

# In Healthcare Marketing, Simpler is Better

*Submitted By: Rob Rosenberg, President  
Springboard Brand & Creative Strategy  
Arlington Heights, IL*

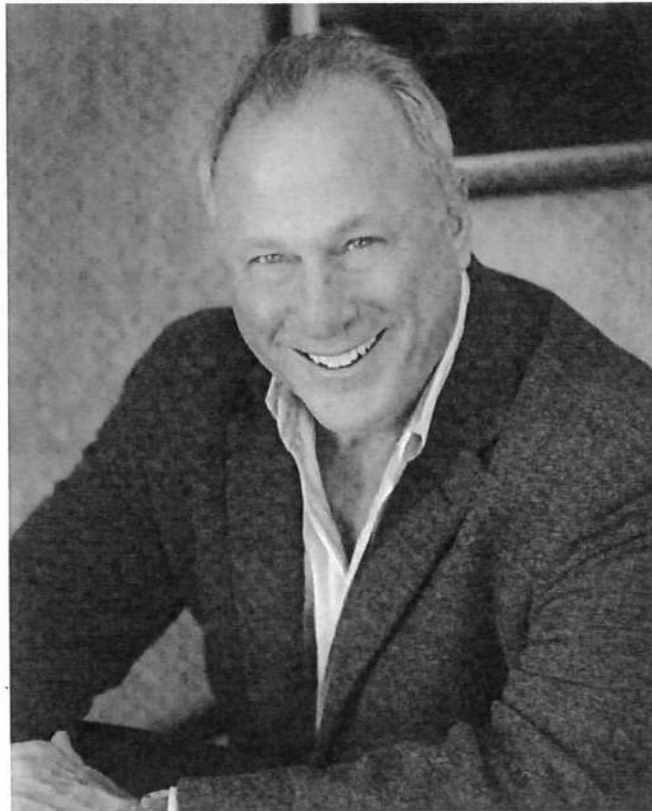
Healthcare is not simple. For consumers, it's difficult to navigate the waters of patient care, referrals, and insurance costs/reimbursements. For physicians, balancing patient care with enterprise-wide business and growth goals is challenging. For employees of larger health systems, there is confusion as to other providers in the organization and how/when to make appropriate referrals. These issues, along with many others, make healthcare one complex industry. And healthcare brands have become just as complicated.

That's why healthcare marketing needs to be made simple. After all, the simple definition of marketing is "meeting customer needs," so making a complex buying cycle and multi-layered organizational structure easier to understand are right in line with the basic tenants of marketing.

## **Why Simpler is Better for Consumers**

Healthcare marketers face a 'double whammy' when trying to reach and motivate consumers. First, studies show that the average consumer is exposed to 5,000 - 7,500 brand messages and marketing content a day (depending on which study you read). And with more and more channels being developed to reach consumers, that number is growing dramatically on a daily basis. The School of Human Sciences and Technology estimates that consumers switch between screens up to 21 times an hour and the average person's attention span is now just eight seconds. Eight seconds! Not only do healthcare messages need to gain consumer attention, they also need to communicate a story, capture their interest, and cause an action, all in less time than a ten second commercial.

This leads to the second whammy; healthcare messaging has traditionally not been that simple, or made that interesting. It's often complicated, duplicative, and undifferentiated. The big, cliché advertising words alone take almost eight seconds to say: multi-disciplinary, continuum of care, state-of-the-art technology, and other



mouthfuls. Not easy to communicate, understand, or capture the attention of consumers who only give it a fleeting moment to resonate.

As healthcare systems continue to grow adding practices and new entities, audiences will only be able to handle so much information. That's why stories need to be short, memorable, provide an overarching single-minded promise, and be relevant to the lives of those they're seeking to influence.

## **Why Simpler is Better for Employees and Referral Sources**

Enterprise success and growth goals depend on strong internal communications. It gives an organization a strategic advantage. When employees know who is part of the system, how to make referrals, where to access information, and why their role is important (as well as the "why" of the organization), patient leakage goes down and their satisfaction goes up.

