

LOYALTY IN HEALTH CARE: THE TIME IS NOW

Tess MacGibbon, senior director of Thought Leadership and Health Care at The Lacek Group, uncovers opportunities to create personalized and long-term relationships across health care sectors through proven loyalty strategies.



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Today's healthcare consumers are more engaged in their health than ever before.

COVID-19 laid bare, in the starkest terms, shortcomings and inequities in receiving quality health care. The pandemic also brought into sharp focus new challenges in personal and population health management. At the same time, already evolving consumer expectations dramatically accelerated in the crisis landscape.

Experts predict the consumer, not the provider, will be at the center of the health model no later than 2040.¹ Advancing technologies will provide more personalized, specific, and portable health data to individual patients. Increasingly empowered to choose the providers and treatments that meet their individual, holistic health needs and budget, consumers will expect health care to match the efficiency, personalization, and value they've come to enjoy in other industries.

Now is the time for healthcare providers and payers to leverage the convergence of healthcare consumerism and the retailing of healthcare trends in creating patient loyalty strategies. Here are four compelling reasons to do so:

- Consumer demand for affordable, personalized, and improved experiences has grown insistent.
- Consumers are more than willing to switch healthcare providers or even systems for a variety of reasons.

- Loyalty program strategies—successful for a long time in other industries—can be extended to health care across sectors, including healthcare systems, specialty care clinics, pharmaceutical companies, medical technology manufacturers, and even retail.
- Successful loyalty strategies positively affect healthcare organizations' profitability.

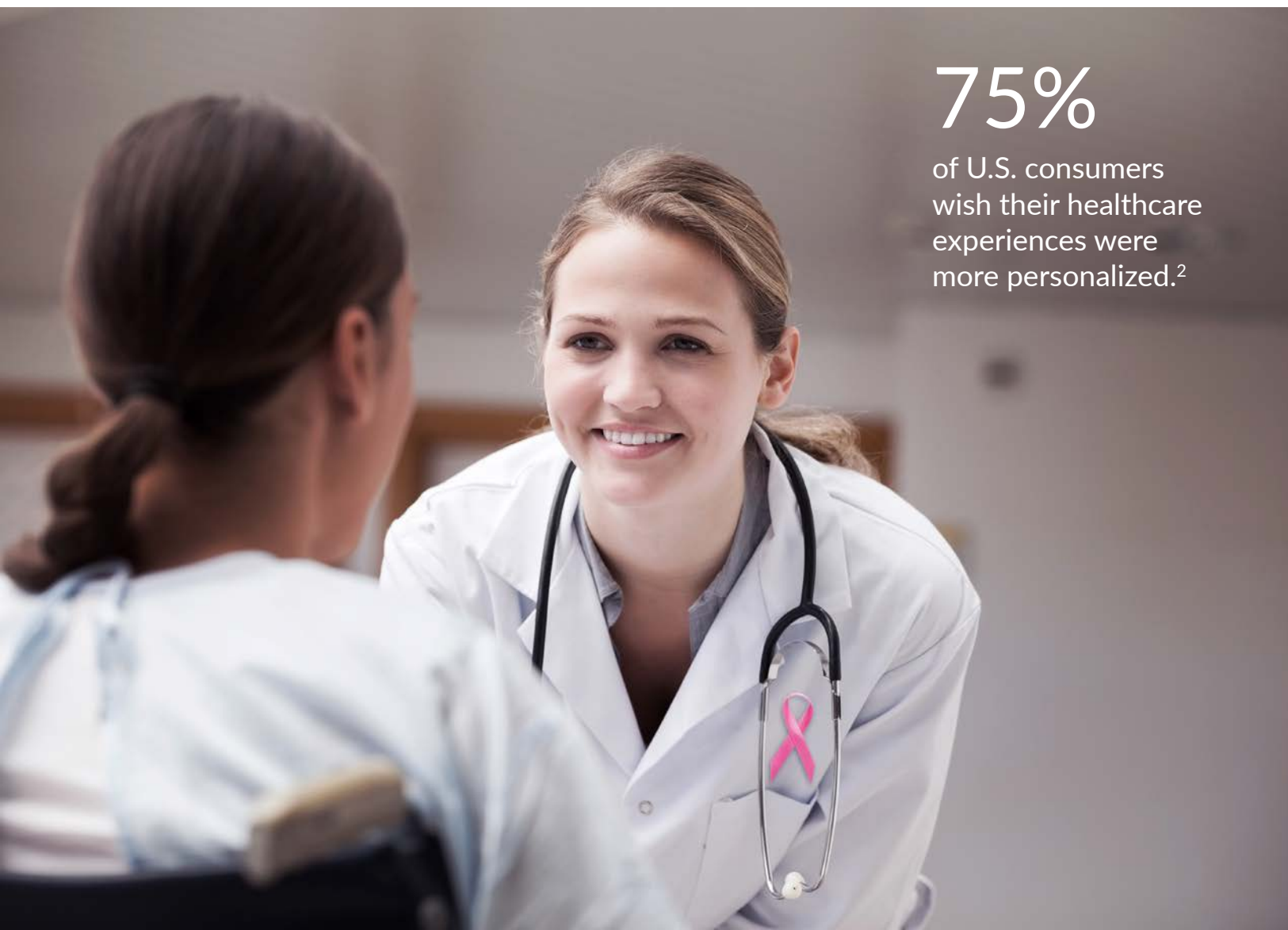
While the idea of loyalty in health care isn't novel, only a handful of targeted strategies have been implemented; and the few that do exist are underutilized across all healthcare sectors. The frequent response to proposals for patient-centered loyalty strategies in health care is that the industry's structure, so different than other fields, makes loyalty difficult or impossible. The complexity of health care and the associated governmental regulations are two of the numerous challenges to engendering loyalty in health care. But doing so remains a rewarding proposition because consumer influences and pressures have caught up to the healthcare industry. That's precisely why loyalty will be the next big thing in health care—beneficially disrupting and ultimately improving the healthcare system.

