

4 Ways Hospitals Can Use Digital Marketing to **LOWER READMISSION RATES**



Readmission rates have been a trusted measure of effective and responsible care for years. However, only since the Affordable Care Act of 2010 established the readmission reduction program (in 2012) did it become a primary assessment driver in the industry.

The readmission reduction program was designed to incentivize hospitals to find ways to reduce expensive (and unnecessary) readmissions. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) defines “readmission” as:

“An admission to a subsection(d) hospital within 30 days of a discharge from the same or another subsection(d) hospital.”

At the time of the program’s implementation, Medicare was seeing a readmission rate of 20%, which CMS deemed as an excessive rate.

As a result, CMS began a payment reduction program impacting hospital reimbursements for readmissions, a move that has seen the national trend improve. But focusing on your hospital’s readmission rates is important for more than just saving CMS a few dollars:

A study presented by Harvard Business Review found that on average, a hospital could reduce its readmissions rates by **5%** if it simply prioritized communication with patients while also complying with evidence-based standards of care.

- A study by the School of Public Health found that the Veterans Administration could save **\$2,140 per patient** by taking measures to ensure patients at higher risk of readmission were properly handled
- Other studies found that **15 to 25 percent** of people discharged from a hospital will be readmitted within 30 days, and that a large number of those readmissions are preventable

In terms of your marketing, reducing readmissions helps you increase the trust associated with your hospital’s brand.

How, then, can your hospital reduce your readmission rates through digital marketing? Follow these four tips. ❖



USE SOCIAL MEDIA RATINGS TO LOWER YOUR READMISSION RATES



The researchers who conducted this study analyzed data from CMS that publicly lists 30-day readmission rates for 4,800 U.S. hospitals.

The researchers looked at the seven percent of hospitals with significantly lower-than-average rates and those with higher-than-average rates, and compared that against their Facebook presence and ratings.

What they found was that low-readmission hospitals were more likely to have Facebook pages than were high-readmission hospitals. For those who provided the five-star ratings system, each one-star increase in a Facebook rating equated to a greater than five-fold increase in the likelihood that the hospital would have a low readmission rate.

A close-up photograph of a red stethoscope with silver-colored metal components, resting on a light blue surface. The stethoscope is positioned diagonally, with the chest piece in the lower right and the ear pieces extending towards the upper left.

Hospitals with presence and high ratings on Facebook are less likely to have unplanned readmissions revealed a study from researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital.



“We found that the hospitals in which patients were less likely to have unplanned readmissions within the 30 days after discharge had higher Facebook ratings than were those with higher readmission rates,” McKinley Glover, M.D. lead author and a clinical fellow in the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) Department of Radiology, said in a statement. “Since user-generated social media feedback appears to be reflective of patient outcomes, hospitals and health care leaders should not underestimate social media’s value in developing quality improvement programs.”

So, what’s this mean for your hospital?

For starters, clearly you need a Facebook page. A Facebook page could open up the lines of communication with your patients and help to make your hospital seem more accessible.

However, just having a page isn’t enough.

It’s important your page is optimized for the user, while still complying to strict HIPAA regulations.

It’s also important to create a reputation management strategy that encourages patients to submit positive reviews on Facebook (and other platforms), while simultaneously addresses any negative reviews or ratings that come to fruition. ❖

BOLSTER YOUR WEBSITE AND MAKE IT MOBILE FRIENDLY

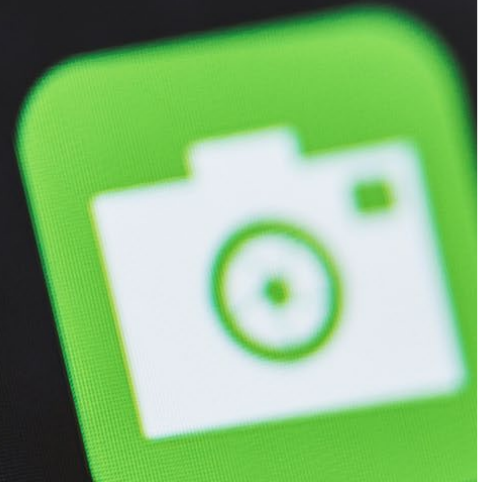
Social Media




Hospital



Settings



A woman with short brown hair and a nose ring is looking down at a laptop screen. Her hand is resting on her chin, and she has a thoughtful or concerned expression. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a library or office setting.

With so many users looking for health information online, your website is a great platform to tell your patients:

- What to expect about their visit
- How to stay healthy when they go home
- Where to go for additional/ supplemental information

