The Case for Building a Post Health System Brand



We've heard a million times about the impact of growing consumerism and new competition from players like Apple, Amazon and CVS. The combination of these two forces shines a harsh light on health system brands. What's worked in the past for health system branding will likely not be enough moving forward. For example, the point has repeatedly been made that consumers are not just comparing your health system brand to other health systems, they are comparing it to Uber, Amazon and Starbucks. If that's true, then why are health systems still building the same old health system brands?

One solution is moving to what we call a Post Health System Brand.

For those who are ready, a Post Health System Brand will help you connect with consumers on a deeper level and beat the competition at its own game. There is some urgency to this. As we'll highlight below, those who move first can own a market, while the rest will be left to follow. Additionally, the challenges are significant, and many systems are not yet ready to make the move. But employed successfully, a Post Health System Brand won't just help you become the top health system brand in your market. It will help you become a top brand, period.

PART ONE

What is a Post Health System Brand?

For as long as hospitals and health systems have developed brand strategies, they have focused on brand positioning that is promotional in nature. Messages have centered on whatever organizational trait is special and distinct from the competition to the degree that it would help convince a patient to choose that organization's services over other options in the market. Whatever the position, it's all about the health system itself. This is in many ways common sense and, in fact, fits the classic purpose of brand positioning — to differentiate a product, service or company.

And until recently, when the only choices for healthcare services *were* traditional hospitals and health systems, these promotional brand positions served health systems well enough. Those who successfully built strong brands, both through messaging *and* delivery of a compelling brand value, rose to the top of their markets, becoming the most respected and recognized health system brands. And some rose higher, achieving regional or national prominence with their health system brands. But now health systems aren't alone in offering care options for consumers. Further, as consumers have more financial skin in the game and more ways to evaluate the choices in the market, they are demanding more from health systems. Put together, that means consumers will be turning to competitors such as CVS, Apple or Walmart, all of whom have an impressive history of effective consumer marketing. To survive, let alone thrive, in this new world, we must evolve our approach to building consumer brands. One solution is the Post Health System Brand.

To help define what we mean by a Post Health System Brand, let's use a recognized framework developed by legendary brand thinker David Aaker. It will help illustrate where health systems are today, as well as where they need to go tomorrow.

Moving beyond promotional brands

In his book, *Building Strong Brands* (1996), Aaker lays out four potential "perspectives" of a brand: brand as product, organization, person and symbol. The latter is focused on the visual components of a brand, such as imagery and logo, so we'll leave that aside for now. The others focus on the different aspects of any brand. In other words, those traits of a brand's product or service, its organization and its personality that combine to make the *whole* brand. All brands have some mix of these three in play. But these three areas also provide a framework for how a brand decides to anchor its positioning or singular differentiation point. Some brands position themselves on the strength of their product or service, some on an organizational strength and others on personality. Let's look at these options and consider them through the context of health systems.

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Level One: Brand as product

In level one, organizations base their differentiation on the product(s) or service(s) they offer. The focus here is on a tangible value or differentiation of the offering itself. Classic product branding includes Walmart, with a focus on the low cost of their products, Subway's "Eat Fresh," focused on the quality of ingredients in their sandwiches, and Michelin's "Because so much is riding on your tires," focused on the quality of their tires and the tie to safety.

In the health system space, hospitals and health systems often leverage product-focused brands by positioning on clinical excellence, location/convenience or both ("Great care, *close to home.*"). Product branding is also what makes the brands of singularly focused organizations — like pediatric hospitals — so powerful, because that product differentiation is inherent in everything they do and is obvious to the consumer.

Level Two: Organization as brand

In this category, companies base their brand positioning on a key attribute of the organization as a whole, one that is reflected across their offerings and holds significant value for the audience. A classic organizational brand positioning is from Avis with "We try harder," which accentuates the *effort* put forth by the rental car company. Or consider State Farm's "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there," focused on reliability.

