

7 Tips in Marketing to Hospitals and Doctors



BY ROB FEY

The federal stimulus for hospitals and physicians to quickly adopt electronic medical records (EMR) has initiated a flurry of marketing activities up and down the health care food chain. With less than 2% of all hospitals having a comprehensive and integrated EMR system, the upside market potential is tremendous.

While many top-tier organizations have expertise in selling to large health care organizations, many of the new entrants do not. These seven tips are designed to help organizations create an effective road map for selling to health care providers.

1. TO NAVIGATE THE HOSPITAL LABYRINTH, A MULTI-LEVEL STRATEGY IS REQUIRED

Major institutional decisions have anywhere from 6-10 voices at the table. Each player has different drivers for decision-making and a different sense of prioritization. Acknowledging the different decision criteria of the key players and targeting them with distinct appeals is essential for being successful in complex selling situations.

Effective marketing employs the laws of marketing physics, creating critical mass and momentum in order for the messages to break through. We apply a simple rule of thumb called the 3-3-7 rule. Simply stated, this approach employs a targeted approach to each decision maker, engaging three different mediums, over three months, targeting a total of seven exposures.

Employing three different mediums (i.e. mail, web, events) maximizes marketing synergy, which elevates the odds of messages being seen. Three-month campaigns provide focus and concentration for sales and direct marketing efforts. Sales research points out that the average sale is consummated after seven exposures. Given the jammed schedules of hospital executives, this level of frequency is needed.

Does your marketing plan have enough momentum to break through?

2. THE MORE COMPLEX THE SALE, THE MORE POWERFUL AND SIMPLE YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION MUST BE

Apple Computers has Microsoft. David had Goliath. Clear, dramatic differences help break through the clutter. The more complex the sale, the more simple and compelling your value proposition must be. The best propositions are clear, sustainable and relevant. Furthermore, like Apple, the degree of difference versus the incumbent approach or competition must be extreme enough to be compelling.

Some research suggests that a winning value proposition should deliver results that are 3-9x better or different than the competition and/or market standard. Post mortems on failed

product launches typically depict limited differentiation and inadequate degrees of separation between competing products and services. Creating perceived and real separation is where the heavy lifting occurs between marketing and product development teams.

Does your product or service value proposition meet the 3-9x test?

3. TO ACCELERATE DECISION-MAKING, THE “TIPPING POINT AND PERSON” MUST BE EXPOSED

Health care organizations have a long list of needs, and limited attention spans. The only new ideas that have staying power in the board room are those with strong, and typically multiple, internal champions. In today’s world, one champion is often not enough. In selling an EMR, the Chief Medical Officer, VP of IT and Chief Operating Officer are all decision makers, evaluating the product from entirely different vantage points and often with different timetables.

Don’t forget about the role of secondary influencers, like the office manager or the referral coordinator in a physician’s practice or the Director level in the hospital. Oftentimes these people hold the real keys to a sale.

Defining the tipping point requires your prospect to articulate what has to happen in order for your product/service to be evaluated in a new light. Understanding this point in time from a two-dimensional perspective ...left brain/quantitative and right brain/emotional defines the ideal environment for closing the sale. End state visioning exercises are often used in planning retreats but can also be employed as effective sales tools.

Have your prospect define what success looks like and feels like, and what the other deliverables are such as the metrics to evaluate success (for your prospect and the organization). If you can get your clients to define the tipping point for you, then the sales process progresses to a new level, with the focus on educating how your product/service can fill the defined gap or meet the defined end state.

Have you defined the two-dimensional end state your client is seeking?

4. TO SPEED INTERNAL SALES ADOPTION, CREATE A TOOL KIT OF TEMPLATES

Even if you have anointed internal product champions, they are likely to have a limited amount of time to spend on making a business case for your product/service. Techniques to help them build a case include turnkey templates that they can populate to document ROI, timing, sensitivity analysis and scenario planning. Templates give prospects control and make you part of their internal sales process.

Best practice examples from other clients and site visits are also proven winning strategies for adding third-party credibility. Who wouldn't want a legitimate reason for getting out of daylong meetings?

Does your tool kit of templates help substantiate your business case?

5. SELL TO HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS LIKE THEY SELL TO THEIR BOSSES

Evidence-based approaches, scorecards, best practice case studies and third-party research are all tools that health care executives employ daily. Employing these techniques to "sell to" health care leaders can also work.

Create a best practice scorecard and allow your client to self-rate where they are in the process. Overlay your product or service adoption over time to this scorecard based on best practice existing clients as an educational selling tool.

Research is an essential part of the hospital selling tool kit. Employ third-party research to help substantiate your cause or neutralize a perceived disadvantage. Half of the selling barriers can often be overcome with evidence-based selling tools.

Do your sales materials eliminate barriers before your Reps show up?

6. UNDERSTAND THE ORGANIZATION'S INNATE BIAS

Napoleon once said that humans make decisions based on one of two principles; to gain something or to avoid losing

something. Knowing the innate bias of your prospect and organization can go a long way in positioning your product. Avoiding pain or risk is a quite different appeal than showing how your product or service will make their practice best of breed and emulated throughout the region.

Sales breakthroughs sometimes occur simply by switching gears from showing how your product gains your prospect something to how it avoids them losing something. The marketing tool kit must include both types of appeals.

Does your sales approach show prospects what is to be gained and what is to be avoided by purchasing your product/service?

7. ELEVATE "EASE OF USE" AS THE DIFFERENCE MAKER

Health care providers view the world through jaded lenses. Their perception is that they have been pick-pocketed day in and day out over the last decade by insurance companies, government agencies and even uninsured patients. Therefore, the concept of compromise in dealing with vendors often does not go over well.

The new marketing math suggests that 1+1=3. Quality and price will get you in the door, but superior ease of use will change the playing field. Hassled health care providers desire ease of use and application as much as or more than demonstrable economic value and superior quality implications.

The "easy button" has a strong voice in health care organizations. Demonstrating ease of use in terms of time and hassle saved can become the margin of difference needed to secure the sale.

Have you leveraged "ease of use" as the difference maker?

To learn more about the BeaconFey approach to marketing to health care providers, call 410-583-1203 or see us at www.BeaconFey.com