

Hospital Rankings and Physician Marketing

What Physician Relations Leaders Need to Know



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Overview: What Physician Relations Leaders Need to Know

We've previously published on the topic of [managing hospital rankings](#), focused on arming hospital marketing executives with a perspective on how to review common ranking systems and develop appropriate plans with senior executives. In that piece, we still stand by our past contention that for most hospitals, especially those ranked in the upper echelons of rankings systems, it's very difficult, if not mathematically impossible, for the marketing function alone to influence the overall ranking in such systems where reputation scores are included along with quality measures.

This white paper is aimed at physician relations leaders, specifically what actions they can take when presented with opportunities to utilize physician marketing channels and goals for influencing rankings.

When Rankings Matter

First, there is a need to understand *when* and *how* rankings matter. Our numerous research studies on this topic align with the sentiments shared by Dr. Melissa Riba, a professor from the University of Michigan, shared in [this interview](#). As stated, consumers rarely use rankings as a critical decision factor for where they will get care. Instead, they most frequently look to referrals from trusted doctors, recommendations from family and friends, and what is logically feasible – such as convenience and distance from home. No matter how much consumers like to fly to their favorite vacation spot, they still want to be close to home for healthcare – even if that means the hospital they select is not top ranked.

Nevertheless, rankings are valuable for certain purposes, and encouraging hospitals to continually improve care and outcomes is always a good thing.

Generally, we feel the influence of rankings serves the following purposes (in order of importance):

- 1) Internal pride
- 2) Recruitment
- 3) Referrer identification (awareness)
- 4) Consumer identification (awareness)

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Three Things Physician Leaders Should Do

While much of the ranking system is beyond the control of physician outreach, marketing and/or events, there are ways to make an impact. Regularly engaging physicians to remind them of the organization's strengths, increasing top of mind awareness, and encouraging their engagement in ranking surveys will not only increase rankings, but more importantly strengthen relationships and promote referrals.

We encourage clients to think broadly about the variety of channels available to engage community physicians including professional associations, professional networks, and one-to-many direct communication.

Here are a few specific actions that can make a difference:

1. Rethink Objectives and KPIs

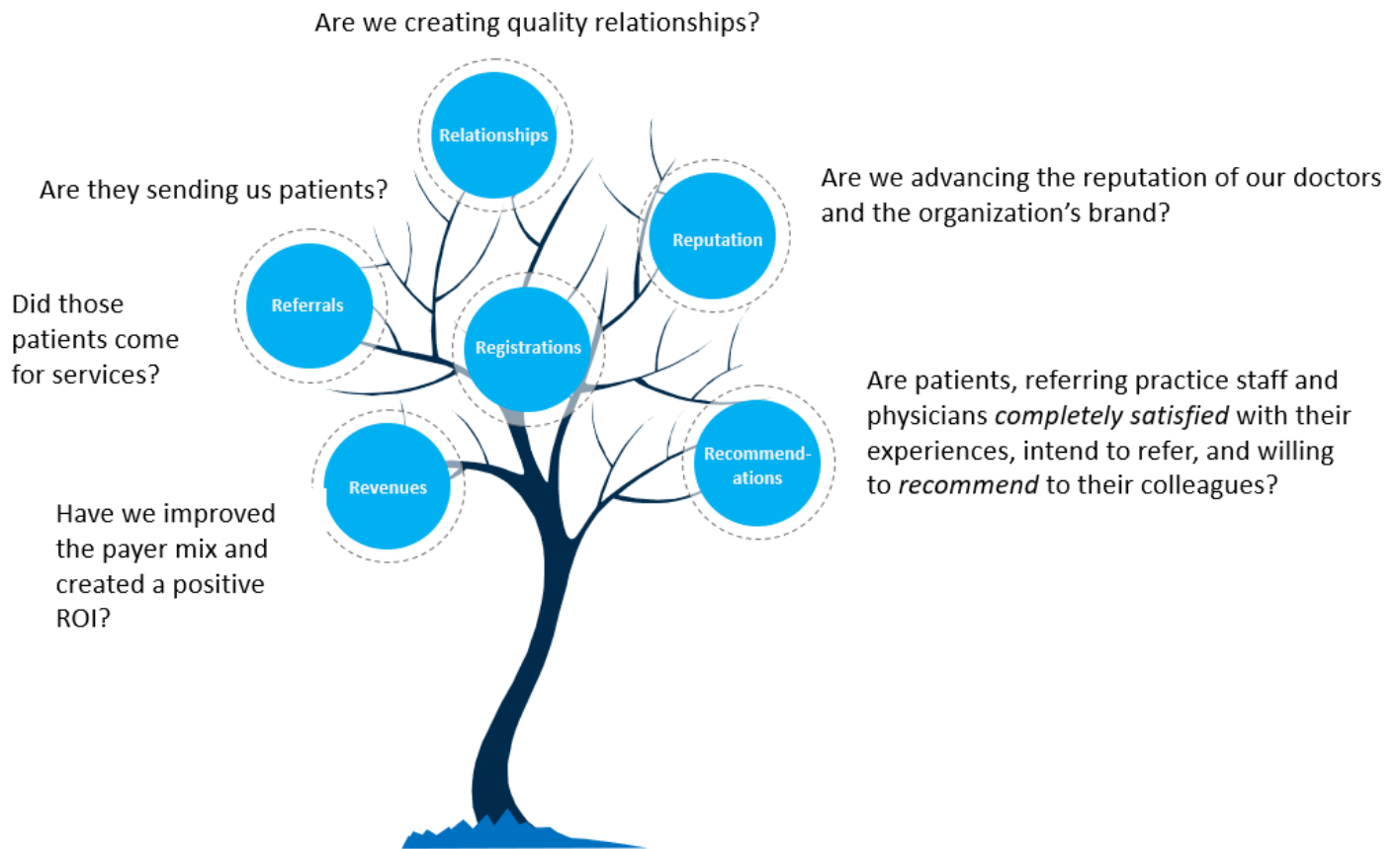
First, focus on your primary objectives. Then, determine what will physician marketing and this specific channel / endorsement do to directly affect those?