HEALTH IS PERSONAL. HEALTH CARE IS NOT.

Nothing is more personal than one's health, yet it often operates on depersonalized systems that leave patients feeling dissatisfied and unseen.

Our research shows that, across all industries, today's consumers are loyal to brands that recognize them as individuals and treat them

as loyal customers at every interaction. Health care should be no exception. In fact, health care should lead the way in personalization.



75%
of U.S. consumers wish their healthcare experiences were more personalized.²

HEALTHCARE CONSUMERS HAVEN'T ALWAYS BEEN SO ENGAGED

If you've been working in health care for a long time, consider skipping ahead to "Health Care, Meet Loyalty" on page 8. Meanwhile, if you'd like a snapshot of how the healthcare industry got to where it is today, here's an overview.

Years ago, patients looked up to physicians as all-knowing, all-seeing demigods and passively followed their instructions. In short, doctors ruled. Questions often went unasked, second opinions were rarely sought, the Internet wasn't around to provide diverging perspectives, and few health support groups existed. Moreover, patient satisfaction was rarely prioritized.

While some, often older, patients still feel this way, many now expect better care and better outcomes for their time, trust, and hard-earned cash. You might say today's consumers have more skin in the game. Moreover, younger people might not even have primary care physicians, relying instead on fitness activities, healthful eating, medtech wearables, acupuncture, aromatherapy, massage, and other alternative health strategies. Of course, that also may be because they're unemployed, their employers don't offer health insurance, or health insurance is flat-out beyond their means.

When did mindsets about health care start changing? Likely in the 1980s—that's when people joined the fitness craze and started running, Jazzercising, and aerobicizing. Consumers realized that exercising could have a significant impact on their health. Jane Fonda's workout videotapes flew off the shelves, Olivia Newton-John's pop anthem "Physical" spent 10 weeks at No. 1, Nike's "Just Do It" tagline became ubiquitous, and fitness magazines like *Shape* hit newsstands.

Simultaneously, consumers were becoming more skeptical of health care and medicine due, in part, to health-related news: The HIV/AIDS epidemic raged without effective treatments. Toxic shock syndrome deaths, usually linked to super-absorbent tampons, were making headlines. Multiple poisonings of over-the-counter medicines forced manufacturers to create tamper-resistant tops and alter formulations. And public awareness of challenging health issues, including Alzheimer's disease and eating disorders, was growing.

As the years passed, patients had more reasons to be wary. In 1990 U.S. health care ranked 6th in the world.³ In 2021, Commonwealth Fund ranked the U.S. last when compared to 10 other high-income countries, despite significantly higher

People want more personalized and consumer-centric health care.



