



Digital Marketing for the LTC Pharmacy

LTC Pharmacy executives face a competitive landscape that we've never seen before. The biggest companies continue their consolidation while the newer entrants struggle to make headway in a shrinking base of nursing facilities. Relying on personal selling to get contracts can still work, but it has become essential for pharmacy marketers to fully engage by taking advantage of new technologies to find prospects, uncover new markets and beef up sales.

Digital marketing can put power in your sales and marketing by creating compelling content, delivered at the right time to the right prospect. Best of all, the best efforts need not be budget-breaking projects and can be on the job all day and night, bringing new accounts to your business and finding new prospects while you focus on doing what you do; taking care of the residents in the facilities you serve.

What is Digital Marketing?



Digital marketing is using the tools of technology (website, email, social media, webinars, and Internet search) to engage with your business customers and apart in the eyes of potential customers. While it all begins with a website, the tools extend way beyond a static web page. Blog posts, white papers, slide shows, informational videos, webinars, social media outreach: all these work together to tell your message and give you the opportunity to contend for your next customer.

Most likely, you have been the recipient of digital marketing. If you've ever subscribed to an industry online newsletter, read a blog post, downloaded a white paper, or watched a video related to a product or service, it was probably part of a larger campaign to persuade you to become someone's customer.

Digital marketing has several advantages over traditional "analog" marketing. First, digital almost always costs less to produce and distribute than direct mail or other traditional approaches. Digital is measurable: Set up properly, a digital marketing piece can tell you where your prospects are, what stage

of the buying cycle they are in, what key selling points are of most interest and whether the company's key attributes are relevant to its target audience.

If you're at all interested in the stock market, you may have heard of the FANG stocks. These are Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, and Google. The common attribute these blockbuster companies share is that they are all Master of Digital Marketing and massive platforms for digital marketers. They seem to be pretty successful, with a combined market capitalization of \$7.2 trillion!

What are the Elements of Digital Marketing?

Website



The heart of the digital marketing effort is the company website. Your pharmacy probably has a website, which may be anything from a few pages describing the company's capabilities, biographies of the founders and executives, contact information and some nice photos of your automation equipment. Or, it may be more extensive, including customer testimonials, clinical backgrounders, newsletters, and blog posts.

Since the website is the core of your digital efforts, getting it right is an essential first step in creating a productive digital marketing strategy. Potential customers looking for your services start with a web search, usually Google, but increasingly Bing, or [other more specialized search engines](#). Your first goal should be to make sure that when someone is looking for a long-term care pharmacy in St. Louis, and your pharmacy is in, or near, St. Louis, your website shows up on the first page of the search results. Sounds easy enough, but unless your site is designed to deliver results matching the potential customer's query, you may end up further down the search results, if it shows up at all.

Since more than 90 percent of searchers do not look past the first page of results, and roughly half don't look past the first three results on the first page, you can't afford to ignore SEO. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process a web designer and digital marketer undertakes to make certain that the content on the site corresponds to what a potential customer is looking for.

There are several tools to help you do this, but the process is never complete. Maintaining good SEO takes continual analysis and testing. The results are worth it when you consider the impact of not appearing at the top of the page for search results.

Blogs



The fundamental role of a blog in a digital marketing effort is to identify potential customers or clients and move them closer to a sale. However, it's much more than a sales screed. To be effective, a blog must reward the reader with valuable information and resources that the reader finds useful.

Several years ago, it was an article of faith that blogs should be short; generally, not more than 400-500 words. That thinking has radically changed. We are seeing very successful (based on clicks and sharing patterns) blogs that stretch to over 2500 words.

This isn't surprising. The people most interested in the content of the blog post are the hungriest for information. If they need to give a report on the most common illnesses reported by male nursing home residents over the age of 90, and your blog post is all about this, you can bet they will read the whole post. When they click on it, you will have another valuable piece of information about the reader: they care about this.

Well-written and well-distributed blogs establish you as an expert and thought leader. If you take the time and effort to be an effective blogger you can steadily move potential customers closer to signing a deal.