This option is often used by companies with a broad base of offerings, because it can be difficult to find a unifying attribute across many different products. That's why it's not surprising that this is where many health system brands live. Brand positions focused on compassion, innovation, communmity or leadership are all examples of organizational brand positioning. Sometimes even a product-oriented positioning can be turned into an organizational position, such as with Geisinger's recent brand message around making healthcare easier for everyone. This goes way beyond a product attribute of convenience to an entire mindset of how they approach the market. Where true differentiation in a market exists, the organizational brand positioning is one of the best ways to build a leading health system brand.

Level Three: Brand as person

In his book, Aaker describes ways in which a brand takes on a personality trait rather than a demonstrable value found in a product or the organization itself. This is where some of the most powerful brands live. The reason these brand positions often rise to iconic status in our culture is because, when leveraged right, the personality they project is one either possessed by, or more importantly *desired by*, the target audience itself. Consider Nike, one of the preeminent brands of the last forty years. Nike didn't base its brand on the quality of its shoes, its innovative designs, its pricing or its service. The Nike brand, with its iconic "Just Do It" slogan, is based on the inner drive of its customers to make themselves better people, to rise above whatever challenges they meet, no excuses.

A personality brand allows for the potential of a deeper resonance with audiences because the brand is focused on them, not the organization itself.

This is where personality brands separate themselves from product or organizational brands: when used as the brand's positioning, the first two are promotional in nature, as they are centered on the brand itself. The third is centered on the *audience*, and while these can be extraordinarily difficult to pull off, a personality brand that captures a powerful longing or belief of the consumer can achieve a nearly cult-like following. A personality brand allows for the potential of a deeper resonance with audiences because the brand is focused on them, not the organization itself. It takes the mantra of "what's in it for me" and hits it at an emotional level.

In the end, when we say "Post Health System Brand," this is what we mean:

The vast majority of health systems have built product- or organization-focused brands **promotional** brands. Developing a Post Health System Brand simply means moving beyond a promotional focus to a **personality** brand, centering your brand on your audience in a meaningful way.

On one hand, it may be surprising we don't see more personality brands in the health system space. After all, if a shoe manufacturer can tap into a deep consumer emotion, surely an organization that saves lives every day could. But we rarely see health systems attempt to build personality brands (we'll look at some exceptions momentarily). The reason isn't that our industry couldn't benefit from personality brands. It's because we haven't evolved enough in terms of brand and marketing sophistication for our leaders to allow it. If you haven't heard it yourself, you can surely imagine the pushback from the C-suite, from physicians or from service-line leaders: "Where are the doctors? Where are our awards? What do you mean we're not going to tout our first-class heart center, our cancer center, our new 1,000-bed hospital and our 17 locations? What about innovation, world-class care and our caring staff?" There are other challenges facing a health system wanting to build a personality brand, of course, and we will address some of those challenges below. But even if a CMO wanted to build a personality brand, it would be nearly impossible in most health systems for this reason alone.

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A few health systems that have already made the leap

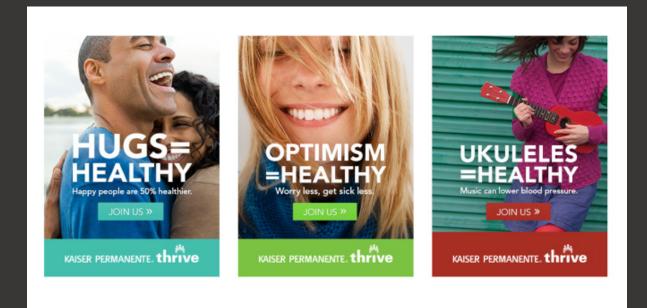
There are a number of ways in which health systems could embrace personality brands. One of the more obvious approaches is to embrace the concept of "health" as the focus of brand. In the face of accountable care, population health and the overriding need to increase scope and scale in the face of diminishing reimbursement, many health systems have expanded their value proposition well beyond inpatient or outpatient care. As reflected in the chapter "Turning Sick Brands Into Healthy Brands" from the book *Joe Public III: The End of Hospital Marketing* (2018), leading-edge systems have broadened their offering set to encompass health, not just healing. As you might imagine, there are any number of variations of "health" a system might focus on.

