

Thinking About Your Health System as a Brand: What You Need to Know



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Branding has always been important for traditional consumer-facing businesses, such as restaurants and retailers. Even in the healthcare space, urgent cares, pharmacies, and specialties like behavioral health and physical therapy have operated with a brand mindset for years.

Traditionally, health systems have not.

Now as competition increases and new players enter the industry, consumers have more choices for their healthcare than ever before. This, in turn, amplifies the need for a health system to be able to distinguish itself from its competition—in other words, the need to develop a strong, recognizable brand.

So, what is a brand? And where do you start when establishing one?

More Than a Logo

To begin with, a brand is more than a logo. However, while a logo and consistent signage are not the be-all and end-all of a brand, their power should not be underestimated.

Together, logos and signage work to connect your locations and the quality of your service in the minds of consumers. Don't assume your wider community knows all the hospitals and practices in your system are connected, especially if they all have different names and signs. Bringing multiple locations together under one name, one logo, and one website is a powerful way to show the breadth and depth of the health system.

But don't stop there!

A brand is also a promise to your consumers about the quality of care and the overall experience they will receive. This means not only is it important to know who your customers are and what you're promising them, but to also deliver on that promise by doing what you say you'll do.

Mergers and Acquisitions

If and when your health system merges with or acquires another system, the process of combining the two organizations will be difficult, messy, and often frustrating. There are a lot of factors to consider, including patient records, internal technology compatibility, and employee sentiment. But it's also important to understand how this impacts the brand of each health system.

Sometimes, M&A results in a completely new name and system identity, meaning new logos, signage, websites, and more for both systems. Other times, one system completely absorbs the other. Regardless of how systems are joining, it's pivotal they mesh together well.

To do this, look beyond coming together financially. Shared vision and consistent communication are also incredibly important for coming together culturally, as well. Even if the consolidation makes financial sense, it's hard to establish a coherent brand if two newly joined health systems approach care differently, communicate with patients and employees differently, and have different cultural values.

To make matters more complicated, established health systems come with their own history and a name that can carry a lot of weight in a community. Incorporating both systems' background and identity into the new brand is crucial to bring practitioners, staff, and consumers with you as you create your new, shared identity.

