Healthcare: always personal, now digital

How healthcare marketers are using
automation to connect with customers.

Sylvia was recently diagnosed with a chronic autoimmune disorder that she'll likely be living with for the rest of her life. She has plenty of company—her disease afflicts more than 1 million Americans. Fortunately, there's a medication that could significantly improve her quality of life, if she follows the regimen closely.

Shortly after filling her prescription for the first time, Sylvia receives an email from the drug manufacturer, inviting her to sign up for their concierge service. She visits the online patient support resource center, where she registers for the service, and then downloads a mobile app that will help her track her injections. Going forward, she'll receive regular email messages educating her about how to manage her condition. And if she misses an injection, she'll get a timely reminder on her phone.

Consumers expect marketing content and offers that are tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. But in the healthcare industry, many companies have been reticent to address customers on a personal level because of the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

That's changing. A new breed of digital marketing tools makes it easier to attract the right customers and engage them with relevant content, while still respecting their privacy and staying well within the legal boundaries. As the example above shows, when healthcare companies use marketing automation in a thoughtful way, it can open the door to better outcomes for both the patient and the business.

Why healthcare marketers need automation

The business of healthcare is becoming more complex

For one thing, healthcare technologies are changing so quickly that providers are struggling to keep up. And while they're trying to meet rising patient expectations for state-of-the-art care, they're also dealing with complicated payer protocols and a vast body of regulations.

Organizations that serve providers, such as insurance and life sciences companies, are looking for efficient ways to help them do their jobs better. Marketers in those same organizations may also be communicating directly with consumers, perhaps inviting them to enroll in a benefits plan, talk to their doctor about a new treatment option, or try a new over-the-counter medication.

For healthcare marketers on the consumer side, the biggest pain point is usually HIPAA compliance. They feel hamstrung by rules that bar them from sending tailored messages to consumers without their explicit consent. Finding the right balance is tricky, and many organizations avoid the problem altogether by sticking to generic content. That means consumers get a lot of irrelevant information, unless they're actually speaking with someone in person or on the phone.

Now, though, COVID-19 has made people less inclined to visit their doctor, and call centers have been overwhelmed, making it harder to get support by phone. As a result, the industry has reached a tipping point. "Finally, healthcare companies are being forced to approach things from a digital-first orientation because that's where their customers are," said Thomas Swanson, head of health and life sciences strategy and marketing at Adobe.

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Adobe

Healthcare consumers want content that's relevant to them

Because of HIPAA, the healthcare industry has been slow to adopt tools that help marketers deliver messages tailored to individuals. That's changing as consumer behavior changes. Based on their experiences in other industries, like retail and hospitality, consumers are used to having a lot of choices—as well as abundant information to help them make those choices.

"Healthcare consumers are starting to behave like consumers in other industries," said Swanson. "They're proactively seeking information in order to make informed buying decisions, because aside from buying a house, healthcare is the thing that you will spend the most money on."

Between 2007 and 2017, the number of Americans on high-deductible health plans almost tripled—from 15 percent to 43 percent, according to a study by the National Center for Health Statistics. Only about 20 percent of people insured on such plans ever hit their deductible. In other words, for a large segment of the population, 80 percent of the money spent on healthcare is being paid for out of pocket.

That trend is changing in how consumers engage with healthcare companies. In a 2019 Econsultancy and Adobe survey of American healthcare consumers, more than 70 percent of respondents under age 55 said information that's easy to find through websites and

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Econsultancy and Adobe, 2019

apps is important to their experience. Two-thirds said the same about their ability to communicate with healthcare providers through digital channels.

Consumers are now willing to switch doctors or change their health plan in order to get the experience they're looking for, which is all about access and transparency. In an industry where pricing has been notoriously opaque, that's a big shift. In the Econsultancy and Adobe survey, 55 percent of respondents under age 55 said when prices are unknown, it makes them want to say "no" to everything. And over 60 percent of respondents said they're willing to share their healthcare data with their insurer if doing so would lower their costs.

Automation helps you manage complexity, compliance, and customer choice

Healthcare is one of the industries that are most vulnerable to disruption, according to analysis by Accenture. In their 2019 survey, 87 percent of healthcare executives agreed that "the integration of customization and real-time delivery is the next big wave of competitive advantage."

The marketing function has a key role to play in that transformation. Traditionally, healthcare marketers have delivered mostly generic content and experiences. But the latest generation of marketing automation technology is designed with HIPAA compliance in mind. And that means healthcare marketers can finally start catching up with their peers in other industries.

