

Improving Your Web-Side Manner

**Five Mistakes
Even the Best
Health Systems Make
(and How to Fix Them)**



How good is your web-side manner?



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Ask any healthcare administrator what their number one priority is and chances are they will tell you, “Improving the patient experience.” Whether it’s recruiting top medical talent, bringing in the latest technology and equipment or redesigning their physical facilities to enhance care—delivering the best possible care to patients seems to be at the top of every healthcare executive’s list.

According to the Pew Research Center, over 72% of Americans search for health information online—many of them seeking information about specific doctors and facilities. Given the prevalence of digital health-care-seeking behavior, it’s no wonder that many healthcare systems have examined and prioritized their websites as the core of their digital strategies. However, we find that many of these redesigns focus on talking about how the hospital is working to improve the patient experience versus actually creating a positive digital experience for patients.

At Red Privet, we work with many leading healthcare systems to assess and enhance their digital properties. Here are the top five most common mistakes we’ve observed that even the best health systems make—and our advice on how to fix them.

5 Digital Mistakes Even the Best Health Systems Make

1. **Making basic tasks difficult**
2. **Talking rather than listening**
3. **Forgetting that patients are human**
4. **Organizing from the inside out**
5. **Missing the point completely**

MISTAKE #1

Making basic tasks difficult

The primary healthcare manager in most households is a busy, working middle-aged woman. These women can find themselves coordinating doctor's appointments, insurance claims and healthcare decisions for their children, their spouse, aging parents and themselves—not an easy task. These healthcare managers are looking for a one-stop shop for all their healthcare needs and they want it on-the-go. What they typically encounter, however, is a complicated web site focused on the health systems' accomplishments instead of their needs.

In our experience, patients are pretty consistent in the tasks they are looking to accomplish on a healthcare system web site. Regardless of condition, most patients visit a health system web site for the following information:

TOP PATIENT TASKS ON HEALTH SYSTEM SITES

1. To find the hospital's phone number
2. To locate a facility and get directions
3. To find a specific doctor
4. To schedule an appointment
5. To pay their bills online

No matter how attractive your website's design might be, no matter how well you position your services and treatments, if patients can't easily complete the tasks above, your digital experience is missing the mark when it comes to important, high-frequency tasks.

THE CURE

Assess your website (and mobile version) by conducting a usability test with actual patients. If they can't figure out how to do the top five tasks listed above from the home page—it's probably time for a redesign. Consider creating a quick links menu or devoting your prime home page real estate to accomplishing these tasks.



MISTAKE #2

Talking rather than listening

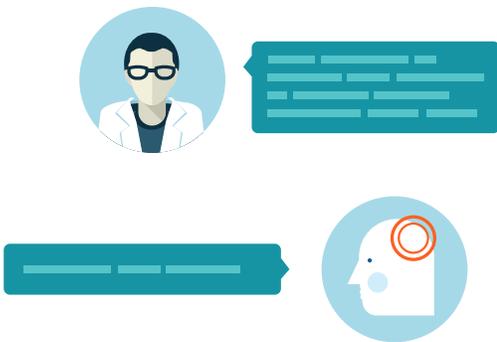
Imagine a patient enters your hospital's front doors. As they step into the main lobby they are bombarded with giant billboards declaring your hospital's most recent accolades and accomplishments. From the information desk, a hospital staffer begins loudly reading these billboards with a bullhorn. Each miniature commercial ends with the hospital employee following the patient down the hall yelling, "LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!" The patient is overwhelmed, bewildered, and most likely, a little irritated.

Sounds silly, right? Yet nearly every healthcare system website we see takes this "me first" kind of approach. If a patient walked into your hospital today, most likely they would be greeted warmly by the information desk attendant and asked "how can I help you today?"—why should their digital experience be any different?

Patients who visit your website may have very different needs, but they all need help navigating the wealth of information available on your site—and they want to be heard. Consider asking your site visitors what they need versus telling them what you want them to hear.

THE CURE

Take a look at your home page. If most of the real estate contains messages about your healthcare system rather than the patient needs, it's time to change the conversation.



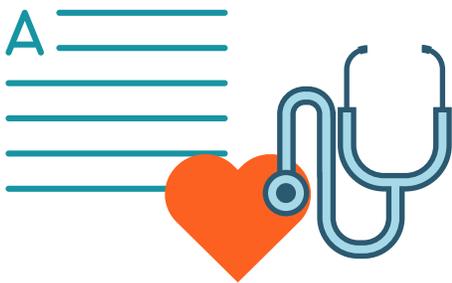
MISTAKE #3

Forgetting that patients are human

In the healthcare profession, we see human beings at their most human. Vulnerable, sick, scared and tired—patients can be overwhelmed and intimidated by the processes and procedures that comprise the modern healthcare system. When they or their loved ones are sick, it can be difficult for patients to concentrate on details, make rational decisions and follow-through on instructions.

Healthcare system digital experiences must be designed with empathy for the unusual circumstances surrounding seeking and receiving treatment. However, most healthcare system web sites seem to ignore the context in which their sites are visited. Dense content pages filled with medical jargon can obscure understanding and leave patients wondering, “what does all this mean for me?”