Customer expectations are informed by experiences outside of health care.



More than one-third of healthcare consumers have no brand preference—and that's growing.



More than 60% will switch providers for greater trust and respect.

spending.⁴ The U.S. ranked last on access to care, administrative efficiency, equity, and healthcare outcomes, including infant mortality, maternal mortality, and preventable mortality. The U.S. statistics on COVID-19 are, unfortunately, just as poor. As of June 2022 the U.S. has confirmed 85.6 million cases⁵ and more than one million deaths—a much higher death rate than other wealthy nations.⁶

No wonder then that two-thirds of U.S. consumers report negative healthcare experiences, and nearly half (44%) of those reporting negative experiences say they were left feeling stressed or upset by the encounter.⁷ Patients are also frustrated by healthcare costs, which are the highest of any developed country in the world. In 2021,

health spending accounted for 18.5 percent of the U.S. GDP.⁸

And while U.S. public spending on health care is similar to other countries, our out-of-pocket and private spending is far higher. In fact, per capita health spending in the U.S. is north of \$10,000, more than double that of Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Even worse, according to the National Consumer Law Center, the largest single cause of bankruptcy is medical debt.⁹

It's easy to see why people are often mistrustful of the healthcare ecosystem. That's why they're advocating for themselves by seeking out providers that offer a more transparent, personalized, affordable, and convenient healthcare experience.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONSUMER LOYALTY

Roughly a century ago, retailers introduced U.S. consumers to Sperry & Hutchinson stamps. People earned S&H Green Stamps based on how much they spent at participating retailers, collected them in small paper books, and eventually redeemed them for merchandise—everything from jewelry to appliances to furniture. At the height of their popularity, the 1960s and 1970s, the company's *Ideabook* catalog enjoyed the largest circulation of any U.S. publication. It was among the first instances of recognizing customer value with a currency award. Many shoppers quickly shifted their spending to retailers that awarded more stamps per dollar spent.

In the 1970s, airlines caught on to the idea, inviting passengers to earn not stamps but miles, which they could then redeem for free tickets. This loyalty space began evolving. Soon other entities—from coffee shops and craft stores to rental car companies and hotel chains—began leveraging the advantages of loyalty programs. They discovered that customers like earning benefits; that customers often keep spending for the received benefits—even if competitors' prices are lower; and that meaningfully engaged customers often

become brand advocates. (Think of customers who sport tattoos of brand logos, for example.) Today, loyalty strategies often go beyond transactions to include emotional connections achieved through positive experiences and meaningful engagement (e.g., sharing, community, co-creation, and recognition).

Effectively, loyalty strategies lay a foundation for brands to better understand their customers, determining the motivations of various customer segments as well as each segment's profitability. Over the decades, marketing experts have evolved loyalty programs and honed more holistic loyalty strategies that engage customers in highly personal ways and drive lifetime brand love.

Two of the biggest benefits of today's loyalty programs are providing a reason for regular engagement throughout the customer life cycle and creating a channel through which customer and data insights can be aggregated, leading to ever-more personalized experiences.



LOYALTY BY THE NUMBERS



62%

say personalized communications and experiences from a brand loyalty program are no longer nice to have, they are a must-have for me.

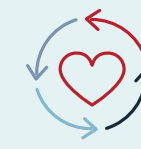
(The Lacey Group, 2022)



73%

say having brand representatives know who I am and understand my preferences is critically or somewhat important.

(The Lacey Group, 2022)



85%

report being treated as a loyal customer across all brand interactions and engagements (e.g., online and offline) is critically or somewhat important.

(The Lacey Group, 2022)



96%

of millennials say companies should find new ways to reward loyalty customers.

(KPMG, "The Truth About Customer Loyalty," November 2019)

FORGING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS



A new approach is needed, one that builds emotional loyalty and nurtures personal relationships.

8 in 10

consumers surveyed indicate that emotional benefits help maintain engagement.

(The Lacey Group, 2022)



Research finds that

80%

of emotionally engaged consumers will promote brands they are loyal to among their family and friends compared to 50% of the less engaged.

