


booth to ask Rice and Aguirre questions. Later, the two walked the floors to check computers and hand out chocolate wrapped as gold coins. A treasure map was used to get employees to start navigating the new intranet, with a drawing for prizes held at the end of the day.

Continued journey

Refinements continued during the rollout to 20 facilities. An online

fact sheet called "How do I find?" was developed to show employees the new location of items. To help employees find key facility information without expanding home page navigational links, relevant keywords were added to the search function. A promotional area on the right side of facility home pages was established for important programs and initiatives.

Rice notes that the organization will begin the second phase of its new intranet in the first quarter of 2005. New features and functions under consideration include customizable links, community message boards, an Ask Banner feature, and games and contests to encourage brand awareness. Training wizards are also being examined, requiring an employee to pass a test before being allowed to author content. 

Don't Overlook General Consumer Trends, Several Healthcare Applications

by Anthony Cirillo

The beginning of a new year brings out the prognosticators. Although you might be following healthcare and technology trends, are you tracking more general consumer trends? Are you thinking about how you can adapt and create services to address these trends? Useful online resources such as trendwatching.com and springwise.com have newsletters that that will keep you current on worldwide trends. Following are some of the trends being cited and some possible healthcare applications.

The latest favorite gadget and the MP3 revolution

This past holiday season some 4 million people (myself included) bought an Apple iPod. Let's think outside the iPod's intended use of listening to music. Why not make learning enjoyable through a technology embraced by young people for listening to music? Duke University has, by distributing iPods to all incoming freshmen. Duke provides course content to students and other useful information that can be downloaded to an iPod.

MP3 players are not only used with headphones, but also with adapters

that allow them to be played through FM radio. In fact, car manufacturers are scrambling to build in features to directly accommodate the players. There have been stories of radiologists using MP3 players to store images.

Potential applications

- Record and digitize health lectures. Then offer them on your Web site to be downloaded. Whether they're free or attached to some requirement is your decision.
- Take other health information and produce it in an audio format for target audiences.
- Convert preoperative and pre-admission information into an MP3 format that can be sent in an e-mail to patients before their scheduled appointment.
- Supplement the hospital newsletter with audio messages to employees and other audiences. The audio format can eventually reduce the costs of producing a physical newsletter and increase the likelihood of the message being received. Instead of having to take time to read the information, people can listen to it while commuting to or from work.

Satellite radio and 'Masters of the Youniverse'

Love him or hate him, shock jock Howard Stern is on to something. He has opted to leave commercial radio and join one of the satellite radio providers in a long-term contract. Although Stern wanted to avoid continued Federal Communications Commission regulations, he had other legitimate business reasons for making this move.

People are growing increasingly disenchanted with commercial broadcasting. A trend cited by trendwatching.com and termed "Masters of the Youniverse" focuses on individual preference, personal lifestyle, customization, and massive choice.

Satellite radio offers niche content in the extreme. Although commercial radio may offer music from the 1960s, a satellite provider might offer 10 subcategories catering to specific tastes under the general category of music from the 1960s. Stern's thinking is that people who enjoy uncensored shock jocks will pay for the privilege of hearing them through satellite.

Potential applications

- Address satellite radio's need for content other than music and shock

jock commentary. What healthcare organization will step forward and partner with the two major satellite providers? Imagine stations dedicated to different ailments – the diabetes channel, the heart channel, the oncology channel.

- Start rethinking your commercial radio advertising strategy and consider how you can capitalize on the trend for highly segmented content.
- Look at this trend in a broader context. What else do you offer or could you offer that meets highly defined preferences?

Increased globalization

The world is becoming smaller. Ironically, interest in how the United States delivers healthcare is on the rise. While some people predict that the United States will move to a socialized structure, the socialized medicine countries are looking to embrace aspects of the U.S. system.

I recently spoke at the first Middle East forum on healthcare marketing, where participants eagerly learned how to apply healthcare marketing strategies to the delivery of healthcare in the Middle East. Public-private partnerships are growing, adding competition and offering options for those who can pay out of pocket and avoid a wait of a year or more to receive care.

Increasingly, the world is looking to the United States to form those public-private partnerships. Harvard Medical International and Johns Hopkins International, to name two, are forming worldwide alliances and building medical schools in foreign countries.

Potential applications

- Use cultural and treatment nuances gained from caring for diverse populations in the United States. Is there knowledge that can be exported to the countries of origin of these groups, or knowledge

from those countries that needs to be imported? Staff exchange programs could be one way to test the concept of an international community.

- Capitalize on global business expansion by offering specific healthcare screenings, immunizations, and education programs for traveling business men and women. Generally, only Fortune 500 companies are likely to have medical directors to oversee such programs. Forming a relationship with somewhat smaller companies for this purpose might lead to a similar connection for caring for citizens of other countries working in the United States.