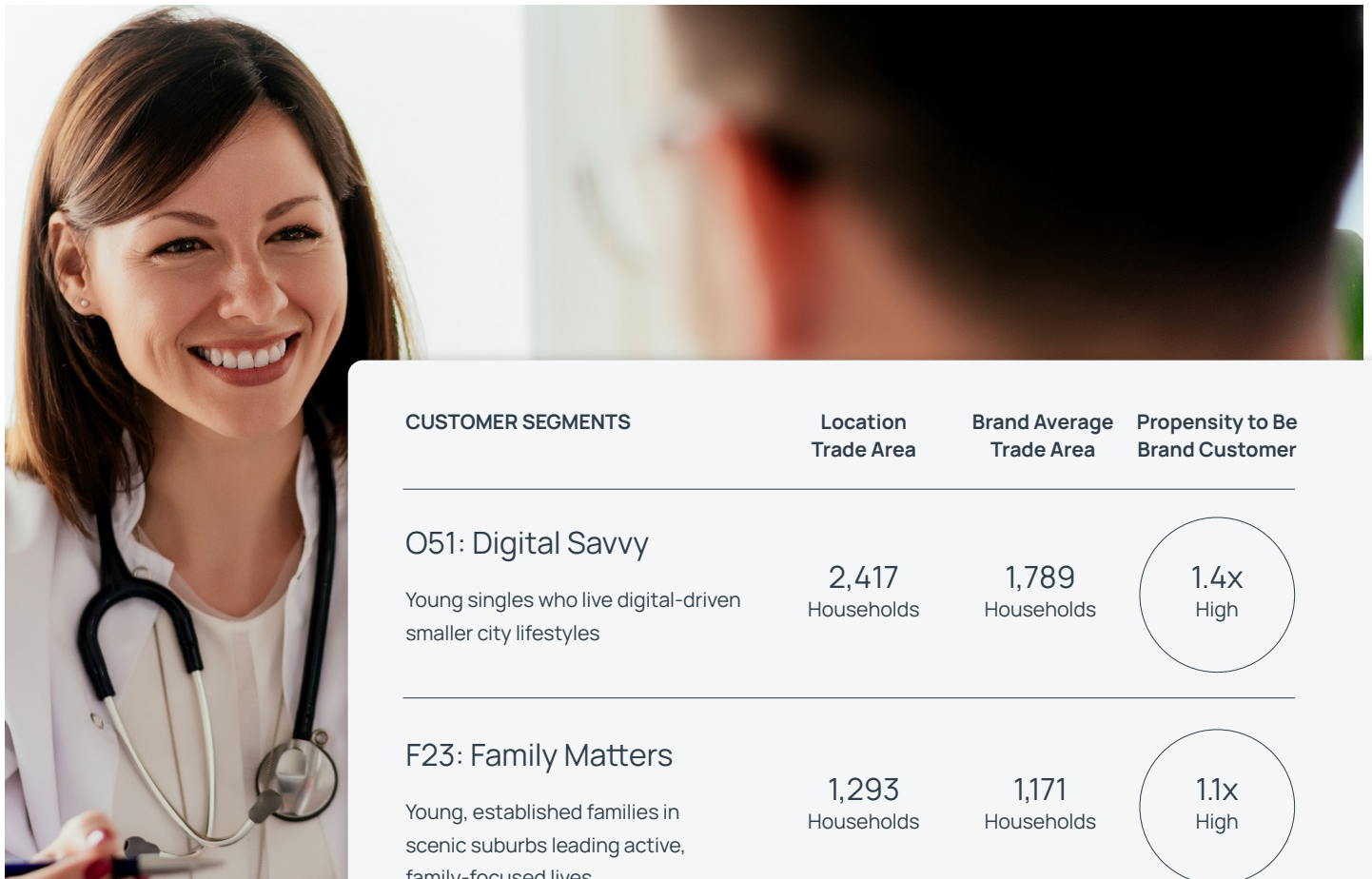
Understand Your Consumers

For a brand, one of the most important factors that guides every decision is their customers. Whether that brand sells shoes, fixes cars, cuts hair, or provides healthcare, these organizations know who buys their products and who uses their services. They also know who doesn't.

For example, both Walmart and Whole Foods sell groceries, but their consumer bases are wildly different. The same can probably be said about the consumer base of one health system and that of a competitor system.

To truly understand who your consumers are, you need to look deeper than demographics and dig into psychographics. Defined as a consumer's behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values, psychographic insights, like those derived from the Buxton Platform, provide the whole story, as opposed to just the glimpse revealed by demographics. For instance, just because a consumer has Medicare does not mean they'll go to your system just because you take Medicare. Other factors contribute to this decision.

Knowing the behaviors of those consumers who choose to use your system and prefer you over the competition is important for finding more consumers, expanding to new locations, and building your brand.



Determine Your Purpose

Once you have behavioral insights about your consumers, it's easier to understand why they come to your health system, what they value about it, and what sets your system apart. These insights are useful for guiding you to your purpose or your why.

Your purpose is what your organization is promising. Knowing this turns your system from a group of care providers with the same logo into a true brand.

To determine your why, start by asking these questions:

Who do you
want to be to your patients?

What do you
want your name to represent?

What are your values?

How do you want your employees to see you? How do you want your
employees to represent your brand?

How do you want your
patients to see you?
Your community?

The answers to these questions can help you build out your vision and mission statements—both of which are the base of your purpose, or why you do what you do.

When brainstorming your responses, it's important get everyone involved. The best way to bring everyone along with a branding change is to have wide representation on the team making the decisions. By all means, ask the executive team, but don't forget to talk to your system's doctors, nurses, administrators, staff, and patients. The more buy-in you have from across the different functions, the more smoothly the branding process will go.

The Importance of Marketing

Social media, emails, commercials, billboards, radio ads—these are just a few of the marketing channels that traditional retail brands use. They're also ones that health systems use to promote their brands as well.

Successful marketing helps create a full brand experience for the consumer via words, images, and meaningful calls to action. It ensures the way they're interacting with your health system online matches the way it does when they see a specialist, take their child to the pediatrician, or spot a billboard on the highway. Consistency builds familiarity and name recognition, which in turn produces loyal patients.

Marketing is also an important tool beyond familiarity and recognition. Sending valuable information—such as your system's various access points, all your providers by service line, or patient success stories—increases credibility and trust, while also working to acquire and retain patients. But for this to be effective, you must understand the different types of consumers visiting your system, which access point they're most likely to use, and how they prefer to be communicated with.

With your consumer base segmented out by service line and psychographic behaviors, it will be much easier to reach the right person with the right message at the right time.

The Bottom Line

The process of shifting to view your health system as a brand, as opposed to a network of healthcare providers, is a long and difficult journey that takes commitment and communication from everyone.

For established healthcare organizations with a long history in their community and weight behind their name, this may be even harder. But moves and changes like these bring with the opportunity to increase goodwill, grow market share, and build something unified and enduring.

Get a Demo

Contact us to learn how we can help your organization thrive in an ever-evolving industry.



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