Your website should be a resource for patients, providing useful information that answers questions that meet their emotional and psychological needs as well as their practical and functional ones. When content doesn’t create a connection, patients often pick up the phone and seek one out—creating more work for your actual human resources.



THE CURE

Create content that cares. Use imagery and headlines that validate concerns and reflect the reality of the situation. Recognize what is persuasive to patients goes beyond empirical statistics. Emotional and irrational decision-making is part of the human equation. Whether picking a doctor or determining the best system for a loved-one, people need their emotional values met as much as their rational ones.

MISTAKE #4

Organizing from the inside out

Org charts make lousy site maps. Yet, you would be surprised how many healthcare systems use their internal organizing structures to inform the information architecture of their digital experiences.

While most healthcare executives would agree that digital experiences should be designed from the patient perspective, the reality is that patients don't stay in neatly defined departments. A patient needing to resolve a billing dispute may require information from their electronic health records, their past billing history, their insurance provider and a patient advocate. On most healthcare system web sites, that would require visiting four different sections of the website—if it were even possible to do any of those tasks online.

The real reason many healthcare systems take this approach to web design is that it allows different departments to manage their section of the digital experience according to their own budgets, schedules and internal politics. While this makes an easier workday for hospital employees, it complicates the patient experience—creating even more work for everyone.

THE CURE

Use journey maps to understand how patient experiences cross internal silos. Once you identify the “moments that matter” most to your patients, organize cross-functional service design workshops and partner across departments to deliver a frictionless patient experience.



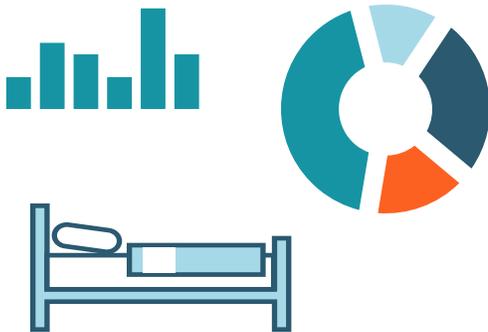
MISTAKE #5

Missing the point completely

At the end of the day, your healthcare system is a business. And while your business is delivering outstanding patient care, your digital experience should be creating a value exchange. You provide meaningful content and access to services and your patients trust you with their healthcare needs. And, as every good salesperson knows, at some point you have to ask for the business.

Every page on your site should include clear calls-to-action. Don't be afraid to tell your website's visitors exactly what you want them to do after reading this page. Do you want them to call for a consult? Tell them. Do you want them to make an appointment? Offer convenient scheduling options. Do you want them to rate your facility or doctors online? Provide them with the link.

Meaningful engagement occurs when your patients' needs and your business goals intersect. Your digital strategy should provide measurable impact against your business goals. If not, the channel is falling down on the job.



THE CURE

Clearly identify the business goals that digital marketing can help achieve. Create clear "conversion" pathways with prominent calls-to-action that make it easy for patients to help you. Then, set up indicators that measure the results. It's not just about getting it right the first time, but embarking on a continuous improvement journey. Poor results will motivate you to learn more about your patients, improve the experience, and ultimately capitalize on the impact.

Searching for Patient Satisfaction: The Case for On-Site Search

In a typical website redesign project, most of the focus is spent on two areas: home page design and creating the navigational structure. As the “first impression” of your digital experience and the primary wayfinding tools these components matter, but a focus on perfecting home page messaging and site navigation often ignores the most common consumer behavior--search.

Thanks to the ubiquity of “Dr. Google”, prospective patients begin their healthcare investigation at a search engine. Equally, patients who do visit your website forego traditional browse behaviors and begin with an on-site search. In our experience, however, very few health systems invest the time and resources to conduct meaningful research and prototyping for search, much to the frustration of their digital patients.

When considering how to improve your site’s search-friendliness, consider the following:

- Recognize that patients starting with an external search engine like Google are likely searching for a condition, treatment, or doctor than your hospital. These searches will often result in the patient landing on an interior page rather than your home page. Be sure these “drop-in” visitors can easily orient themselves and navigate to their desired destination.
- For on-site search, auto-suggest spelling in the search box. This is critical in healthcare where many patients struggle with medical terms.
- Provide faceted results. Organize results by conditions,

doctors, locations, and other contextual information.

- Be sure your search results are relevant. Searches without exact matches can yield extraneous results. Likewise, lack of synonyms in your taxonomy can yield no results.
- If a patient receives no results on a search, be sure to give them relevant options to recover.
- Finally, monitor analytics and search logs so you can continuously improve.



What does this mean for you?

If patient experience is a priority for your health system, your digital experience must be a priority as well. For many of your patients, your website is your health system’s first impression. These five digital mistakes can be costly when it comes to your hospital’s reputation, ratings and reviews.

The good news? It doesn’t take an M.D. to heal your digital properties. By making the patient’s experience the focus of your digital experience, your health system can quickly improve its “web-side” manner.



We're design thinkers and doers that help companies solve their most complex customer experience challenges. We empower customer experience owners to achieve competitive advantage, operational efficiency and smart execution through deep customer understanding, evidence-based analysis and human-centered design. Red Privet supplies the confidence you need to make the best decisions for your customers—and your business.

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