In the many employee focus groups I've conducted, internal team members constantly

express their concerns that they are not informed enough to make important patient referrals and recommendations. As a result, it's not uncommon to see patients go "down the street" to other providers for services that are, in fact, part of the system from which they were referred.

The tools that can help with these issues should also be made simple. Brand books, videos, even old-school laminated cards are effective methods for communicating messages to employees and referral sources. Remember, your stakeholders are "consumers," too, and they give the same eight seconds to different messages throughout the day. Simpler is definitely better.

### **Why Simple is Better for Your C-Suite**

When presenting your annual marketing plan and budget recommendations to leaders in the C-Suite, it's important to stay out of the "weeds." Meaning, don't mire them in discussions around length of videos, size of ads, or even dashboards boasting impressions and click through rates. Not only don't they get it, they really don't care. Studies strongly encourage marketers to talk in the language that the C-Suite speaks; growth, revenue, and business goals. Marketing is their investment, not your expense or budget. You have to know what the organization's core goals are and speak (simply) about them in clear, thoughtful ways and how marketing will help achieve growth. Chief Marketing Officers have the shortest tenure among C-Suite members because they often lose, or have little sight of the big picture, and focus too much on the image of marketing.

### **A SIMPLE Brand Strategy is the Place to Start**

Make it easy on those to whom you are telling your story. Instead of cramming five services into a video message or, worse yet, running five different campaigns with different looks and feels, think SIMPLE: Singular Idea that Motivates People to Listen and Engage.

Acronyms make it easy to remember things, so hopefully this one will help you keep things simple.

**S**ingular—Whether your brand is a hospital or system, master or endorsed, consumers only have the mental capacity (and time) to

remember you by one single name or service. Campaigns that throw out multiple entities, or play the name game, are not only hurting but also competing with themselves. This thinking supports the "branded house" strategy...if you have a "house of brands," allow the same time and spacing to give them their freedom to grow in the future.

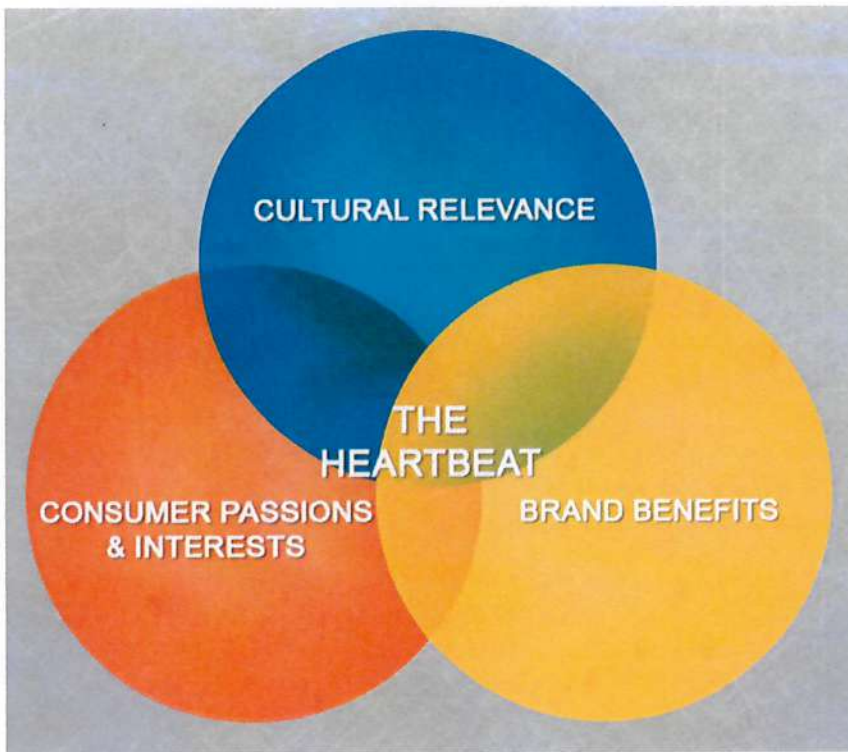
**I**dea—With social and other digital applications of your brand message, content seems to be all the rage. And that's fine. As long as it still has an idea guiding it—one that is carefully crafted based on research, brand differentiators, and a unique and captivating story. This is the "why" of your organization and has to be there for people to want to buy a product or service—and it needs to align with their own philosophy and purpose. In more traditional branding and advertising circles, the "big idea" still reigns, born from creative strategy, a competitive assessment, and customer insights.

