



HEALTHCARE +

Increasing **awareness** and **reputation** of Federally Qualified Health Centers.

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Throughout the country, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) have become an integral part of the health care safety net for a vast majority of both uninsured and underinsured patients needing care. For non-profit FQHCs to remain viable in a highly competitive industry, they must focus on providing an exceptional patient experience above all else.

This means making access to care easy and as seamless as possible. It also means being innovative with offerings and emphasizing healthy behaviors. And finally, it means taking the time to effectively promote access to providers and availability of services within a community.

COMPETING FOR PATIENTS

Nationwide, there are more than 1,400 FQHCs that serve approximately 29 million patients. FQHCs once served a very distinct patient population—those who were uninsured or underinsured.

However, today, in addition to caring for uninsured patients, FQHCs are often competing with larger hospitals, medical groups and health systems for commercially insured patients who are seeking local primary care and ancillary services. As the number of FQHCs has increased, their business models have been required to evolve and adapt in order to survive and flourish.

Ron Dwinells, MD, MBA, is the CEO of ONE Health Ohio, a multi-location FQHC in northeast Ohio, that was founded in 1986. His organization has found itself facing competitive challenges in recent years, making the need for strategic plans greater than before.

“It is important for health centers like ours to be able to quickly respond to the changing needs and challenges of our industry and our communities. Just like you cannot wait for others to make quality care available to everyone, you cannot wait for others to tell your story for you. While we must operate ourselves as a business, we ultimately do so as a community resource and remain committed to the tenets under which we were founded.”

PARTNERSHIPS FOR COLLABORATION

As a changing payer mix has provided the basis for competition, it has also laid the groundwork for an increased collaboration with other community partners and organizations.

In a recent interview, John Riordan, Director of Marketing for Community Health Centers, Inc., in Orlando, FL, discusses the importance of establishing community partnerships.

“You cannot provide the best care for a community and its residents alone. You need to establish and grow trusted partnerships with your peers and partners to maximize the impact you can have on a population. By having a strong community focus, we are able to develop an even stronger community reputation. By building trust with our patients, we are able to become trusted partners in not only their care, but also their life.”

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INCREASING LOCAL AWARENESS

While implementing marketing plans was previously not a top priority for FQHC executives, more and more leaders are realizing the need to incorporate for-profit business strategies into their non-profit organizations.

“It is important that we properly assign and allocate funds for marketing,” says Dr. Dwinells. “As an FQHC, our grant funding is required to go to direct patient care. However, our excess program revenue can be used for marketing programs and initiatives. As we launch new services that address population health and social determinants within our community, it is vital that we educate and inform potential patients and referral sources of new access and availability.”

In most markets, there is significant opportunity for an FQHC to market its services. One recent industry survey revealed that only 23% of responding FQHCs have fully developed marketing and communication plans that are ready for implementation. About half of those surveyed indicated that marketing plans were currently in development.

Given this significant opportunity, there are marketing initiatives that typically provide a substantial return on investment for FQHCs seeking to educate potential patients and community members about service offerings.

Targeted digital marketing is an area where smaller, more nimble health centers often have an advantage over larger health systems, in that they can typically plan, develop and launch efforts in a more timely manner. While there are many digital options available to consider, each ultimately requires a commitment to develop regular, engaging and consistent content.

1 According to the National Association of Community Health Centers, an engaging social media presence is one of the best ways for FQHCs to share their story, communicate their value and connect with many different audiences.

Unlike traditional media, social media channels allow organizations to produce, publish and share their own content and engage audiences in a way that can further enhance relationships while reinforcing a desired image and perception.

By connecting with patients and potential patients in a personal and meaningful way, FQHCs have the opportunity to develop trust that goes beyond that which is provided at the typical point of care. Whether the choice is Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn, quality content and sincere messaging will go a long way in establishing an FQHC as a true community resource.

2 Native advertising and content marketing, are also valuable methods to enhance reputation and awareness within a targeted geographic area.

The ultimate goal of content marketing is to provide information to online readers in a way that builds credibility and ultimately positions an organization as a trusted industry expert. By developing high quality content, FQHCs are also able to help improve their online visibility in a relatively short period of time.

Native advertising is essentially integrating content into a pre-determined paid advertising placement. Whereas content marketing is an inbound strategy, native advertising is designed to target an external audience and gain a much wider reach of messaging.

Native advertising is typically placed on websites that are a part of mainstream media publications, or as part of larger advertising networks. These aspects of "sponsored content" are now one of the leading revenue sources for media websites, and allow advertisers to guarantee placement of their efforts within articles on leading websites.

3 A unique opportunity exists to blend the reach and power of social media with the ability to produce impactful high-level native content. For example, through the development of regular bylined executive blogs, organizations can position themselves as thought-leaders in a wide variety of areas.

For instance, an FQHC may choose to provide expertise in the areas of recruitment, finance, facilities or physician engagement. While this insight ultimately occurs within the healthcare industry, the strategies and deliverables may extend well beyond the walls of a community health center.

The ability to distribute these blogs through professional social networking sites such as LinkedIn allows FQHCs to utilize "owned media" to be seen as industry innovators, while also driving web traffic back to their owned sites.

GOALS + OBJECTIVES

The ultimate goal of efforts to increase an FQHC's reputation is to show a marked increase in awareness and perception within primary and secondary markets. However, it is just as important to show an increase in the awareness of community leaders and how potential donors and government officials view the organization. In most cases, a stakeholder audience is typically much more than only those patients who utilize a center's medical services.

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SUGGESTED TACTICS + RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many available options to consider, however, it is recommended that a targeted strategy be developed in order to make the best use of staffing and budget resources.

Consumers are overwhelmed with the amount of advertising messages they face every day. To be effective, your messaging needs to stand out from the clutter, be consistent and be engaging.

MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

To measure the overall effectiveness of any awareness and reputation campaign, FQHCs should specifically track the following:

- Increase in social media followers and engagement
- Increase in earned media and share of voice
- Satisfaction with physicians and staff
- Satisfaction with communications and messaging

Choosing a marketing and communications partner that has specific experience partnering with Federally Qualified Health Centers is vital to succeeding in this highly complex, competitive and regulated industry.

At ddm, we know healthcare because we've been there. For more information on how we can help you achieve your organization's mission, please visit teamddm.com or contact John Gonda at johng@teamddm.com.

Sources

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