(Oracle, "Why an Emotional Connection Matters in Loyalty and How to Achieve It," Modern Marketing, Feb. 15, 2020)



How customers feel after an interaction can greatly affect loyalty. The top positive emotions that have an impact on customer loyalty are feeling appreciated, respected, and valued.

The top negative emotions impacting customer loyalty are feeling annoyed, disappointed, and frustrated.

(Forrester, "The U.S. Customer Experience Index, 2021: How Brands Build Loyalty with the Quality of Their Experience," June 1, 2021)

HEALTH CARE, MEET LOYALTY

All of this supports the belief that it's time for healthcare organizations to invest in developing genuine and multilayered patient loyalty strategies.

In brief, loyalty is an outcome—the result of an enterprise strategy to develop meaningful relationships with customers. And loyalty strategies can help fuel the healthcare industry, saving money, building brand recognition, and growing the bottom line, among other benefits. Yet most healthcare entities are still just warming up to the idea of patient loyalty and engagement. After all, government oversight of the industry—e.g., the Affordable Care Act, the Hospital Readmissions Reduction Program, the Physicians Payments Sunshine Act, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Medicare, and Medicaid—brings with it time-consuming rules and reporting. But those demands, even if mostly helpful to patients, can cause lags in consumer-driven changes.

Still, three healthcare systems have been on the leading edge of patient loyalty for over a decade.

Humana, the Kentucky-based insurance provider, topped Forrester's 2021 insurance provider rankings and increased second-quarter profits 20% over the previous year. That's thanks in no small part to Humana's popular wellness program, Go365. Launched in 2011 as HumanaVitality and rebranded in 2017, Go365 rewards members for healthy behaviors like getting preventative screenings and vaccinations, taking part in community wellness activities and nutrition classes, and completing verified workout sessions. Go365 members can redeem rewards for gift cards at a variety of retailers.

Kaiser Permanente, both a payer and a provider system, often ranks at or near the top and offers a similar wellness program with the generous benefit of a \$500 statement credit or \$500 gift card for up to two adults on the plan.

That's a win-win. When patients are loyal to a system, the result is the centralization of care, which prevents fractured interventions and multiple, dislocated health records. As one group of researchers reports, "Loyalty promotes continuity of care, compliance with medical advice, and greater use of preventative services."¹⁰ Humana's loyalty program is part of an overall commitment to personalized patient care. "At Humana, we're dedicated to improving the health of every person we serve. We believe everyone should have equitable access to the tools and support they need to be as healthy as possible—support that's personalized and easy to use," says Humana CEO, Bruce Broussard. "Building trust and taking care of people has always been core to our values and our company's purpose and mission."