Blogging takes work and the rewards are not immediate. The key is to post frequently, but not continually. If what you offer is valuable, well written and timely, you will eventually move up the credibility scale. By the way, don't forget to perform SEO on your blog posts. You won't be read if you can't be found.

Newsletters



The newsletter is an artifact of the analog era but maintains a very high level of effectiveness in digital marketing. Email newsletters can deliver valuable information, focus on discrete areas of interest, summarize important industry developments, and help keep your readers up to date.

Newsletter subscribers are either customers or potential customers and can be added to your lead generation database. They can be forwarded to others, generating new subscribers and help to establish your expertise on managing complex drug regimens in the elderly.

The technology available to prospective newsletter publishers is impressive. There are dozens of email marketing technology companies that simplify the process of creating email campaigns. These tools not only help you format and present your content but will report on who opened the email and how many followed links to your content. Newsletters are also great tools for market research. A spike in clicks for a specific topic lets you know your readers are interested in that topic. An unusually low open rate may suggest your content needs some work.

Your newsletter can also be a vehicle for getting closer to new customers. Ask the administrator of a non-client nursing home if you can feature them in an interview. Go visit a hospital discharge planner for a story on the process and you now have a contact for a continuing relationship.

In short, newsletters are great marketing tools, but like other elements of the digital marketing strategy, they take some work and a little patience to see meaningful results.

Webinars



We've all probably been on a webinar. The webinar is an efficient platform for communicating information through a live (or recorded) event where you are the host, and you convey useful information to participants.

Your prospects attend webinars because they want the information you have promised to provide. Your webinar may include expert guests or panelists and

has the additional feature of allowing you to create a live call-to-action that encourages your participants to do something that moves them closer to becoming a customer.

You don't have to invent anything to do a great webinar. There are dozens of applications that help you run a webinar, send invitations, create questions and polling, promote your webinar on social media and capture analytics.

Webinars are powerful marketing machines. People who carve out the time to attend a webinar are interested in the topic and are potentially serious about what you have to offer.

Social Media



Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and others serve as massive network multipliers. By passing along interesting and valuable information to your network through these platforms, you can earn the right to have your material distributed to other networks, potentially exposing thousands of new contacts to your value proposition.

Not all social media are equally valuable in achieving the results we want. For an enterprise like an LTC pharmacy, LinkedIn, with its focus on business and professional networking, may be a more efficient tool than Facebook. However, it's not always the case, and it's worth looking at opportunities across all the available options.

To get a sense of the opportunities available on LinkedIn, check out the Groups menu and discover the number of groups that have formed around senior healthcare. These groups often have thousands of members and it seems someone is posting content that is interesting and relevant to professional audiences.

Success on social media sites is a result of careful research and patience. As with newsletters, social media posts take time for you to establish a reputation and create a following. While the LinkedIn groups are generally congenial, be prepared for comments you didn't expect.

Facebook Groups for Business is another option, and well worth discovering, especially given the size of the platform (2 billion active users).

Creating a Digital Marketing Strategy

As you can see, digital marketing has many features and tools. It's tempting to dive in and get working on everything at once. If you do, you are likely to be disappointed and frustrated with your lack of effectiveness.

The basis for any effective digital marketing effort is a well-thought-out strategy. Digital media, in addition to their relative ease of creation and distribution, offer a rich stream of data to guide our efforts. Planning an approach that deliberately harvests the data and allows us to learn more about our potential customers will pay huge dividends as we continue the journey of marketing success.

Data: Our Bridge to Reality



Business people, especially marketers, are natural optimists. We are often in love with our business and can't imagine that anyone would not see our enterprise in the same light. Data is the great reality machine of marketing. Coldblooded facts about the number of people who read our blogs, open our emails, and click on our links have a way of quickly giving us feedback that signals what the market believes about us.

One of the most important disciplines in becoming a successful digital marketer is the commitment to following the data we glean from our efforts. The nice thing about data is that it doesn't care how hard you struggled to create a perfect blog post, how many emails you sent, or how flawlessly your website performs. It tells you only whether you are achieving your objectives.

