



# What would retail do?

5 approaches to patient-centric care  
in a consumer-centric culture

**The proliferation of social media and online resources, shifting healthcare policy, and increasing out-of-pocket costs for patients have all contributed to a rising patient consumerism.**

Patients now approach their healthcare experiences the same way they do their retail experiences—they research their options, shop around, and rely on online ratings, reviews, and recommendations. As a result, many patients now expect healthcare to deliver on the same promises as their favorite retail brands.

So what can healthcare professionals learn from these brands? And how might they apply these learnings and strategies to their own practices to improve the patient experience and increase engagement?

# Making it personal and giving them experiences

While consumer brands sell different services and products, the most successful brands succeed because they provide their customers with two underlying things: **personalization** and **meaning**.

First, they make it personal—meaning they work to cultivate personal connections with their customers. A national coffee chain, for example, may feature photographs of your town in your local shop as the barista you see every morning scrawls your name on your cup. Or your favorite online retail site may curate suggestions and recommendations for you based on your shopping trends.

Successful retail brands also know and understand that today's consumers want more than just things—they want experiences. People value experiences that add meaning to their lives—experiences they can post, share, and discuss on their social media channels. Like the delivery experience of an online retail site known for its prompt service and extensive reach, or the sleek, eye-candy, cool-factor experience of a frequented computer store.



## Looking to retail for new methods of engagement

It's true that providers and practices don't have to work quite the same way to sell their services. Unlike, say, a caramel no-foam latte, healthcare is a basic human necessity. However, to compete and thrive amidst rising patient consumerism, it may benefit practices to look to retail to inform new ways to attract, retain, and engage patients.

Patients now treat their healthcare experiences the same way they do their retail experiences—they research their options, shop around, and rely on online ratings, reviews, and recommendations.

Better patient experiences can lead to better patient engagement—which can help improve health outcomes for patients and financial performance for practices.<sup>1</sup>

# 5 approaches to patient-centric care in a consumer-centric culture

So where do you start? By examining small touchpoints and reexamining the big picture. If that sounds daunting, below are 5 different ways to approach it.

## Assess all aspects of the patient experience—beyond the exam room

Consumer brands think about and address every customer touchpoint, from the website to emails to customer service to the buying experience. Pretend, for a moment, that your practice is its own brand. How would both your prospective and current patients perceive and experience it? Are there things you can do to improve each touchpoint?

Start with the online experience. For example, how appealing and easy to navigate is your practice's website? Most of your patients conduct research via their mobile devices.<sup>2</sup> Is your site optimized for smartphones and tablets? And if you don't already have one, a practice blog could be a great way to not only connect with your patients in a more personal way about relevant, timely topics—like tips for flu and tick seasons—but also provide them with insights that could improve their health.

Then move on to your office. Consider easy ways to improve the waiting room experience, like free Wi-Fi or office iPads (these are especially useful when your patients bring their children with them). Friendly, accommodating front-desk staff is a given, especially as 96% of patient complaints are related to customer service.<sup>3</sup> And something as simple as parking validation can vastly improve a patient's experience.

The post-visit experience is important, too. Today's consumers want 24/7 access and connectivity. How are your patients connecting with you when not in your office? Think about the ease with which they connect via your portal, emails, texts, and/or phone calls.



## Go directly to the source—and make it personal

Successful retail brands treat their customers as valued individuals, creating an open dialogue and connecting with them on a personal level. In this regard, you already have an advantage, as you understand the individual health-related needs of your patients. You can build on this understanding—and strengthen patient relationships—with real-time check-ins and feedback requests about your practice.

For example, Banner Health recently adopted technology to assess real-time patient experiences during their hospital stays. The tool, called InMoment, gives providers up-to-date information about patient needs or complaints, providing them with the opportunity to address any issues.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Aurora Health Care founded Health Share, an online community of 5,000 highly engaged patients that offers feedback about Aurora's performance, from digital strategy to educational content to clinical innovation.<sup>5</sup>

## Use technology—and data—to your advantage

Retail uses technology to collect information, engage consumers, and demonstrate relevancy and innovation. You can do the same.

