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## Use Integrated Rich Media To Engage and Retain Website Visitors

Article by:  
Ken Morselander  
STEMworks Partner

Healthcare marketers are beginning to understand what other industries have known for at least a year. High speed Internet connections are changing the Internet user experience from a static (read only) environment to an interactive broadcast environment. These changes provide the healthcare industry with excellent opportunities to distribute unique intellectual capital through a user-preferred format. This article is the first in a three part series. The series will provide a strategic road map for elevating your website from brochure status to user-preferred intellectual partnership.

Picture this.

A visitor to your website is greeted with a homepage that fits neatly on her computer screen. No scrolling required. Color pictures of people who represent your key service lines demographic dissolve up on the screen in an appealing montage.

A frame right beneath your logo opens with a video of the CEO welcoming the visitor, explaining how the website works and assuring the commitment of the organization to meeting their healthcare needs. Per the verbal instructions, the visitor types in her key words of interest, women's health.

Your Women's Health landing page opens with pictures of staff, a video patient testimonial about successful treatment, and offers interactive risk-assessment tools. The visitor takes a risk assessment survey. When she completes the assessment, she prints concise educational modules with a single click. As she exits the site, she is asked whether she would like to sign up for an e-newsletter on specific women's health subjects.

Why?

Perhaps the most compelling reason to consider the use of rich media in e-healthcare marketing is that broadband distribution has changed the way Internet users want to receive information. The video-on-demand technologies of TiVo<sup>®</sup>

and i-Pod have created a user culture that is driven by access to rich media. Simply put. Integrated rich media offers excellent tools for engaging, educating and retaining your website visitors.

There is no question that audio, video and interactive technologies engage and retain website visitors. In “Silent Messages”, Albert Merhabian Ph.D., UCLA points out that people are engaged by the following:

- Text 7%
- Audio 38%
- Video 58%
- Interactivity (mouse/typing) (100%)

Integrated media provides an excellent format to ensure the transfer of complex medical and scientific information on the users’ terms. It is infinitely easier to explain an interventional treatment through integrated motion, audio and graphics media, than it is by text. The other problem is that reading is an interpretive skill. Individual readers do not take the same messages from the same text.

### Where Do You Start?

As with any marketing initiative, the first step in developing rich media applications for your website is to craft a strategic and tactical implementation plan. Your strategy document serves to focus the rich media effort to specific enterprise-wide goals and creates criteria for measuring the effectiveness of the initiative. Some common questions to consider in creating a rich media strategy include:

- What are your high-level goals?
- Which of your organization’s branding messages are better delivered through rich media?
- Which types of rich media elements best reflect your culture?
- Which of your key service lines are best promoted through rich media?
- What are your resources?
- What is your budget?

### High Level Goals

As the title of this article implies, a high-level goal of your web offering should be to engage and retain prospective customers. In the earliest days of Internet marketing, this was described as a “portal” strategy. The theory was that if you could attract visitors to your site repeated times, that “population” could be translated to revenue. The model has proven to be successful. eBay is the portal for buying anything. Google is the portal for search. How does that apply to healthcare?

Within your geographic service area, there is a demographic cross section of potential customers. The instant they, or a loved one, is given a medical diagnosis, they begin to search for information ...and possibly a provider. The opportunity for healthcare marketers is to provide unique information portals that reflect the key service lines of the organization.

To continue our example of Women's Health. Within your service area, there is a finite demographic population that will, in the future, require treatment for breast cancer. Your marketing strategy should be to attract, engage and retain that demographic through the distribution of your organization's unique intellectual capital. If you answer the needs of this audience with accurate, complete and compelling information, there is a good chance they will choose your organization as their care provider. The logical extension of this capture is that if the patient experience is positive, it is realistic to assume those patients will seek other types of medical services from you.

### Branding Messages

Rich media offers tremendous advantages in brand messaging. Sound, video and motion allows you to convey nuance to solidify your branding messages. Showing an appealing, professional environment is far more powerful than stating you have one. Media allows visitors to hear the sincerity of a staff message; recognize the caring attitude of a caregiver, and feel like a valued partner by receiving specific, directed information.

The impact of marketing tag lines and graphic elements can be greatly enhanced through the appropriate use of motion and sound. The key word in the previous sentence is appropriate. An extension and affirmation of brand messaging is choosing the rich media elements that best reflect your organization's culture.