Digital marketing is especially friendly to gathering data, but you need to make a commitment to testing everything you do. Is one headline on an email newsletter better than another? Does a blog post with a relevant image attract more readers? Does a video outperform a text document in gathering leads? Testing will give you the answer, but you need to make sure you are testing as much as possible, getting rid of the poor performers and building on the winners.

The key is to have a plan to capture and analyze the data available and focus on only the data that can impact your business.

Determining the Goals

If we don't know where we want to go, any road will take us there. The fact is, we all know where we want to go, generally. The trick to success is moving from "generally", to "specifically". If we state our goal as: *I want to attract and retain more nursing facility clients.*, that's an aspiration. If we say, *I want to add four new nursing facilities to my customer accounts, begin service in two assisted living facilities and collaborate with two home healthcare companies within the next 15 months*, that's a specific goal.

There is something mildly intimidating about setting goals. Once the goal has been written down, it takes a life of its own. You will know, within a fixed period, whether you succeeded or failed.

Goals Should Be Measurable: You already know this, but several surveys reveal that small companies often have goals that are impossible, or at least difficult, to measure. The data you will gather, such as new subscribers to your newsletter, downloads from your website, search position based on your keywords all give you a picture of whether you are moving potential customers closer to a buying decision.

For each goal you set, you should ask; "how will I measure this?"

Goals Should Be Achievable: We always encourage big dreams but setting goals should be tempered with a healthy dose of realism. You may aspire to be the next Amazon, and perhaps you will be, but you are unlikely to get there over the course of a year.

If you're starting out with only a static website, and not collecting data, you won't have much to act on. So, a good initial goal might be to optimize your website to make it functional, easy to use and optimized for SEO. Next, you'll want to set up your site for analytics. Neither of these initial steps requires advanced degrees in computer science. You can do these with [free tools from Google](#).

Once you get the website designed and optimized, you will want to plan your content strategy (more about this later). Content includes the information and resources you will develop to offer to your audience through blog posts, email newsletters, white papers, infographics, and videos.

Each element of your content strategy will be associated with a goal. In the early phases you may simply want to know how many visits your website attracts, where they come from, how long they stay on your site and what pages they visit. From this you can begin to associate user behavior with user interest and then structure your goals toward attracting more users.

Goals need to be revisited frequently, at least once per calendar quarter, to ensure you are staying relevant and remain focused on the most important thing.

Goals Should be Time Limited: Time limits create an urgency for us to move. There is nothing like a deadline to motivate us to get on with it.

In the beginning, our timelines should be short. Get the website built, optimized, and set up with analytics within the next four weeks. As we move along, we might want to provide time for our experiments to play out. If we are working with a new strategy to grow our email marketing list we might give it a couple months or more before we evaluate next steps.

Make it a practice to subject each marketing tactic to a beginning and end point. This discipline will keep us from operating on autopilot and force us to examine our data to keep us moving ahead.

A Word About Key Performance Indicators



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are the results we expect to achieve as a result of our digital marketing efforts. Our marketing goal may be to increase newsletter subscribers by 50 percent over the next year. The assumption we make is that increasing our subscriber base will increase our sales leads and, ultimately, our sales. Increased sales is the KPI, not the increase in subscribers.

Every marketing goal should be matched to a KPI. There are quantitative KPIs that give you a number or percentage (e.g., gross profit as a percentage of sales), and there are qualitative KPIs, such as customer satisfaction scores from your surveys.

These are useful to think about when creating your marketing plan. If your most pressing business objective is to generate sales, your marketing priorities should be anything that will lead in increased sales revenue. Any marketing efforts that don't primarily generate sales should not be a priority. Many

founders love the idea of becoming a thought leader, but if you spend time speaking at industry events that don't generate business you may want to refocus on activities that conform to your highest priorities.