Obviously, your online presence, as discussed earlier, is important. Fifty-four percent of people ages 18–24 rely on online recommendations when shopping for a provider.<sup>6</sup> So what does your online presence look like?

While it should begin with a responsive website, it shouldn't stop there. Also consider how you're using social media channels, e.g., Facebook, to engage and attract patients. And reach patients where they are with health-related apps that provide reminders for appointments or lab testing.

### Trust Quest Diagnostics to be your patient-engagement partner

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- **TestMinder®** supports patient compliance with lab test orders, and can help you keep high-frequency testers up-to-date and on schedule.
- **QuestDirect™** allows patients in Colorado and Missouri to choose and order their own lab tests, while encouraging them to discuss results with their doctors.

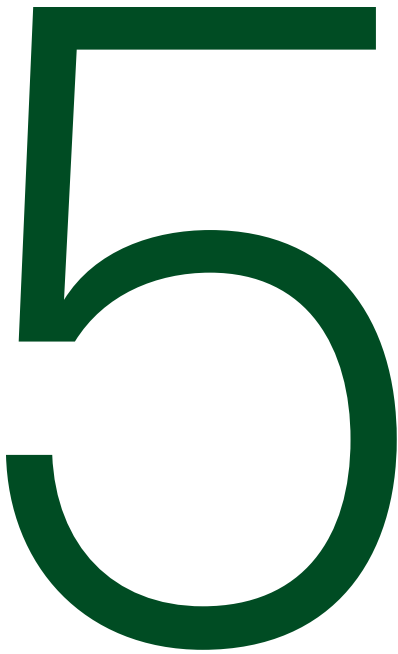
## Engage patients with rewards programs and gamification

Retail brands that reward loyalty and offer programs to further engage customers find success. Consider a program\*—or app—for your own practice to better engage patients in their health by rewarding them for taking proactive steps (examples include apps such as [Pact](#) and [SuperBetter](#)).

The interest is definitely there: while 58% of smartphone users have downloaded at least one health app, 15% of Americans own smartphone-connected, wearable health-and-fitness devices, such as a Fitbit® or smartwatch, which reward people with “badges” for completing certain milestones and allow them to compete with friends.<sup>6</sup>

Health plans are already using these tactics with success. For example, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield's Blue Rewards program rewards patients with up to \$300 for actions like subscribing to a wellness email or completing a health screening. And Humana Go365 rewards patients for engaging in healthy activities with items such as gift cards or program-compatible, fitness-related electronics.<sup>5</sup>





## Strive for transparency

The most successful retail brands in today's consumer-driven culture are also transparent—about costs, ingredients, mission, and so on. While healthcare is considerably more complex, patients want transparency from their providers as well, particularly with regard to cost. If possible and applicable, consider what you can do to provide your patients with more information about the costs of the services they need, as well as the ways in which your practice is helping them save.

And while some physicians worry that creating an online presence will open them up to negative ratings and reviews, don't let these concerns stop you. Enabling reviews, both good and bad, demonstrates transparency—and trust. Show that you trust patients to be savvy enough to weigh all reviews and—just as they do with retail brands—distinguish the good from the bad and determine where true quality resides.

## Do more with what you already know

Marketers have determined that today's consumers value experiences over things. According to an *AdvertisingAge* article, “various psychological studies are showing that all people—not just millennials—are happier when their money is spent on living, rather than having.”<sup>7</sup>

That's why, to rise to the top in today's consumer-driven culture, retail brands compete with one another to give consumers the very best experiences—ones that create meaning and make their lives better.

Healthcare practices, on the other hand, are literally in the business of helping people live well, of knowing how to improve and promote good health for the best experience—or life—possible. And physicians already have what retail spends millions of dollars to get: intimate insights about their customers.

By using retail tactics, providers and practices can do more with what they already have to create better patient experiences, leading to better engagement and healthier outcomes. And, ultimately, what could be more meaningful than that? If a consumer brand can turn a large iced non-fat hazelnut macchiato into a meaningful, personalized experience, physicians can use their insights to better provide what may be the most meaningful experience of all—living healthy.

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