But health isn't the only potential positioning — there's also community, culture and happiness, for instance. There are many, many ways to move to a Post Health System Brand. Here are three examples of health systems who have made the leap to a Post Health System Brand.

Case One: "Thrive"

Perhaps the granddaddy of all health system personality brands is "Thrive" from Kaiser Permanente. Now more than 15 years old, the "Thrive" campaign encourages its audiences to live happier, healthier lives. As the case study from Campbell Ewald, the agency behind "Thrive," describes it on their website:

"Health care is about people. So we democratized the category, putting the focus on health seekers and the control they have over their health. Instead of showing doctors in white coats, we showed people taking control of their own health, living the lives they want to live." While doctors in white coats have since become the poster boys and girls for clichéd hospital marketing, this approach in 2004 was considered revolutionary. While the campaign has evolved over time, it is still employed by Kaiser to this day, and has led to a significant impact not just on their brand but on their business. According to a <u>2014 case study from Harvard Business Review</u>, Kaiser credits the campaign for increases in consumer awareness and perception of the brand, increased employee and employer perception of Kaiser, and an increase in membership in Kaiser's health plans.



Source: Campbell Ewald (c-e.com) "Thrive: 2013"

Case Two: "Hello Humankindness"

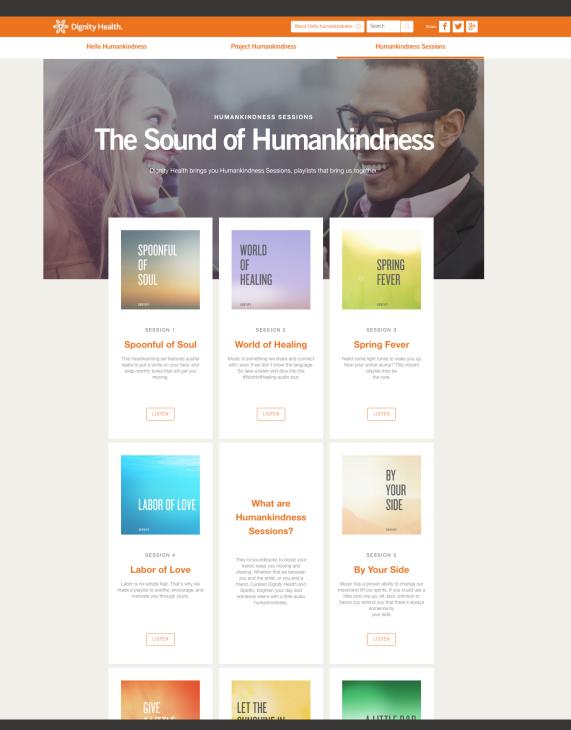
In 2013, Dignity Health, one of the top five largest health systems in the U.S. at the time, launched their "Hello Humankindness" campaign. The goal of the branding effort, as articulated in a <u>2013 press release</u>, was to launch "a major national effort to engage and inspire people to promote acts of humankindness within the health care industry and beyond." This was in response both to the continuing struggle within the healthcare industry to treat patients as individuals, but also to an overall decline in societal civility. The initiative was not just an advertising campaign, but a bid to start a national conversation around the importance of civility and its connection to individual health, as well as a program to offer opportunities and tools to drive kindness among individuals. In a <u>2017 article in Chief</u> <u>Marketer</u>, Dignity Health vice president of branding Mark Viden reinforced the rationale of striving to appeal to an audience beyond just patients:

"Healthcare is historically not something that people want to engage with when they don't need it. Part of being a compelling brand is being top of mind when they don't need us."



