



LESSON 7:

Leverage the Purpose Advantage

SE2

Strategic Healthcare Communications

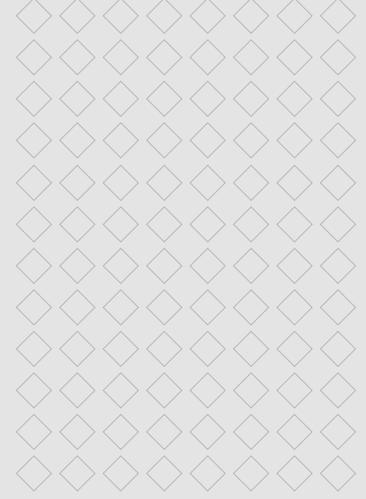


All hospitals and health systems should highlight their local legacy.

Faith-based hospitals and systems in particular can leverage significant advantage from their religious roots — as long as they make clear that the hospital is a welcoming and healing place for people of all faiths.

Read more in this recent article by SE2's CEO Susan Morrissey published on Fierce Healthcare.

But this information isn't just relevant to faith-based organizations. Even secular hospitals and systems will find valuable lessons on how to own and celebrate your local roots.



FierceHealthcare

Industry Voices—Hospitals need to reconnect to their faith-based legacies

by **Susan Morrisey**

Not so long ago, Catholic hospitals were typically run by nuns. Their presence in the halls and executive suites were a constant reminder of the hospitals' faith-based legacies, which were generally appreciated by community members, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Today, Catholic hospitals are much more likely to be run by lay executives who don't serve as a human embodiment of religious roots. The nuns' presence may now be limited to black-and-white photographs on the hospital walls.

This shift has not gone unnoticed by the communities served by these hospitals. In some cases, there's a feeling that the hospitals have lost their souls. While hospitals with religious affiliations may continue to offer spiritual counseling as well as care for those in need, they may be increasingly indistinguishable from other hospitals, even for-profit institutions.



WHATEVER THE REASON, HOSPITALS ARE SEEN AS MORE THAN JUST A BUSINESS – THEY ARE OFTEN SEEN A REFLECTION OF THE OVERALL HEALTH OF A COMMUNITY.

Ironically, this can actually hurt their bottom line, as religiously affiliated hospitals lose the loyalty of community members who sense an erosion of the values that were long integrated into their care.

This may coincide with market consolidation, which can pull faith-based hospitals even further from their unique local legacies in the community.

What results is a growing concern in communities that these nonprofit hospitals and health systems have lost their way, becoming more fixated on numbers than people or mission.

“So what?” you might ask. Numbers drive every business and a hospital isn’t any different, especially in the increasingly competitive national healthcare landscape.

But hospitals face more scrutiny and are held to a higher standard than most other businesses.

Chalk it up to the charity-based origins of many of these institutions or because of healthcare deals with intensely personal and emotional issues of life and death. Whatever the reason, hospitals are seen as more than just a business – they are often seen a reflection of the overall health of a community.

Communities demand a high degree of engagement, transparency, and accountability from hospitals – and want to see them regularly putting their values into action.



LEVERAGING THE “PURPOSE” ADVANTAGE

The timing is fortuitous for hospitals to double down on their faith-based and local roots.

Today companies across every sector are trying to demonstrate “purpose” because that’s what consumers want. Millennials, in particular, expect more in this regard from companies with whom they do business. In fact, 76 percent of Millennials regard business as a force for positive social impact. According to Nielson, 73 percent of Millennials are willing to spend more on a product or service if it comes from a socially, civically or environmentally responsible brand.

Nonprofit faith-based hospitals already have that purpose at the core of what they do. And it’s not just window dressing, but something that is woven into these hospitals’ history and DNA. This is a position of great advantage – but nonprofit hospitals have to do a better job of telling this story.

When nonprofit hospitals reconnect with their faith-based and local roots and reflect that connection to the community, they can reap the benefits of the goodwill it creates.



LEAD WITH THE MISSION

Nonprofit hospitals should lead with their mission when communicating in the community.

Healthcare communicators love to talk about quality first. While people need to be confident you can take care of the basics, what can set nonprofit hospitals apart is this added commitment to incorporating deeply held values in all care.

This can get complicated because this discussion may lead into controversial territory around reproductive health. These issues are what they are – not all patients will agree with the Catholic approach to these issues but downplaying Catholic roots won't make these questions go away.

A hospital shouldn't sanitize or genericize its core values for the purpose of appealing to a wider audience. Own your hospital's faith-based roots even as you make it clear that the hospital is a welcoming and healing place for people of all faiths.

Make sure that faith-based differentiator is clear, not just to patients and the broader community, providers and staff, as well. And, of course, live those values in all aspects of the hospital – just paying lip-service to them will not cut it.



HOSPITALS WITH RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BENEFIT WHEN THEY CAN ALIGN THE LEGACY OF FAITH AND SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY WITH THE ADVANTAGES OF SYSTEM MEMBERSHIP.

HIGHLIGHT BENEFITS OF THE SYSTEM

Highlighting the local Catholic roots may be complicated if a hospital is part of a larger system, even a faith-based one.

Communities may become suspicious when a long-standing local hospital joins with a larger health system. They may see the system as responsible not just for diluting the mission-focused orientation of a legacy institution in their community, but also bearing guilt for a host of other complaints about the general state of our healthcare system.

Therefore, there's benefit in continuing to cultivate the essence of local hospital's unique personality and roots, even as the benefits of system affiliation are stressed. For example, the system may provide communities with greater access to capital for infrastructure improvements or leading-edge technologies and services that they might not be able access to on their own.

And it's fair to acknowledge that even nonprofit organizations have to be business smart. In fact, their faith-based missions are dependent on their economic sustainability.

Hospitals with religious affiliation benefit when they can align the legacy of faith and service to the community with the advantages of system membership. In this way, they can recapture the community's confidence that a hospital can be rooted in faith-based values while also nimble enough to stay strong the evolving healthcare market.