Marketing automation makes it easier to attract, engage, and retain the right kind of customers. And if you thoughtfully design your programs, you can deliver content that matters to individual customers without crossing any legal or ethical lines.
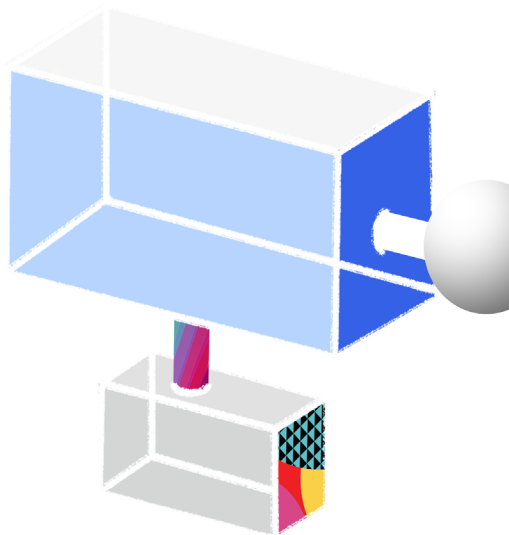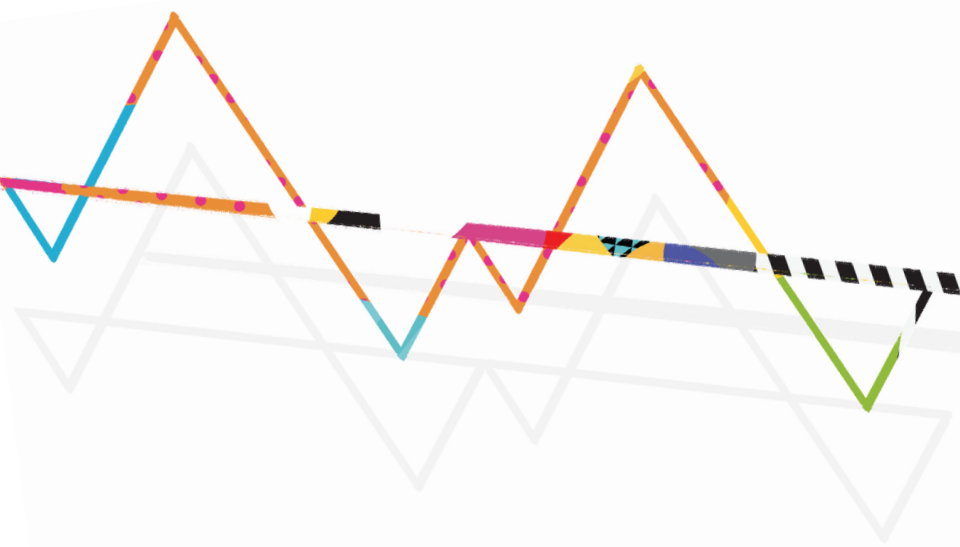
# Four things you can do with marketing automation

As a healthcare marketer, you can use automation to identify the right customers for specific products or services, deliver the content they need to make buying decisions, and connect the experiences they're having with your brand across multiple channels. Automation also helps you capture the data you need to constantly improve your marketing programs and demonstrate their value to your internal stakeholders.

1. Identify customers that have relevant needs and interests.

With the right lead management and targeting solutions, you can create customer segments based on geographic, demographic, or behavioral characteristics, and then provide relevant content to those customers—even in the early stages of their relationship with your brand. Tailoring content to a group of similar customers can help you quickly get to the stage where they give you permission to target them as individuals.

A lead management solution lets you keep track of how each customer is engaging with your content. At a minimum, you can tailor content to all the people who received and opened a specific email. Tracking what they clicked on and how far they scrolled before abandoning the email can help you infer what their interests are.

Kindred Healthcare, the largest diversified provider of post-acute care services in the United States, is using marketing automation to build relationships with physicians and case managers— the company's biggest sources of patient referrals. The marketing team tracks topics that are important to these two groups in real time and uses those insights to create highly relevant campaigns for each segment.
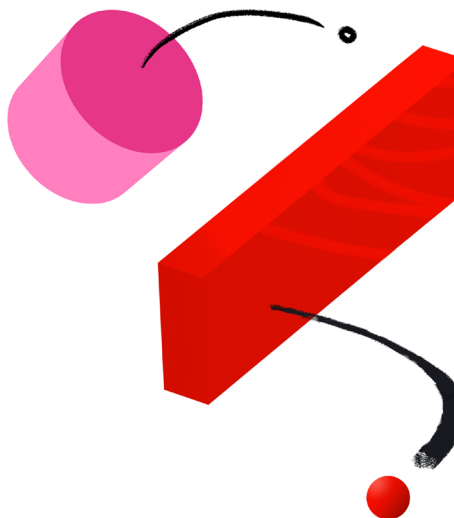
2. Deliver content that addresses your customers' needs.

Once you've identified the customer segments that matter to you, it's up to you to deliver experiences that matter to them. For example, InTouch Health, a cloud-based telehealth organization, transformed their static corporate website into a dynamic hub that serves content tailored to their core audience segments, including CIOs, hospital administrators, physicians, and IT professionals.