Tip: When assessing marketing channels and tactics, don't forget to account for touchpoints at various stages of the referring physician's experience.

- Pre-referral, strategies include building personal connections and points of contact through outreach (liaisons and navigators), communication such as emails to keep up to date and generate awareness, and tools such as referral directories with details about subspecialists.
- Post-referral, critical touchpoints include easy phone access for scheduling, connection to a portal and EHR to share records and results, faxed or mailed copies of records, and phone or email access for on-going questions that arise.

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Here are a variety of KPIs we've developed that examine the physician relationship more holistically than referrals (or rankings) alone:



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Measure and Develop Strategies to Improve Reputation Scores

In our work with many prominent physician relations organizations, we have found many ways to measure and improve reputation scores, including:

1. Strengthening Net Promoter Scores. NPS measures overall perceptions of brand and is a strong indicator for growth. In ranking surveys, a referring physician puts his/her name on the line to recommend you. Unfortunately, many organizations measure NPS annually, at best. Developing a better understanding of how likely physicians are to recommend you, and diving deeper into why they answered this way, is helpful for making changes that matter. Here's a resource that you might find useful to tracking metrics like NPS in real-time with a [dashboard](#).
2. Engaging staff or affiliated physicians in building connections. This requires defining opportunities and setting expectations for physicians to participate in the process of relationship building. This may include promoting usage of social platforms, participation in offering CME or Grand Rounds, lunch or dinner meetings with clinical presentations, or involvement in medical societies. Regardless of the tactic, the extent to which your organization's physicians are plugged into their referring physician community is critical.
3. Promoting publications. Monitoring the development and distribution of publications from faculty or staff physicians provides a high impact opportunity to generate awareness and strengthen perceptions of reputation - particularly with peer reviewed materials. In addition, promotion of these publications is a way to recognize physicians.
4. Strengthen relationships with alumni. For academic medical centers, graduates represent a built-in relationship that should be nurtured. Creating opportunities for engagement, such as alumni advisory boards or recognition programs, serves to help them stay connected and serves as a potential for future referrals.
5. Maintain connection throughout the year. It's easy to fall into the trap of only promoting big events, though top of mind awareness suffers because physicians are not being engaged regularly. Planning relevant content throughout the year keeps the hospital at the forefront of physicians' minds. For example, if no big event or milestone is happening in a certain season, the physician outreach team may want to highlight CME offerings, clinical trials available, new physicians or services, or seasonal reminders/tips related to common issues that physicians see during that time.

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2. Confirm Reputation Lift in National Rankings Is Actually Possible

Based on many ranking methodologies (e.g., US News), physician marketing and outreach efforts can only directly impact the reputation score.

So, develop the business case for how much impact is possible:

- Add your institution's reputation scores from the last 2 years, and then add 100 (this is your simulated gain).
- Divide that number by 3. This is your maximum possible reputation score for **this year**.
- In many specialties this reputation score will account for 25% of your overall score, so multiple that score by .25 to see what your maximum score could be.

US News, for example, uses both quality and reputation in determining final scores in many specialties. In fact, only **four** specialties utilize reputation alone: ophthalmology, psychiatry, rehabilitation and rheumatology.

In addition, you can use this same simple math to compare your potential lift with others in your category – after all, there are only so many hospitals a physician can list as part of his/her recall.

Establish the business case - confirm your expected lift is actually possible and how much reputation influences selection.

Conclusion

One final note – it seems as though the most predictable way for physician marketers to maximize their advantage in ranking studies is to ensure their faculty, employed, alumni and referring physicians are enrolled in the survey sample platforms (today, this is Doximity's platform).

However, for reasons that go beyond rankings, physician marketers must also be continuously reminded of the strengths of your organization. This physician marketing activity supports your brand reputation and is a strong predictor of sustainable referral volume.

For more information about engaging and building relationship with referring physicians, please see the following resources:

[Embracing your Evolving Role in Referring Physician Engagement](#)

[SMART Physician Relations Benchmarking Tool – Free Online Survey and PDF Report](#)

[Engaging Physician Alumni for Increased Referrals, Reputation and Resources](#)

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About Endeavor Management

We work with leaders to accelerate revenue growth while optimizing business performance. We aim to lead our clients to achieve real value from their strategic transformational initiatives. We serve as a catalyst by providing the energy to maintain the dual perspective of running the business while changing the business through the application of key leadership principles and business strategy.

In 2012, Gelb Consulting became an Endeavor Management Company. Our combined experience (Gelb founded in 1965) offers clients unique capabilities to focus their strategic initiatives with a thorough understanding of customer needs to drive marketing strategies, build trusted brands, deliver exceptional customer experiences and launch new products. Our experienced consultants and analysts use advanced marketing research techniques to identify customer needs and spot high potential market opportunities.

The firm's heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, enabling Endeavor consultants to deliver top-tier transformational strategies, operational excellence, organizational change management, leadership development and decision support. Endeavor's deep operational insight and broad industry experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets.

Endeavor strives to collaborate effectively at all levels of the client organization to deliver targeted outcomes and achieve real results. Our collaborative approach also enables clients to build capabilities within their own organizations to sustain enduring relationships.

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