**M**otivates—With barely any time to register, your message still has to create a response. Whether a click, call, or visit, be engaging, entertaining, and interesting enough to motivate desired behaviors. Of that eight seconds, you probably have a third of that time to hook an audience member with an irresistible email subject line, an eye-catching logo, or a tagline that stays in their head all day and motivates them to think about your brand.

**P**eople—Whether they are consumers, health professionals, stakeholders, employees, or other groups—your customers are people. They have busy schedules, multiple interests and limited time. They are diverse and culturally interesting with dreams and visions. Your brand needs to have a "heartbeat" to reach and influence them, not a "chest beat" that attacks their senses with irrelevant messages.

Key to "heartbeat branding" is being culturally relevant. This means your brand and communications programs reflect what is happening in a community, city-wide, or global basis. If people are only giving you eight seconds to make your point, it has to be timely and topical.





focus on those that reinforce your brand position.

As you evaluate your brand strategy, have a clearly articulated goal in mind. From there, develop strategies that are aligned with the goal(s) and tactics that execute the strategy. Keeping to this “formula” will help you keep things simple and move your brand forward.

In healthcare marketing it’s easy to get off track. There are physicians with midnight brainstorming, administrators and Boards with ideas of their own, and constant changes to the structure and composition of your organization. Your job is to count to eight, breathe, remind yourself of the amount of time key audiences will spend thinking of your brand and develop a SIMPLE marketing and communications program. ■

**L**isten—Breaking through, especially in healthcare advertising is tough. Everything sounds the same. And whether it’s on in the background, or while they watch, getting people to hear you is easy, getting them to listen is the difficult part. Most brands want to cut through the clutter, but it is often irrelevant to the wants, needs, interests, and desires of their audience. Remember, it’s about them (your customers) not you! Strive for clarity, not volume. Create messaging that people will tune-in, and doesn’t get drowned out.

**E**ngage—Different from motivating, engaging means you’ve touched your audience in a deeper capacity and they’ll seek your brand out in other ways. One of the key ideas of a “brand” is to connect with consumers and develop a long-term relationship with them. This connection is what translates to loyalty and interest, and hopefully sales.

**Strategy is the Essence of Keeping Things Simple.**

A strong brand strategy, by design, will help you keep things simple. Sacrifice is a key element of strategy. Meaning, you can only do so many things with the resources you have, so you must concede programs and tactics that don’t make the cut and

**HMR** *Calendar*

Are you or your organization sponsoring a healthcare conference, seminar or class that might be of interest to other marketers? If so, let HMR list it for you in our monthly calendar of events. Send information to: HMR, Calendar of Events, P.O. Box 76002, Atlanta, GA 30358-1002.

**May 21-23, 2019 • Chicago, IL**  
 2019 Healthcare Marketing & Physician Strategies Summit  
 Forum for Healthcare Strategists • **312-440-9080**

**June 12-14, 2019 • Atlanta, GA**  
 31st Annual Conference of Healthcare Call Centers  
 Healthcare Call Center Times  
**770-457-6106**

**September 8-11, 2019 • Nashville, TN**  
 SHSMD Connections  
 Society for Healthcare Strategy & Market Development  
**312-422-3888**