

Lessons Physician Groups Can Learn from the Hospitality Industry

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The hospitality industry places a high priority on the consumer, with airlines and hotels doing everything they can to differentiate themselves by creating a better consumer experience, all with the goal of creating loyal consumers. Many elements that help businesses in the hospitality industry build loyalty and create a better experience could also be incorporated into the healthcare industry and more specifically, physician practices.

Employ a Concierge in Physician Practices for a Better Experience

Consumers go to the concierge for questions about everything from tickets to shows to restaurant and attraction recommendations, rather than asking other staff members for recommendations. While online review websites could be used to find the best restaurant in town, for those in an unfamiliar city, the human element of talking to the concierge creates a more personalized experience that addresses their specific needs.

Consider what it would be like if the physician office had a concierge desk, a spot for patients to ask clarifying questions after their physician visit, connect with community-based resources to improve their health or call if they need additional support. A concierge could:

Personalize the experience

- Look at physician orders around lifestyle habits such as working out or healthy eating and recommend resources as well as assist with things like enrollment at a gym, or in nutrition classes or other community-based social groups.
- Follow up in the weeks after the visit to ensure that the physician's recommendations are being adhered to and if the recommendations aren't fitting with their lifestyle, problem solving to find alternative offerings and resources.

Improve access

- Ensure the correct pharmacy information has been provided to the pharmacy and offer to have the prescription delivered to their home.
- Assist in scheduling follow-up appointments for labs, imaging or visits with specialists.

Create a better experience that serves as a differentiator in market

- Help consumers better understand the healthcare industry. Healthcare is complex and navigating is not easy, so helping consumers navigate will help them have a better understanding of what and why things are happening.
- Develop a specialized focus for an office. For instance, if a practice that wants to focus on caring for they offer free pick up from appointments or one that wants to attract athletes could offer workout classes. Partnerships with local businesses that encourage wellness could help bring these unique experiences to the consumer rather than the practice creating them alone.
- Offer service recovery in the event of an unsatisfactory experience by listening to the consumer and finding a way to address their needs.

Just like hotel guests pay for the dinner or experience set up by the concierge, the same can be true of offerings from the physician group, as the role of the concierge is to simply make these experiences more accessible. A concierge can enable your organization to not only be top of mind when something goes wrong, but to have a role in keeping the consumer well as you create a more personalized healthcare experience that fits their lifestyle. This empowers consumers to manage their health while building loyalty.

Create Consistency and Stickiness Just Like Loyalty Programs

In the airline industry, frequent fliers are good for the industry; in healthcare this is not the case. Hotels and airlines have realized just how important loyalty programs are in creating a stickiness with customers that makes it hard for them to leave. They offer perks and rewards, but they also provide a predictability and ease that make the uncertainty and the unknown of traveling easier and more seamless because members know what to expect from a given brand.

Imagine if the same could be true in healthcare and every consumer encounter in a physician office setting across an entire health system, regardless of specialty, was predictable and consistent. From scheduling to visit reminders, check in, the flow of a patient visit, check out, meetings with a concierge to solidify next steps and follow up phone calls. This consistency would differentiate an organization in the market. Consumers would know where to go to seek help when they're unclear and how to access the appropriate type of care which would decrease the uncertainty around the healthcare experience and ensure they're receiving the right care at the right time. Loyalty programs are successful because they are small gestures over time that lead to a large impact. It's the small gestures and genuineness of the loyalty programs that provide that enhanced experiences. This enhanced experience comes through a concierge and the experience at a physician office. Whether it's a coupon to spend at a local vitamin shop or a celebration for those who have completed a weight loss program or a reward for ten straight years of receiving an annual physical, these small gestures can encourage consumers to remain loyal while rewarding healthy choices. With loyalty programs consumers feel valued, creating a stickiness that keeps them coming back.

Leverage Technology to Further Personalize The Experience

After booking a flight or hotel stay, an email confirmation is sent along with instructions to opt into text alerts or download an app for additional information. As the flight or hotel stay approaches, reminders are sent via email and text regarding check-in, flight status, gate information and information to help manage expectations (such as what you can't bring on a plane). Some hotels inquire about any special requests for a stay and email information about local attractions, restaurants and hotel amenities so guests can prepare appropriately.

Think about if physician practices followed suit. They could provide alerts if a physician is running late along with the anticipated time of the visit.

Or email information about what is needed for the visit and an explanation of what's going to occur in the appointment, so consumers could prepare appropriately.

Consumer Relationship Management (CRM) systems play a critical role in personalizing the experience in many industries, including hospitality. They offer insights on every touchpoint a consumer has whether that's via email, chat, phone or in person enabling the individual managing a request to have a full picture of their need and know what's been discussed previously. At the same time data from patients could inform physician groups about areas where they could improve their experience.

To further personalize the experience, follow the example of hotels that display personalized welcome messages on a television screen within their guests' room and do the same in exam rooms.

By looking outside the traditional framework of the physician practice, it's possible to create a differentiated experience that will benefit your bottom line by increasing consumer loyalty while also enabling you to equip your consumers with the tools to manage their health outside the brick and mortar buildings of healthcare.

Key Takeaways

To attract and retain consumers at your physician practice, you must do things differently. To do so:

Think differently.

Look outside the healthcare industry for examples of exemplary consumer experiences that create stickiness to the brand.

Plan differently.

Identify ways to incorporate lessons from the hospitality industry into your physician practice and invest in technology to personalize the experience.

Act differently.

Establish metrics to track the impact of new initiatives and continue to assess their impact on improving patient health as well as consumer retention.



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