### Cultural Considerations

Is your organization for profit or not for profit? Do you have a faith affiliation? Are you located in an urban or rural environment? What are your key service lines? What are the personalities of your thought leaders? What is the average age of your patient base? The answers to these questions are influencing factors that shape the culture of your organization. Your choices of rich-media design elements should reflect the culture of your organization.

If your culture is conservative, upbeat music and hyperactive flash media probably should not be your first media choices. You can still incorporate those media elements in your strategic offering, but the delivery would be understated. However, if you are a children's hospital, hyperactive flash media would be an excellent choice (Check out Kid's Galaxy at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia [www.chop.edu](http://www.chop.edu) ).

Individual service lines have their own culture. The media elements that you might choose for Women's Health would be completely different than the choices you might make for robotic prostatectomy. One basic premise for all media choices is that you should try to humanize the information as much as possible. Instead of just integrated pictures and text of a treatment or procedure, consider having a caregiver (not an actor) narrate the explanation.

### Service Line Choices

There are certain services lines that can absolutely be transformed through the integrated use of rich media. Interventional procedures are an excellent example. Brachytherapy treatment for breast cancer is much better understood if graphics are used to present anatomy, motion shows device placement and animation depicts the treatment. Technology requires media to be understood. Trying to explain robotic surgery or gamma knife without interactive media is difficult. Graphic rendering can help translate science into lay understanding. Remember, your goal is to empower potential customers so they may make cognitive choices about provider services.

Empowerment also helps to reduce the anxiety and fear that all patients experience. Integrated rich media, especially when personalized with caregiver narration, is an invaluable tool for increased understanding. Ask any caregiver and they will tell you that a confident, empowered patient is a powerful ally in achieving positive outcomes.

### Internal and External Resources

You probably have more source material than you think. Begin your evaluation of media resources by doing an inventory of every graphic and media element associated with your organization. Collect and review every source picture and video from all departments and services. Ask yourself how those assets may be leveraged for use with several audiences. For example. A scientific presentation by one of your physicians for a nursing audience might easily be repurposed to serve as an educational piece for allied staff and consumer audiences.

For individual service lines, contact all the vendors who provide the equipment or services associated with the service line and ask what graphics and media elements they can provide to tell your story. A good example for the Women's Health service line might be digital mammography. There is a good chance the manufacturer of the digital mammography equipment has excellent media elements, already produced, to support their concepts and science. If you are using their equipment, they should be willing to share those assets with your organization.

## Show Me The Money

If your organization is like most, traditional marketing budgets fall far short of the funding needed to respond to the rapidly changing market. Also, like most, your organization probably has access to the funding needed. It simply wasn't allocated for this use. Everyone is facing the same paradigm. Here are the issues that must be considered:

- there is a *market-driven* shift away from traditional marketing initiatives. DoubleClick and Nielssen a healthcare organization's most valuable marketing tool is unique intellectual capital (the Internet, as opposed to print media, provides a ubiquitous venue for information distribution)
- rich media tells a better story than text and broadband distribution supports rich media
- e-marketing efforts may be tracked (daily, if necessary) to allow realistic evaluation of ROI metrics. Technology allows you to track any element of Internet activity with your site visitors. You can track the obvious things such as impressions, click-throughs and elapsed time but new off-the-shelf tools provide knowledge management tools to measure efficacy of design. Use data can be assembled to design viral marketing (DoubleClick study).

At the end of the day, the funding must be viewed as an enterprise-wide investment...not just a marketing budget. Rich media e-marketing can change clinical care models. For example. Asthma patients can do on-line password protected journaling. As a result, exacerbation trends can be evaluated in a more timely way. So, one could argue that some funding should come from clinical services. Rich media/technology can provide operating efficiencies in finance and general operations. On-line bill payment is already shortening accounts receivable times. On-line scheduling saves everyone time. So, one could argue that some funding should come from operations and finance. Rich media is an excellent recruitment tool, so one could argue that some funding should come from HR. Rich media enhances education so one could argue...you get the idea.

Is it worth it? Two years ago, St. John Health in Warren, MI decided to completely renovate their "brochure" style web presence and use integrated media elements to tell their story. In the ( ) issue of eHealthcare Strategy and Trends, St. John Health reported the following; "...for every \$1 invested we have recognized a \$3 profit after expenses.

Can rich media help you engage and retain your website visitors and can that investment be translated into a measurable return? Absolutely.