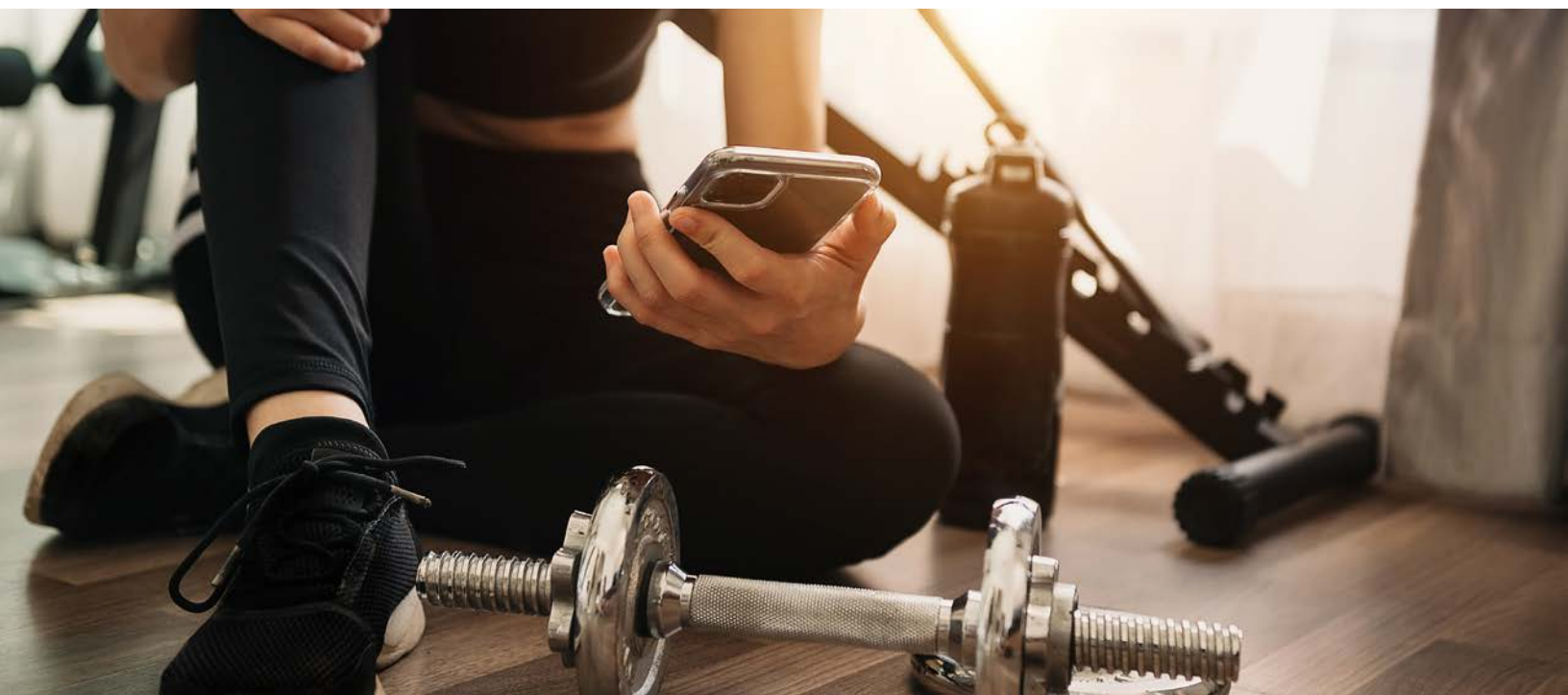
Meanwhile, the Ohio-based Cleveland Clinic instituted "Patients First" as a guiding principle roughly a decade ago when its leaders realized that patients had plenty of other healthcare providers vying for their business. Since then, its patient satisfaction has grown due to efforts such as boosting medical communication with patients, offering "Quiet at Night" hours in its hospitals, and ensuring nurse leaders make regular hospital rounds. Cleveland Clinic even has a chief experience officer, whose sole job is to improve the patient experience. In short, if patient experiences are improved, healthcare outcomes are likely to be better, and the business grows.

CONSUMER LOYALTY IS VITAL TO HEALTHCARE-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

In the hypercompetitive—and today, extremely vulnerable—healthcare industry, driving loyalty via better care, affordability, personalization, and convenience offers patients exactly what they want. Moreover, retaining loyal patients boosts healthcare providers' and payers' business health and growth.

Interestingly, patient loyalty isn't always about receiving excellent health care. According to the Marketing and Planning Leadership Council's (MPLC) Primary Care Consumer Choice Survey, consumers prioritize convenience (Is the clinic near my house? Can I get an appointment when I need one?) over provider continuity and provider credentials. Another survey found that 65% of healthcare consumers would consider finding a new provider if the staff was rude to them.¹¹ A recent Huron study found that 60% of consumers are willing to change providers for greater trust and respect.¹² These and other consumer findings illustrate why healthcare providers and payers need to more deeply understand and apply the principles of top-notch customer service to their businesses. After all, retaining customers is far more cost effective than acquiring them. And ensuring patient satisfaction adds to providers' and payers' own long-term vitality.

In *Harvard Business Review*, Frederick Reichheld and W. Earl Sasser, Jr., note that the value of a loyal customer should be judged over a lifetime. "The longer a company keeps a customer, the more money it stands to make," they assert. That's certainly true of health systems, which can arguably offer a continuum of care from maternity to hospice, or birth to death. "Although the shape of [consumer] defection curves vary across industries, in general, profits rise as defection rates fall," write Reichheld and Sasser, adding that reducing defections by just 5% can boost profits 25% to 85%.¹³



COLLECTING DATA IS IMPERATIVE TO LOYALTY

In fact, data collection is a major reason brands value loyalty programs. They provide the opportunity to collect personal data from their most devoted customers. This exchange—consumer data for member benefits and personalized experiences—enables companies to best market products and services to those customers.

