Catholic Hospital's Website Is an Award-Winner

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Holy Name Hospital in Teaneck, NJ, is a stand-alone facility in the highly competitive New York City market. It has been a pioneer among those health care organizations that have turned to the Internet. In fact, Holy Name was the first hospital in New Jersey to create its own website. In 1997 the facility won international press coverage when it became the first hospital to post photos online of babies born in its obstetrics unit.[1]

Today Holy Name is the market leader in its region in the provision of online health information and services. E-Healthcare Leadership Awards recently declared that the site—which can be found at *www.holyname.org*—is the best hospital website in the 300-399 bed category and has the most innovative design.

"Our website is an important extension of our ministry," says Catherine Yaxley, Holy Name's vice president for planning. "We want online health consumers to have convenient access to services and information that empower them in meeting their health care needs. At the same time, we want to position Holy Name as the market leader for online services."

Health consumers primarily go online to look for information about a particular medical condition.[2] To meet such needs, Holy Name created a rich library of health information and resources. The library offers:

• Access to manuals covering specific medical topics

• Special resource centers for such topics as cancer, women's health, and health care for the elderly

• A database of hundreds of other websites, each of which deals with a particular medical condition

TOWARD AN INTERACTIVE SITE

Health care websites seem to work best when they develop through a set of phases: first an informational phase, then an interactive one. Holy Name has successfully navigated its infor-mational phase. "We are moving to make the site interactive, thereby personalizing it for users," says Paul Garrin, the hospital's vice president and chief information officer.

Last fall, for example, Holy Name launched an interactive breast health center for women. (Women not only make the health care decisions in most families; they also constitute a majority of web service users.) Consumers who register for the site receive, along with information concerning breast care, an e-mail that reminds them when their annual mammogram is due. Those who wish to do so can even use the site to arrange a mammogram appointment.

"We see online services such as the breast health center as a great win-win," says Yaxley. "By encouraging women to have mammograms, and making it easy for them to know how and when to schedule them, we are improving the health status of this population. At the same time, we are delineating our services and increasing the likelihood that women in our area will turn to us for those services."

Holy Name also has an online pregnancy resource center. Women who subscribe to it

receive a personalized weekly electronic newsletter that provides information geared to the particular stage of their pregnancy.

The hospital is also developing a Web-based audio library that all health consumers should find useful. A patient who, for example, has learned from his physician that he has diabetes, can contact the library and listen to a tape describing the illness in detail.

Holy Name has tried to make its website both easy and fun to use. The site offers, for example, a "virtual tour," in which users can simulate an actual walking tour of the hospital's services. They can use the site to send personalized birth announcements or get-well cards. They can even purchase flowers, gifts, books, and baby items from the site's "virtual gift shop."

TIPS ON BUILDING AN INTERACTIVE SITE

To health care leaders thinking about creating similar sites, Yaxley and Garrin offer several bits of advice.

Begin by Focusing on What You Want the Site to Deliver "Initially we didn't focus on that," Yaxley says. "We started by discussing how the website should look and what should be included in it. Later we learned that those were details that would get taken care of once we had decided how the site was to be used. Site planners should keep their discussions focused on what they want the site to achieve." To help sharpen this focus, Yaxley says, planners should form a steering committee to assess needs and opportunities and develop a web plan.

Deliver Services that Consumers Find Valuable Many hospital websites feature their facility's mission statement and management philosophy. Although no doubt important to the organization, such pieces of information may not belong on its website. Holy Name's leaders urge planners to use their sites as another way to *deliver* services, not just talk about them.

Planners of new sites should also remember that constraints on other media do not necessarily apply to the web. They should not try to use their sites as a brochure, for example. Printed materials are a static, one-way means of conveying information. Planners can, if they put their minds to it, make their site a delivery mechanism that works around the clock.

Recognize That a Website Is Not a One-Time Investment "Although we were the first hospital in New Jersey to have a website, we failed in the beginning to make the commitment necessary for its

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growth," Yaxley says. "Now we have an annual plan that enables us to continually add new services, thereby keeping up with consumer desires and increasing the value of the site."

Actively Promote Your Site The flow of traffic to Holy Name's website varies according to how actively the site is promoted. When the hospital launched the breast health center last year, it publicized it heavily in the local media. This publicity increased site traffic, which in turn increased the number of inquiries about mammography services. Planners of new sites should use all available communication vehicles to promote those sites on an ongoing basis.

Look for Online-Service Vendors with Experience in Health Care "We believe that health care is different from other industries," says Yaxley. "We have found that vendors who have health care experience are more likely to fit our work style and translate our goals into online services."

Determine When to Use Internal Resources and When to Outsource Them Garrin advises planners against connecting their interactive website to the hospital's information network. He suggests, instead, having the public site "hosted" by a server separate from the hospital's main server. "We concluded that there are too many risks involved in connecting a public website to the hospital's information system network," Garrin says. "By having our public site hosted at an 'outside' location, we eliminated a number of technical and security risks for our medical records and business systems."

INTERACTIVE SITES PRODUCE RESULTS

Holy Name's leaders are discovering that the website can help the facility achieve both mission and business goals, as the success of the online breast health center shows. "Each time someone interacts with our site, he or she is encouraged to take action in ways that create or reinforce a relationship," says Yaxley. "Web services are one of the most cost-effective means of promoting our organization and reinforcing our mission and our brand in the marketplace."   □

NOTES

1. *USA Today*, February 28, 1998.
2. "The Online Health Care Revolution: How the Web Helps Americans Take Better Care of Themselves," Pew Internet & American life Project, November 26, 2000 (http://www.pewinternet.org).

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