Many healthcare providers are looking for ways to maintain relationships with patients in between office visits. One way to do that is by offering educational materials—delivered through email or other digital channels—on wellness topics. This approach builds loyalty and helps patients view their provider as a trusted adviser on how to stay healthy.

Some pharmaceutical companies are building direct relationships with consumers by providing services and social media connections that let people with similar health challenges support each other. By offering valuable content, one company encourages people with a specific health-related goal to download an app and create an account. Those actions meet the HIPAA consent requirements, which means the company can then deliver experiences tailored to those individuals.

When you offer content that's designed for a broad audience, encourage customers to click on a link, answer a poll question, or engage with the content in some other way—and when they demonstrate interest in a specific topic by clicking, you've reached the first level of consent and can start sending them more information on that topic.

As you gather data about customer interests and preferences, remember that the right content doesn't just have a relevant message. It's also delivered in the right channel and the right context.

3. Coordinate marketing efforts across mobile, web, and other channels.

Delivering a cross-channel experience builds customer engagement and loyalty. It's also efficient. Making better use of digital channels takes the weight off your sales team (if you have one) and frees up providers to focus on what they do best.

A major healthcare provider in the Midwest is connecting online and offline channels in their COVID-19 testing experience. On their website, people can fill out a survey about their symptoms and their exposure to people with symptoms. Then the system either directs the patient to the nearest testing facility or—if their responses suggest they don't have COVID-19—provides information about home remedies for other conditions. Patients can even get a custom QR code that connects the information they entered online with the physical experience at the test center, so they don't have to answer the questions twice.

4. Use data to improve your marketing programs and show their impact.

A good lead management solution includes tracking capabilities that let you use basic information—the kind you can act on even without the customer's consent—to improve the customer experience. Tailoring the content visitors see on your website is a great place to start. Geotargeting, for example, lets you start forging deeper relationships with anonymous visitors. If someone in Denver is doing a search for robotic surgery on a provider's website, the lead management system can tell the content management system to serve an ad for a local hospital that offers those services, based on the person's IP address.

If you add an advanced analytics solution to the mix, predictive content becomes part of your marketing toolkit. That's a method for building more nuanced customer segments, by using artificial intelligence to amplify the clues your customers leave when they engage with your content. An AI-powered analytics solution can take the data that's been captured in your lead management system and match it up with aggregated data about how similar customers typically behave. Based on that analysis, the system can then recommend the next experience for customers in a specific segment.

Another key benefit of marketing automation is attribution analysis. You can see where a customer's relationship with your brand started and which experiences have moved it forward. Knowing which channels, programs, and messages are helping

customers progress in their journey lets you provide a better overall experience. It also helps you demonstrate the value of marketing investments.

GE Healthcare improved the quality and consistency of customer data by implementing a marketing automation system. Using better customer insights to deliver more relevant experiences helped the company drive more than one billion dollars in pipeline. As a result, marketing is now recognized as a core driver of revenue and growth. "It's not just a marketing automation platform," said Chief Marketing Officer Glenn Thomas. "It's also a source of customer data integration and campaign integration."

What healthcare marketers need to do automation right:

- A single source of truth for channels and campaigns—so you know how your channels are working together and which ones are performing best

- A single course of truth for customer data—so you have a complete picture of each customer's engagement with your brand

- A system that can automatically:

  - Create customer segments based on behaviors and attributes

  - Identify which experiences are performing best

  - Build customer journeys, by combining and using all this information to offer the next experience that's most likely to resonate

- An integrated process for keeping marketing and sales in lockstep

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> Adobe

Use automation to engage customers on their own terms

In healthcare marketing, the risk-reward calculus has changed. Companies that adopt marketing automation will reap the rewards of customer loyalty and revenue growth—as well as internal efficiency. Those that keep offering generic experiences will become less and less relevant to the customers they aim to serve.

"Healthcare has been very resistant to change, and they've used HIPAA as an excuse," said Swanson. "Now there are tools that enable you to deliver what the customer's looking for while staying within the boundaries of compliance, and customers are demanding that and expecting that. Healthcare no longer has a valid excuse for not engaging customers how, where, and when they want to be engaged."

Adobe can help

Adobe's industry-leading Marketo Engage solution, part of Adobe Experience Cloud, uses marketing automation to help healthcare companies efficiently drive demand and build long-lasting customer relationships. Through seamless integration with Adobe Target, Adobe Experience Manager, and Adobe Analytics, Marketo Engage can help you to identify, attract, and nurture the right prospects for your business—and measure the impact of your marketing and sales enablement programs.

Learn more about how your marketing and sales teams can drive demand through the power of timely, relevant experiences.

Get details

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