Source: Eleven Inc.

As with Kaiser's "Thrive" campaign, Dignity Health's "Hello Humankindness" initiative is still running strong many years after its start. Currently it features a web experience that celebrates stories of human kindness and offers content and tools to help spread kindness, such as a series of playlists featuring music and sounds aimed at inspiring kindness in listeners.



Source: Eleven Inc.

Case Three: "Health Esteem"



In 2017, ReviveHealth worked with long-term client Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System (FMOLHS), the largest health system in Louisiana, to evolve the system's brand positioning, which to that point had concentrated on promotional attributes of the system. In our exploration, we couldn't escape the fact that Louisiana is consistently ranked one of the least healthy states in the nation. We believed it was critical that people not only knew they had access to great care, but that they *deserved* to live happy, healthy lives. It was on this foundation that FMOLHS developed its "Health Esteem" campaign, a brand message focused not just on helping people lead healthier lives, but on helping people feel better about their health overall. Rather than lecturing consumers on how to be healthy, the campaign seeks to meet people wherever they are with their health and suggest, with a light touch, small things that can make them feel better about themselves — all to raise their "health esteem." The campaign has been in market for nearly a year, and early results show the message is resonating with consumers throughout Louisiana.

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PART TWO

What makes a Post Health System Brand better?

Now that we know what a Post Health System Brand is, why is it better than a standard, promotional health system brand? Here are the two primary reasons why a Post Health System Brand can take you so much further with consumers in your market.

Reason One: More people will engage with your brand more often

As we've said, many health systems have achieved success pursuing a promotional brand, and in every market there are at least one or two organizations that are considered the top health system options for patients. But that success has likely not reached its full potential because a promotional brand limits the ability of a health system to more fully connect with the broadest set of consumers in its market. **For health systems to maximize their brand's potential, they must be relevant to the greatest number of people.**

Consider the following model, which helps illustrate at a high level the different states of the consumer we want to influence.



On the left, "Living Moments" represents the mindset of consumers when they are just going about their daily lives, not thinking about clinical care, doctors, hospitals or even improving their health at all.

In the middle, "Thinking Moments" are the times that consumers are actively considering their health or the health of their loved ones. This may be something as fundamental as wanting to lose weight, getting better sleep after a night of tossing and turning, or researching "why does my knee ache after jogging?" online.

On the right, "Solving Moments" represents those situations in which consumers are actively researching, seeking or shopping for care. This may be driving to an urgent care clinic after a child has twisted his ankle, jumping onto Google to determine the best oncology options after a breast cancer diagnosis, or even searching for resources on teenage eating disorders after noticing a daughter has been skipping meals.

Now, using this model, here is how most health systems approach building their brands and prioritizing their marketing. \bigcirc

Living Moments Thinking Moments

Solving Moments

The focus is almost universally on those Solving Moments when consumers are searching for the kind of services you offer. At one level, this makes sense — your organization gets paid when patients use your services, so you want to make sure you build your brand in a way that paints your organization as the best option for those services. Some more advanced systems have been building their brands to focus on Thinking Moments, which is where the idea of a "health" brand comes in. But Solving Moments is where the vast majority of system brands are centered.

But here's the problem. Consider how consumers *actually* experience their world.