In 2022, brands have basic patient data like names, addresses, and phone numbers. Today's sophisticated loyalty marketing efforts create meaningful value exchanges with patients that help earn their permission to also leverage customers' behaviors, triggers, needs, and drivers, enabling marketers to engage more meaningfully with those customers.

To that point, nearly 60% of American consumers say they're willing to share personal data—including health information—if it means a better user experience. That better experience might mean improved outcomes, end-to-end healthcare solutions, more consistent patient communications, integrative health care, and more.

Additionally, while yesterday's loyalty programs were limited by what marketing could control, today's vanguard brands bring loyalty to life with digital and tech advancements focused on the customer experience. Think, for example, of the many opportunities healthcare organizations could offer if they leveraged the allowable data they already know about their patients. A healthcare brand, for example, might look at broad data (not personally identifiable information)—i.e., localized data, public health data, and regional trends—and

learn the prevalence of certain disease states and their complications in the area it serves. Or, if patients agree to share highly personal information, that healthcare brand might offer specific patients personalized tips and tools to help them make healthier life choices.

CREATING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IS INTEGRAL TO LOYALTY

Retail brands do everything they can to make customers feel part of a brand community and thus inspire loyalty. During the pandemic, for example, fitness companies pivoted, offering free online classes or, like Ethel's Club in Brooklyn, providing creative online wellness classes and workshops, plus affordable digital memberships. Restaurants, with financial help from loyal customers, served up free meals to frontline workers, especially physicians and nurses. And Walmart, in addition to requiring masks and undertaking new sanitizing regimens, transformed 160 of its parking lots into temporary drive-in movie theaters, hoping customers' good memories of the event and safe experiences would conjure up positive associations with the nation's largest retailer.

It's likely that your healthcare organization already provides complimentary wellness programming that helps create community. For example, more than 9,000 people are members of a Medtronic insulin pump online community, offering one another support, ideas, and tips. Applying a more formal framework to offerings like this could deliver greater patient engagement and, by extension, deeper loyalty to your healthcare organization.



SHARING VALUES WITH PATIENTS LEADS TO LOYALTY

Increasingly, consumers appreciate brands that give more than lip service to their values. And younger customers, especially millennials and Gen Zers, are more likely to engage with brands that contribute to the greater good and proudly say so.

Let's consider again Kaiser Permanente, which is both a provider and a payer. In addition to receiving money annually for performing simple health assessments, many patients feel a strong affinity for the organization's lived values. Many of Kaiser's achievements over its 75-year history are admirable, including hiring disabled vets, women, and people of color at its outset; boasting numerous medical research breakthroughs; introducing the first organic farmers market at a U.S. hospital; founding an award-winning educational theater program; extending healthcare benefits to domestic partners of employees over 25 years ago; and much more.

Turns out, patients, like most consumers, appreciate brands whose values agree with their own. In fact, according to 5WPR's 2020 Consumer Culture Report, that idea is growing ever stronger: 83% of millennials want companies to align with their values, and 76% want CEOs to speak out on issues they care about.¹⁴ During the economic free fall associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, when it seemed likely that socially conscious investors might jump ship, they instead battened down the hatches, preparing to ride out the storm with their environmental, social, and governance investments intact.

HOW DO BRANDS DEVELOP A LOYALTY STRATEGY?

First, the conditions must be right: A brand must evaluate what the impact of a loyalty strategy can be on its customers or patients, to its operations, and to its business performance. An expert loyalty agency like The Lacek Group can help you with this work. Those three vectors—customers, operations, and finances—must be in proper balance to arrive at a viable loyalty proposition.

Second, a loyalty strategy in health care should incite positive, preventive wellness behaviors, even layering in value at trigger points along the care continuum. Beyond rewards for healthy behaviors, such as on-time screenings or regular workouts, healthcare providers could offer discounts at wellness-related businesses like fitness clubs and health foods markets. Or surprise members on birthdays or anniversaries with healthy gifts like a free yoga session or massage.

“More than half of health insurance customers are interested in a rewards or discount program based on healthy behavior,” according to a Forrester report. The key takeaway of “Vendor Landscape: Wellness Platforms for Customer Engagement and Loyalty” is that “organizations

should embrace wellness platforms to improve customer engagement and loyalty.”¹⁵

Third, a healthcare loyalty strategy must develop a genuine relationship with patients. The Lacek Group’s global research shows 62% of consumers now consider personalized communication and experiences a must-have from a loyalty program. An engagement strategy should improve the experiences of all patients. If a patient is getting chemo every week, for example, provide him door-to-door valet service. If a child is hospitalized, offer free daily coffees or lunches for her parents. Long-term patient relationships will drive continuity of care, reinforce compliance, and help support cost containment.

