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4 lessons the healthcare industry can learn from starbucks

As Healthcare adapts to a consumer mindset instead of a patient mindset, where should healthcare providers look for inspiration? The first place we recommend they look is to successful retailers who have proven track records of creating lasting customer experiences.

Any discussion of successful retailers must include the topic of the influence of Starbucks, the iconic coffee brand that miraculously convinced millions of people to pay a premium for coffee, a truly remarkable marketing achievement. And now Starbucks is one of the most recognized brands in the world for what it's achieved.

Interestingly, the Starbucks experience has influenced how many other changing/disrupted industries, like financial services, are starting to operate.

In fact, in a [CNN article](#) Martin Shires, branch transformation manager at NCR, said:

“Banks are not just competing with other banks anymore, they are competing against the experiences that consumers have when they walk into an Apple Store or when they buy a latte at the hip coffee shop that accepts mobile payments.”

The same is true for the healthcare facility of the future – and the future is arriving now.

So exactly what lessons can healthcare providers take away from the Starbucks experience? Here are four:

1. Patients Expect a Personalized Experience

Patients and consumers alike are constantly seeking choice and personalization when it comes to their buying decisions. For Healthcare, this might take the shape of how they schedule appointments, where they receive care, and how that care is delivered. The days of patients passively waiting for the doctor to direct them what to do, where to go and how much to pay is essentially over.

Today's educated patient/consumer walking into your healthcare facility already expects a certain level of care and experience based upon their interactions with retail destinations like Starbucks, the specialty store shopping experience, or even how hospitality providers like Marriott and Hilton treat you the minute you walk in the door.

2. Patients Expect a Seamless Technology Experience

As noted previously, consumers today, led by millennials, live on their phones. Starbucks and Amazon have trained their customers to leverage their apps to order a coffee and skip the line, or order their next tube of toothpaste with one-click ordering.

According to a [recent article](#), we'll start seeing similar interactivity with our healthcare providers. "Imagine a patient with a chronic condition fills a prescription and, upon receiving the pill bottle, records the Rx number into his or her mobile device of choice."

The article goes on to describe how the patients' calendars would auto-populate with alerts reminding them to take the medication on a regular schedule, as directed by their doctor.

We're already seeing this with other industries who have privacy concerns, like financial services. As soon as healthcare providers embrace interactivity in a HIPPA environment they will be jumping on the bandwagon en masse.

3. A Uniform Brand Experience

Starbucks' [growth strategy](#), according to a Market Realist article, was to "...to have a green, twin-tailed siren on every street corner." Part of the secret to its location saturation approach was the consistency of the brand experience – the recognition by even non-coffee drinkers of the iconic "twin-tailed siren" logo.

Traditionally, healthcare providers have not been good at providing consistent brand presence and visibility. Hospital systems have a strategic need to acquire many facilities across dispersed geographical areas. But this results in no consistent look, feel, or any resemblance to the original healthcare brand and facility. Patients are unaware that many of the health and wellness facilities they frequent are owned by the same health system. This lack of brand awareness results in a lack of brand loyalty.

The challenge healthcare providers face is: how do we take our brand, our look and feel, whether it's urgent care or it's a million square foot medical center, and make it seamless and recognizable across all properties?

4. The Patient Waiting Area as an Interactive Experience

Starbucks has essentially become the new office. With the rise of telecommuting and the freelance workforce, every coffee shop on every corner is full of latte-sipping workers with their MacBooks open, and their earbuds in listening to the latest music.

Patients and their family members today expect a similar experience when visiting the waiting area of their local healthcare facility. A Wisconsin based healthcare provider has made the decision system-wide to do away with their broadcast TVs (except in long dwell time areas like surgery, ICU, the maternity ward), because most patients and their family members are on their iPad or their laptop, they're not watching broadcast TV. Instead healthcare providers now have an opportunity to provide education on health and wellness to their patients through the use of, branded channels, digital signage, wayfinding, and merchandising.

Conclusion

The Starbucks experience, and its influence on the consumer mindset is forcing healthcare providers to adapt. They must adapt to this trend that sees the intersection of newer generations, technology, and expectations that come from the experiences non-healthcare service providers like Starbucks and our favorite retail stores are providing.

Healthcare leaders responsible for the patient experience must rethink their complete healthcare delivery strategy by noting that their consumer experience model should not just beat other healthcare providers, but rival the coffee shop on the corner!