Living Moments

Thinking Moments



For the vast majority of consumers, health is not typically top of mind most of the time, and the need for a doctor, hospital or any clinical encounter is definitely a rare moment. This, of course, is the argument behind the *Joe Public Doesn't Care About Your Hospital* mantra. The vast majority of people do not need or even want to think about our services the vast majority of time. So building a brand focused on your services will not be relevant to the vast majority of consumers the vast majority of time. That doesn't mean you can't build your brand using a promotional message, it just means it will take a lot of time and a lot (A LOT) of money to break through. Here's another way to think about it. Patients who have received amazing care from a hospital or health system will often rave about that brand, sometimes going out of their way to tell friends and family about the incredible care they've received. And most health systems would be quick to leverage that type of story to help support their brand, because they've built a brand aimed at *patients*. By concentrating on the attributes of your clinical care, in whatever way it differentiates you from your competitors, you've built a promotional brand that's singularly invested in Solving Moments. These stories will always be important to reinforce the clinical or experiential excellence of your organization. But if most of the people are not patients most of the time, how do you connect with them? After all, your brand should seek first and foremost to appeal to *potential* patients, not existing patients. And while everyone is a potential patient in one way or the other, very few of us actively think or act that way until we *are* a patient. So to connect with consumers *before* they are patients actively seeking care (when they do care about your promotional attributes) we must find another, non-promotional way to connect with them.

Once again, consider Nike. Would the Nike brand have had such cultural impact and brought as much success to Nike if it was focused solely on the moment when people were buying their shoes?

For health systems to maximize their brand's impact, they must be *relevant* in the Living Moments. If clinical services are not relevant to most people in most Living Moments, what is? That's where a personality brand comes in.

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Reason Two: More people will engage with your brand at a deeper level

This leads us to our second rationale: the emotional power of a personality brand. Few would deny that brands that make real, meaningful and emotional bonds with consumers are the most successful brands. Entire books have been written about the power of emotion in branding — we'd recommend *Emotional Branding* by Marc Gobe or *The Culting of Brands* by Douglas Atkin if you need more context or evidence for the impact of emotion in branding.

Brands often seek to become a reflection of an individual's identity. Tesla drivers, RedBull drinkers, Whole Foods shoppers — in each case, many of these consumers choose these brands as much or more for what the brand says about them as the qualities of the product or organization itself. Tesla says I'm cool and progressive. RedBull says I like adventure. Whole Foods says I care about the environment and living a healthy lifestyle. In Aaker's *Building Strong Brands*, he quotes Russell Belk, a renowned consumer behavior researcher, who said:

"That we are what we have is perhaps the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior."

Aaker goes on to explain that Russell meant "that brands and products can become symbols of a person's self-concept. A brand can thus provide a self-expressive benefit by providing a way for a person to communicate his or her self-image."

WHAT MAKES A POST HEALTH SYSTEM BRAND BETTER?

In some cases, brands rise to almost religious status with their followers. A recent article in *Fast Company* talks about the power of branding to create a following, and how those brands that are successful at it aren't focused on product or organizational attributes, but on something that really connects emotionally with consumers. In the article, <u>"The Selling of Souls"</u> (October 2019), the author cites a number of brands, such as Apple, Lululemon and AirBnB, which have successfully tapped into deep emotional drivers of their audiences. The article spotlights SoulCycle, which has built what the author calls a "cult brand." One of the founders of SoulCycle, Julie Rice, discusses how she and her cofounder set out not to sell spin classes, but "spiritual bliss."

"People didn't come to SoulCycle because they got fit," said Rice. "It was for the connection they got in the room." "People didn't come to SoulCycle because they got fit," said Rice. "It was for the connection they got in the room."

How do you know if you have an emotionally driven personality brand? Try using the t-shirt test. Would your target audience enthusiastically wear a t-shirt with your organization's name or logo on it? Would they proudly and publicly proclaim their association with your brand to anyone they met on the street? People would for Apple, LuluLemon, Nike and SoulCycle. But the truth is, very few people would wear a t-shirt emblazoned with a health system logo (unless of course they work for that system). That doesn't mean they wouldn't value that system when it came time to seek care for an injury or ailment. But what it definitely means is that this health system's brand, like nearly all others, is not connecting with that consumer on a truly emotional level *outside* of that consumer's potential role as a patient.

PART THREE

Secrets of Success

The potential for health systems to adopt a personality brand is significant. But the strategy is not without challenges or risks, and it's not for everyone. Here are five secrets for building a Post Health System Brand, some of which are very much counter to how our industry currently thinks about branding.