Content Marketing



If our digital strategy is the use of online tools to attract and retain customers, content marketing is the product we deliver through these channels. Unlike commercials or advertising, content marketing does not focus on a direct appeal to the reader to become our customer. Rather, content marketing sets the stage for the customer to view us as a knowledgeable, trustworthy, and capable source of expertise on helping them achieve their goals.

If our digital strategy includes blogging, we have to have something to blog about. Likewise, if we hope to position ourselves as experts through a regular newsletter, we need to create content to include in the newsletter. You get the idea.

The key to effective content marketing is to focus on what the potential customer needs, not on what we want to sell. Our digital tools and analytics can help us determine what our prospective customers want, but it's up to us to patiently lead them through the sales process so that we hold off on direct selling methods until the customer has signaled a readiness to buy.

Content Marketing and the Sales Funnel



Content marketers often characterize their online audiences in relation to where they fit in the sales funnel. The funnel is wide at the top, where most of your audience will be at any time, and narrows at the bottom, where the audience consists mostly of prospects that are ready to buy.

The key to being an effective content marketer is matching your content to the customer based on where he or she is in the funnel.

Top of Funnel: Most of your online audience will be here. They are generally aware of your service, or at least services offered by your industry. They are not ready to buy, but have expressed some interest, either by signing up for your newsletter or clicking on a particular page on your site.

Top of Funnel Content: For prospects in the top of your funnel, focus on general education and insights into the needs of the customers you serve.

Middle of Funnel: This person has engaged with your content by downloading a whitepaper, visited your site on several occasions and clicks on content with deeper levels of information. They may be close to becoming prospects for your business or may already be actively looking for services you provide

Middle of Funnel Content: For prospects in this section, you might offer a document titled: What to Look for in a LTC Pharmacy.

Bottom of Funnel: Prospects in the bottom of the funnel are close to making a buying decision. They are actively comparing options and sometimes reaching out for more information.

Bottom of Funnel Content: This is where the commercials come in. Comparisons between you and your competitors, return-on-investment calculators, customer testimonials, and free consultations are fair game for prospective clients in this section of the funnel.

Mapping our content to the funnel will help us nurture prospective customers all along the path to a buying decision. We don't want to send material on choosing a pharmacy to prospects at the top of our funnel and we wouldn't send general educational information to a potential customer that has signaled that she is ready to buy now.

Creating Content



Considering the effort required to persuade and convince potential customers over the period between arrival at the top of the sales funnel to the bottom, creating the content for this journey will require a great deal of focused effort.

Consider getting out of the pharmacy and spending time meeting with your customers and perhaps other non-customers in the industry in your local area. Your initial purpose is not to pitch, but rather to collect information on what causes them the most anxiety in their professional lives. Is it employee turnover, compliance with state and federal regulations, reimbursement issues? These are all great starting points for content creation.

Once you have researched content ideas, you should consider how this content can be communicated through your digital channels. Perhaps you can start with a whitepaper on reducing the use of opioid pain medicines in LTC facilities. There are many sources of authoritative literature on the Internet and through trade and professional associations. Use this to create your own guide and make it available through your website. Be sure to capture contact information on those who wish to download the document.

The same material can be condensed to use as a blog post and perhaps an infographic that can be promoted through your blog or your newsletter.

Your conversations with customers, prospective customers and former customers will shape the subjects you will cover, as well as the feedback you get from your website and other marketing channels.

Content creation will become a major part of your job, but you will want to be sure you get every possible ounce of value out of everything you publish. This means constantly seeing how you can repurpose each piece of content to make it useful to other channels.

Paid Options



So far, we have been thinking about digital marketing primarily through the lens of what we can do for free (or almost free). However, at some point you will want to focus on filling your sales funnel and will want to give paid advertising a try.

Fortunately, one of the world's biggest digital advertising company is enthusiastic about helping you. Yes, Google has a remarkable number of tools that help you efficiently test the waters of paid advertising through its [Google Ads](#) program.

Google advertising is a pay-per-click (PPC) platform that serves up your text ad when people search for terms you specify. You only pay for advertising when someone clicks on your ad, and you can limit placement of your ad based on the location of the user when they do the search.