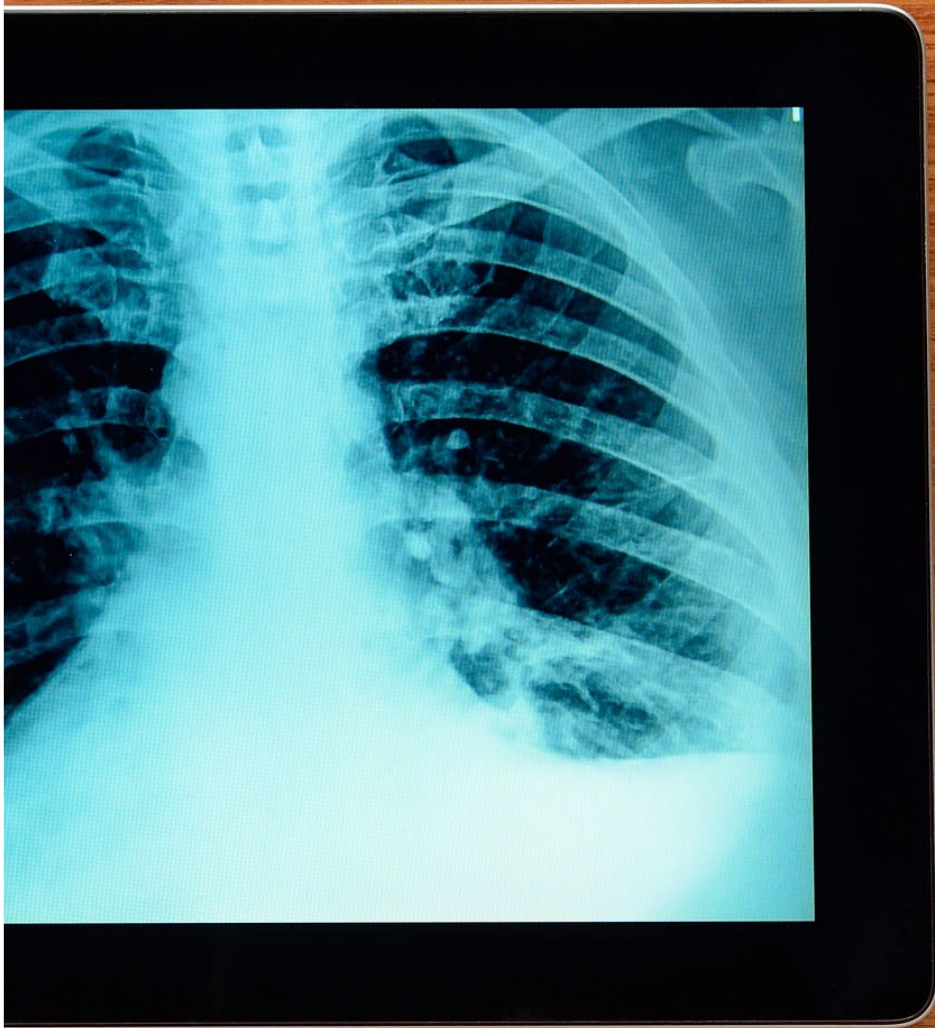
72% of internet users in 2013 said they looked online for health information within the past year (according to Pew Research Center). That number has likely dramatically risen in the last three years.

Each of these components can directly reduce your readmission rates, particularly since effective discharge planning is the holy grail of readmission reduction.

By the end of their procedure, patients are eager to go home and may struggle to hear their discharge instructions because of some physical discomfort. Using your website or another digital channels to keep your patients informed can help them and their families stay true to their recovery regiment, while also opening up the lines of communication.

This open communication (between patients, their families, and your hospital) can then turn into a more patient-centered, personal care that will likely reduce your hospital's readmissions. ❖

IS IT TIME FOR YOUR
OWN BRANDED APP?





Roughly **3%**
of healthcare
facilities today
offer a branded
facility app.

Creating your own branded app is certainly an effective way to differentiate your hospital from competitors. However, this app can also help patients:

- **Manage appointments**
- **View lab reports**
- **Locate support services after their stay**
- **View their specific discharge instructions**

In fact, apps are so advanced these days that you can set up notifications (or alerts) that reminds your patients, for example, to take their daily medication.

Depending on how intuitive you want your app to be, you can also set it up to open up the lines of communication between patients and their doctors. If the patient has a non-emergency question, he or she can pose it via the app.

Your doctor can then respond when scheduling permits. This type of communication keeps the doctor connected with minimal day-to-day interference or interruptions. ❖

USE VIDEO MARKETING WITHIN THE HALLS OF YOUR HOSPITAL



So far we've discussed how you can use social media, your website, and apps to reduce readmission rates.

But not every one of your patients is technologically savvy or inclined to use these channels. That's why you might also want to consider using video displays within your waiting areas and cafeterias.

According to an [Arbitron study](#), three out of four patients and caregivers prefer digital communications to print.

These videos can highlight health-related information (such as quick tips that emphasize the importance of medications and follow-up care).

By including video in key areas of your hospital, you can enhance the patient experience while providing much-needed information that can reach segments of your population who may not turn to the web or their smartphones. ❖

1 in 5
elderly patients
is readmitted to
the hospital within
30 days of leaving.



DIGITAL MARKETING: REDUCING READMISSION RATES WHILE INCREASING BRAND TRUST

Fiscally speaking, reducing your hospital's readmission rates is a top priority. However, your high readmission rates are also negatively impacting the trust associated with your brand.

Digital marketing in general is designed to help you reach a wider audience while promoting the positive aspects of your hospital. It just so happens that, when properly used, digital marketing can also directly lower your readmission rates.

Follow these four tips and you'll not only enjoy fewer readmissions, but your hospital will have happier patients willing to promote your services to their friends, family and peers.

If you need further elaboration on anything discussed please reach out:
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