1. Evaluate your existing clinical brand for readiness.

Post Health System Branding is not for every organization. To move to this next level, a health system brand must already be at a high level — one that boasts at minimum a strong reputation for clinical excellence, if not also for service, patient experience, convenience and other key attributes. If consumers in your market do not already consider your organization a premiere destination for care, you have unfinished work to do in building a clinical brand — most likely through long-term improvements in the actual care or experience itself (not by just *promoting* a better clinical experience). Take Dignity Health's "Hello Humankindness" effort. In pursuing a personality brand, Dignity Health had to be confident in the fact that consumers in their markets already considered Dignity a top choice for care, as their personality brand effort was not going to explicitly convey that message. It had to be *assumed*, allowing Dignity to stretch for something higher, something non-promotional in nature. If you still need to convince your audiences your clinical offering is strong, you still need a promotional brand position.

2. Balance your personality brand with service-line marketing and other promotional needs.

Just because you build a Post Health System Brand doesn't mean you give up all promotional marketing. You're just moving away from being promotional at a *brand message* level. You will still need to drive site-specific or service-line specific volumes. So keep in mind there are three ways to think about how your Post Health System Brand will dovetail with service-line marketing.

A. By building a more powerful brand that resonates with more people, your brand tide will lift all boats, including service-line oriented business. The more consumers your brand connects with, the more top of mind you will be for all clinical services, even without explicitly touting them in your brand messaging.

B. In most cases, your personality brand will lead implicitly to service-line patient opportunities. Take for example the "Health Esteem" campaign for FMOLHS, which doesn't specifically promote any services. But if someone identifies that what's keeping their "health esteem" low is trouble sleeping, the content and tools provided by FMOLHS should lead that individual to seek care if the problem is severe and persistent, which would generate business for the system's Sleep Center. While a personality brand does not expressly prioritize promoting your service lines, physicians or expertise,

that content is behind the scenes, waiting to be found if and when your personality brand organically leads an individual to it. (All of these attributes are still critical for the Solving Moments.)

C. Finally, learn to be okay with your Post Health System Brand not explicitly promoting your service lines. The best way to do that is by ensuring you are taking all the effective, necessary steps to market your service line in addition to your brand campaign. SEM, SEO, web content, call centers, direct marketing, digital advertising, find-a-physician tools, physician relations — you should be maximizing all of these tactics and more to drive service-line volume, as these allow you to engage most effectively with consumers who are in Solving Moments mode.



Among our favorite personality brands is Dove and its "Real Beauty" campaign. One of the most successful branding efforts of the last twenty years, Dove has sought to redefine what beauty means for women. And while their products appeared in their brand campaigns, the messages were intentionally not promotional. However, while their brand campaigns ran, Dove also simultaneously delivered comprehensive, *promotional* product marketing. It wasn't one or the other — brand

3. Be prepared to fail the "logo test."

The logo test is the famous test marketers use to decide whether their work is distinct enough from the competition. The saying goes, "If you cover up the logo and the message could work for anyone, then the brand isn't distinct." The point is, you should say something no one else can say to truly differentiate yourself. But this doesn't actually work with most personality brands. Take for example Nike and "Just Do It." There's nothing unique about Nike's manufacturing process, shoe quality, customer service or design that is demonstrated in the brand message "Just Do It." Further, any shoe company could have rolled out "Just Do It" because it's based on an emotional driver of the shoe buyer, not a distinguishing feature of the shoe itself. Any health system could have launched "Thrive" - and in fact, some have tried subsequently to build health brands in very similar manners.

or product — it was both, and often with very little or no creative cohesion between the two efforts. (Learn more about this approach and how it was proven over the years to drive the best business results for Dove in this <u>case study</u>. Health systems should adopt the same approach. It's not a question of brand or service-line marketing, it's both, though not necessarily executed with creative uniformity.

