em (inviting them to) add their own reflections.



2011 at 5:37 am and is filed under social  
200 2 0 feed. You can

I'm President of  
Trajectory. We work with  
ambitious lifestyle and  
healthy living, personal  
care and healthcare  
companies at times of  
significant change.  
Creating new brand energy and new  
value for customers, companies and  
shareholders. Before Trajectory, I was  
EVP Mgm't Board member at  
Interbrand, the world's most influential  
brand consultancy. I've also held senior  
level marketing positions at Faberge,  
LOreal and Beiersdorf.



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The lesson for our organizations is that we have to expose a lot more of our humanity, because customers trust each other/trust people more than they trust a lot of organizational brands these days. Blogging gives you that ability.

When a searcher enters a keyword phrase and lands on a post that is written using an exact match to their phrase, a post that is written by a person...it leads to dialog...which leads to the opportunity to make a connection beyond other social vehicles.

So, get going.

Be one of the first 138 hospitals to blog (there were 137 blogs as of this writing).

And make your blog the nucleus of your healthcare social media strategy.

Wishing you good blogging!

## Questions or Comments

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