That’s truer than ever. The Affordable Care Act has placed greater financial pressure on healthcare providers. Moving from fee-for-service to value-based reimbursements ensures that healthcare providers get their offerings right or be left holding the bill. And because hospitals and providers rely on government subsidization, the importance of retaining patients is even more paramount.

What else can you do to provide meaningful engagement so patients feel known, appreciated, and in a relationship with your brand?

Here are a few ideas:

BUSINESS TO CONSUMER



- Create deeper engagement with valuable, regular content via patients’ preferred channels.
- Offer benefits around convenience (e.g., allow synchronized scheduling for family members).
- Surprise maternity patients with baby gifts.
- Invite patients to email providers with questions.
- Text appointment reminders to patients.
- Offer complimentary classes for caregivers.
- Create online support communities.
- Provide education and tools for managing disease.
- Invite patients to healthy cooking classes with local chefs.
- Host a farmers market in a clinic or hospital parking lot.
- Host a run/walk (socially distanced, if necessary) to raise funds for medical research (e.g., Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s) or a wellness effort (e.g., stocking a food shelf).
- Offer fun, consumer-oriented contests that reward participants with healthful prizes.
- Create an engaging platform that invites patients to share their health stories (e.g., beating cancer) and forge a community.

BUSINESS TO BUSINESS



- Strategic partnerships that have an element of risk share, are mutually valuable and include both rational benefits (financial, clinical consulting, process improvement) and emotional benefits (accredited education, employee discounts, recognition in the public sphere).
- Promote exclusive bundled product offerings that deliver unique value to distributors.
- Partner with another organization that shares your wellness values to reach a wider audience of customers.
- Host peer-to-peer events that encourage best practice sharing and community.
- Surprise and delight valued customers with thoughtful business-anniversary gifts to thank them for their business.
- Team up with an integrated delivery network (IDN) or insurer to co-create a health industry survey or white paper on a pertinent topic.
- Participate in medical podcasts, webinars, and other educational opportunities.
- Recognize customers’ loyalty by offering a short-term discount, a customized report, or another business item of value.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOYALTY STRATEGIES SPAN SECTORS

While the major opportunity to optimize the healthcare consumer experience is in patient care and payer member retention, loyalty strategy opportunities stretch across healthcare sectors, including specialty provider groups, medical technology companies, pharmaceutical companies, telehealth providers, healthcare distributors, and even retailers. In fact, almost every healthcare vertical segment has an opportunity to employ proven strategies that deliver high value to patients, contain costs, and decrease patient churn, all while complying with HIPAA.

STRATEGIC BRAND PARTNERSHIPS	BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS	HEALTH SYSTEMS
<p>Extrinsic value</p> <p>Develop partnerships with brands that have a natural synergy and shared values to extend the value of all brands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retailers (Walgreens, CVS, grocers) • Fitness centers • Health and wellness apps • Wearable devices (fitness watches, OTC athletic support devices/products) 	<p>IDN-payer partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk-share agreements • Medication adherence incentives • Enhanced data programs <p>IDN-manufacturer partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-house expertise (risk share agreements) • Volume/value agreements, community building <p>Payer-pharma partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a coalition between payer and pharmaceutical companies to motivate/incent medication adherence • Reduce preventable hospitalizations and deaths • Improve the health and outcomes of patients dependent on pharmacotherapy 	<p>Intrinsic value</p> <p>Create meaningful touch points throughout the journey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalized communications • Relevant content • Loyalty acknowledgment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Statement credits - Gift cards - Passes to parking ramps - Experiences - Cafeteria comps

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS CREATE WELLNESS ECOSYSTEMS

Patients increasingly seek more holistic care to support their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Preventative medicine, nutrition, physical activity, mental health support, and self-care routines all come together to form the modern pursuit of well-being.

Strategic partnerships extend the value of each brand and increase brand awareness in new audiences. Partnerships with organizations of like-minded values and objectives can create wellness ecosystems that collectively offer unique benefits throughout the member journey, and are an opportunity to build loyalty to your brand.