But what is the health campaign everyone remembers? What is the campaign that lifted its brand above all the others, despite the ensuing rush to follow its lead? The "Thrive" campaign for Kaiser. What is the most iconic brand campaign of all time? Nike's "Just Do It." The point is that if you're the *first* to market with a personality brand, you win. Others can't follow and stand out. If they try, they will look just like that — followers. Of course both Nike and Kaiser have separated themselves from the pack by more than just their audience-based message alone: Both have given their messages distinction through tone and style. The powerful characteristics of those brands are the crucial components of that distinction, which brings us to the fourth point.

4. Avoid becoming a clichéd "lifestyle" brand.

Kaiser gained much success and fame for its "Thrive" campaign, and many hospitals and health systems have tried to follow in its path. And while "Thrive" still stands the test of time, the brand has had to evolve to stay ahead. In fact, we're seeing a shift in the herd mentality of health system marketing creative across the industry. The dominant approaches of the past — showing doctors, nurses and patients interacting in a hospital setting — has long since become cliché.

The emerging cliché is the "lifestyle" brand — health systems depicting health with happy, healthy people out in their "Living Moments," smiling, playing with their kids, the world a sunny day, and all of it thanks to their local health system. Two cautions here. First, any lifestyle campaign that is grounded in the specialness or expertise or awesomeness of a health system is still a promotional brand, not a Post Health System Brand. Second, even when you can achieve a true Post Health System Brand, you may have to work harder to creatively separate yourself from the deluge of lifestyle-focused advertising. The "Health Esteem" campaign is a good case in point. The campaign creative does more than visually present people happy about their health. It uses humor and small, accessible moments to demonstrate real ways consumers can raise their "health esteem." Typically the brand positioning that underlies a Post Health System Brand — human kindness or health esteem, for example — is differentiating enough. But make sure your creative stands out as well.

5. Harness your fear and use it to drive change.

We have seen the enemy, and they are us. The number one reason we haven't seen more Post Health System Brands emerge in the industry is not because they're not proven to work, or consumers don't value them or health systems aren't ready. The number one reason is fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of taking a risk, fear of trying something new, fear of being the first. For health system marketers, that fear is utterly understandable. As we've laid out in Joe Public Doesn't Care About Your Hospital and other writings, the health system industry has lagged behind other industries in understanding and valuing marketing and branding. And while we've made great strides in the past few years (see Joe Public III), healthcare marketers typically still don't have the seat at the leadership table they deserve. The traditional, default mindset of many healthcare executives and physicians is that marketing equals promotion. Advocating for a brand position that doesn't laud the organization? That

doesn't celebrate its greatness? That doesn't showcase doctors, nurses and technology? That doesn't include a *U.S. News and World Report* badge — or better yet, that doesn't base the entire campaign on the system's awards and rankings? Pushing against all of that is a risk for health system marketers. It's a risk that, by countering the powers that be, the marketer could be further marginalized or, worse, replaced.

Doing new things, different things, better things, takes courage. And it starts with the healthcare marketer. If she doesn't believe, if she doesn't see the value in change, if she's not willing to push and push and push, to show resiliency in the face of resistance, then change will be slow to happen if indeed it happens at all. Find the courage of your convictions and help lead your organization to new heights. If you don't believe in the power of a Post Health System Brand, no one else will.

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Conclusion

In the face of growing consumerism, increased and new competition, and seismic shifts in our industry, health systems have the opportunity to leverage brand in a new and powerful way. Now you know what a Post Health System Brand is and why it can lift your organization above the competition and possibly to iconic brand status. The question now isn't why should you pursue a Post Health System Brand. **It's why not.**

Watch for more content on Post Health System Brands, including deep-dive case studies, strategies for building Post Health System Brands, intel on overcoming key challenges and more. For more, visit <u>www.thinkrevivehealth.com</u> or subscribe to The Weekly Hash, our weekly newsletter on all things healthcare.



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