A niche focus for wellness

Offering the same set of services to everyone has been the trend in physical fitness and wellness. Yet niche services catering to women, men, and children are thriving. The company Curves operates gyms geared to women and boasts 4 million members and 8,000 locations worldwide. Cuts Fitness For Men offers a 30-minute cardiovascular and strength training workout exclusively for men. The formula has proved so popular that Cuts has seen the number of franchises grow from zero to 160 in only 18 months. Fitwize4kids offers supervised workouts for kids, helping address the problem of childhood obesity.

Potential applications

- Segment health offerings to address the specific needs of each target population. In building a fitness center, consider cutting the size by two-thirds and building two other, connected facilities with separate entrances. The perception of a dedicated program can make a huge difference in attracting and retaining revenue-generating members.
- Cater to individual needs within an existing facility. Exclusive spas, for example, have common areas for

men and women as well as separate treatment areas with distinct services for each.

- Market services separately. Although a community newsletter or online calendar that lists all services is good, a publication specifically geared to men, women, or children is even better.

Generation R

Springwise has dubbed a trend “Generation R,” the R standing for revenge, as in what happens to a company if it chooses not to listen to its customers. Consumers now have a means to fight back instantly if they are not pleased with a product or service. From starting their own blogs and viral videos to posting their opinions on sites such as Epinions.com, they have the potential of reaching global audiences quickly.

Entrepreneurs are becoming information brokers between organizations and right-here, right-now customers. South African company 34007 allows consumers to anonymously text-message their grievances and suggestions right on the spot to merchants and suppliers that have a special merchant code. Merchants can then reply and hopefully resolve the issue. They can also proactively offer consumers a digital voucher for every comment, suggestion, and complaint they receive. Text messaging takes what has been evolving on the Web one step further.

Imagine someone who has experienced some sort of delay or bad treatment in your emergency department having the ability to let thousands know about it at the exact time it occurs. That is powerful communication and needs to be recognized.

Potential applications

- Realize that focus groups and the occasional survey are no longer

enough to keep current on customer concerns. After-treatment satisfaction surveys are dated by the time they are received and addressed. Real-time feedback mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure prompt attention and customer satisfaction.

- Set up your Web site so that feedback forms are conspicuous and promoted.
- Create an internal culture in which complaints and concerns are reported after every shift to appropriate personnel for resolution.
- Start and monitor a blog to moderate what is being said about

your organization, and include a mechanism for responding in real-time.

- Give out senior executives' e-mail addresses so that anyone can send them an e-mail.
- Establish mechanisms internally to act on consumer issues. Existing mechanisms for collecting, evaluating, and acting on employee suggestions could be adapted for continuous, daily response to consumer concerns.
- Call, rather than write, those who complain (or compliment!) and let them know you are addressing the issue.

Although most healthcare organizations are extremely knowledgeable about healthcare trends, it is the savvy organization that can look at consumer trends and see healthcare applications. Take the trends noted here, formulate your own unique responses, and get them to market quickly.

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ASK THE EXPERT ... SUSAN SOLOMON

Question: Should Healthcare Communicators Blog? What Should We Know?

By day, Robert Centor, MD, is an academic general internist at the University of Alabama School of Medicine. By night, he turns into one of the most noted medical bloggers in America. Centor is the author of *Medical Rants*, a blog he says is devoted to discussion of the healthcare field.

Medical Rants is an eclectic mix of information, including commentary on topics such as malpractice, direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising, resident work hours, and obesity. A loyal group of readers log in every day to read the writings of Centor (who also peppers his blog with quotes from Groucho Marx and Nietzsche) and to become part of the community known as "the blogosphere."

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Don't underestimate the power of the blogosphere. Although right now most blogs are created by dedicated individuals such as Centor, there is tremendous potential in this latest online communications phenomenon. A recent Pew Internet & American Life Project study estimated that about 27 percent of Internet users, or about 32 million Americans, are regular blog readers. A new blog is created every 7.4 seconds, which means there are about 12,000 new blogs a day.

"Clearly we have only scratched the surface when it comes to the potential of blogs in medical communications," Centor says, noting that medical blogs and medical bloggers are multiplying rapidly.

If your organization is thinking about setting up a blog, consider the following:

Q. OK, what is a blog?

A. Short for Web log, a blog is a Web page made up of short, frequently updated postings that are

arranged chronologically. The content varies greatly – from links and commentary about other Web sites to news about a company, person, or idea. Sometimes photos, poetry, essays, and project updates are included. In essence, a blog is a diary, but as one blogger puts it, "Diary doesn't sound nearly as cool."

People maintained blogs long before the term was coined, but the trend gained momentum with the introduction of automated publishing systems, most notably blogger.com. Thousands of people use services such as blogger.com to simplify and accelerate the publishing process.

Q. Why are marketers excited about blogs?

A. Actually, marketers are getting into blogging rather late. It's Web enthusiasts who are the real pioneers. Blogs are powerful because they allow millions of people to easily publish their ideas and millions more to comment on them. A blog is a fluid, dynamic medium, more