Rather than connecting with your brand only for medical care, partnerships with other wellness providers create touch points for your patients every step of the way. While some partnerships may seem obvious, the modern focus on holistic well-being opens the door to partnerships in a variety of industries your organization may not have considered.

- Massage therapy
- Farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA)
- Healthy grocers
- Meditation
- Mental health counselors
- Wellness influencers
- Wearable fitness tech and athletic/athleisure apparel companies
- Fresh meal services
- Sleep support experts
- Natural home and personal care products
- Mindfulness music and apps
- Aromatherapy
- Pet therapy



These examples are for illustrative purposes only.

POTENTIAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

PAYERS have a great opportunity to implement a loyalty platform that's focused on wellness and prevention. When patients behave proactively versus reactively, troublesome conditions are caught earlier, promoting early interventions and reducing patient hardship and payer investment. It's a win-win: The patient is in better health; the payer has fewer claims and can better contain costs; and costs drop overall when people maintain health. In addition, payer-providers—e.g., Kaiser Permanente—or those with payer-provider partnerships are in the best position to offer a loyalty plan. They own patient data, centralize care, and provide both care and reimbursement.

MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES generally serve other businesses. As decision-making has shifted from physician preference to a value-analysis committee model, medical device manufacturers have been challenged by this new selling constraint. On the whole, medtech companies have historically led with business-to-business strategies and are not as well practiced in consumer marketing. In this case, organizations can engage consumers and drive consumer pull-through by creating communities around the disease states their devices serve. For example, Coloplast, a Danish medical device company, has a strong care community that offers support groups, educational opportunities, and much more. Active outreach to end users demonstrates a commitment to improving lives. Additionally, a manufacturer might create a loyalty platform loaded with valuable rewards (e.g., value bundling or solution selling) for distributors, much like auto manufacturers do for car dealerships. Or an organization may want to create a strategic partnership with an IDN to infuse value across the customer experience.

Options might include sharing data insights, VIP-tier benefits such as reserved product stock, or accredited continuing education for clinicians.

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES stand to benefit hugely from engagement programs, especially for clinical trial participants and patients undergoing challenging treatments. Including caregivers and families in the strategy helps to ensure patients' support networks remain informed and involved.

Developing engagement strategies that lead with compassion and convenience—and build in critical milestone touch points—can increase patient and caregiver bonds with your brand. That emotional connection may improve trial or treatment completion and even patient outcomes.

“Patient compliance and retention are critical to the success of clinical trials. But they're also two of the hardest variables to control, with the average dropout rate across all clinical trials totaling about 30 percent.”¹⁶

For patients undergoing critical therapies, offering support tools and access to communities of patients and caregivers encourages sustained engagement throughout the treatment plan. Small but meaningful gifts at critical milestones recognize the hardship they're enduring and symbolize your brand's partnership and support in their journey. For example, giving an encouraging book like *The Cancer Poetry Project: Poems by Cancer Patients and Those Who Love Them* at the beginning of treatment may inspire and encourage patients and families.¹⁷ Partnering with support platforms, apps, or motivational speakers can positively impact the overall experience of both patients and their support networks.

CREATING A SUCCESSFUL LOYALTY STRATEGY DOESN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT

Most loyalty strategies start small and build from there. And most call on loyalty marketing experts to do the heavy lifting. After all, many agencies have been operating in loyalty marketing for decades.

If this is your brand's first foray into loyalty, don't let it stagnate: The best loyalty strategies morph and expand to respond to the changing needs of their members and organizations. In addition, many loyalty strategies operate as partnerships. In fact, at the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal* Forum: Health Care Update in January 2020, James Hereford, president and CEO of Fairview Health Services, pointedly stated that payer-provider partnerships are key.

Finally, your loyalty strategy must be compelling both to your company and your customers or patients; it must be financially viable; and it must be operationally feasible. If this triad of musts is fulfilled, you're well on your way to winning patient loyalty and all the benefits that entails.



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The Lacek Group

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The Lacek Group is a Minneapolis-based, data-driven, loyalty, experience, and customer engagement agency that has been delivering personalization at scale for its world-class clients for more than 25 years. The Lacek Group is an Ogilvy Experience company.

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