For example, if you specify "LTC Pharmacy" and "Nursing Home Pharmacy" as keywords and settle on a per-click dollar amount with Google, your ads will appear at the top of the search page (usually) when a searcher enters those keywords in your service area, providing you established the locations you want to target.

So, if you agreed to pay Google \$5.00 every time someone clicks on your ad, you only pay when someone actually clicks on your ad.

You've seen these ads. Every time you do a Google search the first few results have a small box with the word "ad". These are paid advertising placements.

Bing (Microsoft) also has PPC advertising programs and are worth considering, since Bing has become an increasingly popular search engine.

[Google](#) and [Bing](#) will provide you free access to tools that will help you determine how many searches are performed for the keywords you have chosen and how many competitors are targeting the same words.

One of the best things about these programs is that you can set a budget for how much you are willing to spend per month, and Google won't go beyond your targeted spend.

Budgeting



While digital marketing is quite cost-effective it does require a commitment of time and money. Key considerations include a targeted cost per customer acquisition as well as cash resources available to fund the program.

Many experts recommend a pharmacy allocate approximately 2.5 percent of gross sales to marketing. The healthcare industry average is between 5 and 8 percent. This may, or may not, make sense for your organization. Your growth targets may dictate a

higher number and your marketing mix may push the total dollars higher or lower. Also, choosing to do most of the marketing yourself versus using outside agencies will affect your total spending.

Creating a comprehensive marketing plan is the place to begin. The subject deserves a separate analysis, which we will cover in a future paper.

Putting it all Together

This has been something of a whirlwind tour through digital marketing, and we have only scratched the surface, but you should be able to see how powerful a tool this can be to continually attract new prospective customers to become new clients. It's a lot of work, but the rewards can be huge. It requires a commitment and time but, done properly, digital marketing can transform your sales and marketing efforts.

Many business executives wonder whether they should undertake a digital marketing program by themselves or hire an agency to do it for them. It's a legitimate question and there are no clear-cut answers. However, doing it yourself, even if you get a little help from outside, forces you to understand your market better than simply handing it off to someone else. Besides, a fully functional program created and run by an agency is a major investment that you may not be quite ready to make, at least in the early stages.

Regardless of your choice, remember that competing in the modern healthcare marketplace without a digital strategy puts you at a major disadvantage to your competitors. When a potential client does an online search for services you provide and you don't show up as an option, it will become increasingly difficult to compete.

Nurturing relationships early and leading them through the sales funnel to a signed contract is a journey well worth taking.

The LTC Pharmacy Directory



One of the easiest things to do in digital marketing for your pharmacy is claim your **free** listing on our [LTC pharmacy directory](#), the most comprehensive and up to date listing of LTC pharmacies to be found anywhere.

Claiming your pharmacy will allow you to keep your information up to date and demonstrates to potential clients that you care about getting found. Have you ever done a search for a vendor and been disappointed when their information is missing or outdated? Make certain that this doesn't happen to you.

You will soon be able to enhance your listing to add additional information and include links to landing pages and videos. It all begins with claiming your site.

Do this now!

Additional Resources

Neil Patel	<p>One of the best digital marketers anywhere. Neil helps you help yourself with tutorials and helpful blog posts. Serious about SEO? Neil Patel is a good first stop on your journey.</p>
SEMrush	<p>SEMRush is a leader in online marketing and consistently ranks among the top sites for help in making your marketing efforts sing!</p>
Hubspot	<p>Hubspot is among the top five direct marketing sites. A wealth of tutorials and self-help to get you started plus paid consulting services.</p>
Moz	<p>Search engine optimization is a critical component of online success and Moz is the recognized powerhouse in helping you get found on the web.</p>
Fundamentals of Digital Marketing	<p>Google offers training in digital marketing. Maybe they know something?</p>
LinkedIn Learning	<p>Of course you're on LinkedIn. A premium membership gives you access to a vast library of courses on digital marketing and all its components.</p>