

**Merritt**GROUP

HOW TO BREAK THROUGH IN

# TELEHEALTH

WITH MARKETING  
AND PR





A record number of healthcare providers have turned to virtual consultations in the wake of COVID-19 for everything from **mental health** to **routine care and triage**. While telehealth is by no means new, the rapid pace of adoption driven by the pandemic is unprecedented, with analysts expecting a **64.3 percent increase in telehealth uptake** in 2020 alone.

Boosted by **relaxed policies** and the infusion of \$200 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (**CARES**) **Act funding**, and combined with an increase in **patient willingness** to try virtual care, it's safe to say that telehealth is here to stay. So much so, the telehealth market is **forecasted** to reach \$55.6 billion by 2025.

Rushing to meet this demand is a new set of players in the market—from emerging startups to established brands pivoting into the space. This crowded market is now far exceeding the 275 players **Becker's Hospital Review** compiled just a year ago. With competition reaching a fever pitch, it's growing difficult for brands to differentiate themselves, build trust and become the solution of choice.

As a result, it's more important than ever to invest in smart marketing and PR strategies that can cut through the noise, set your brand apart, build buzz and, most importantly, generate leads. However, when it comes to reaching telehealth buyers, a "one-size-fits-all" approach pulled from traditional healthcare or technology marketing playbooks will not work. That's why we're providing this guide on how to break through and grow your telehealth business today and well beyond in a post-COVID world.

## 1

## FIND THE WHITE SPACE TO DIFFERENTIATE YOUR TELEHEALTH MESSAGING

Developing a unique messaging platform is critical to standing out from the crowd and avoiding being lumped in as “just another telehealth vendor.” To get there, revisit your messaging and go through a (re)positioning exercise according to the following steps to ensure the story you’re telling to providers and health systems is relevant, compelling and different.

### 1. GATHER CROSS-ORGANIZATIONAL INPUT AT THE ONSET

Bring together key stakeholders in your organization—from the C-level to sales—to identify messaging, positioning and competitive challenges. Are you new to the space or repositioning your brand from an adjacent market? Has sales identified user pain points from conversations in the field? Are common rebuttals surfacing in meetings? Map out how your messages can answer those core questions.

### 2. LOOK AT PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA TO IDENTIFY THE WHITE SPACE

Conduct primary research (one-on-one interviews, focus groups and online surveys) and secondary research (competitive and market research) to inform message development and identify market gaps and opportunities. Are all telehealth solution providers saying the same thing in all the same places? Don’t blend in; see how you can take a fresh approach by finding the “white space” in the telehealth conversation.

### 3. CRAFT YOUR UNIQUE TELEHEALTH STORY

For telehealth solution providers in particular, it’s critical that you address practitioner and health system pain points head-on. Focus on messaging details that educate and illustrate how you:

- + Take the pain out of deployment
- + Support ease-of-use during a telehealth visit
- + Meet patient privacy and security requirements, such as HIPAA compliance
- + Integrate with existing investments such as electronic health records (EHRs)
- + Deliver quantifiable ROI

### 4. TEST YOUR MESSAGE WITH HEALTHCARE INFLUENCERS

Reach out to external resources such as industry analysts to bullet-proof your draft messaging. If you have a beta program for new product launches, get on-the-ground practitioners and even their patients to provide feedback on your solution positioning and overall brand messaging.



Third-parties and physician advocates can surface areas of confusion, poke holes and help you fine-tune your narratives and proof points so you can put your best foot forward going out to market. And because these advocates were brought into the process early for buy-in, they are often willing to sing your praises publicly when the time is right.

## 2

## BUILD PEER-TO-PEER CREDIBILITY AND BRAND TRUST

In healthcare, peer-to-peer insights and word-of-mouth (WOM) matter. Providers are busy and don't want to hear a lot of marketing fluff from companies — they just want the facts and they want to know whatever you're selling works. Physicians in particular trust their peers over many of the information sources they're bombarded with every day.

It's your job to build bridges in a market where personal relationships open doors. But how you go about doing that has changed in many ways in the COVID-19 environment:

### PUBLISH PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH

Make peer-reviewed publications a component of your overall content marketing strategy. Whether you have a physician on staff or your product team is collecting efficacy or other unique data, package and pass that original research by a reputable review board. Getting published in peer-reviewed journals, such as *JAMA*, *Telemedicine and e-Health*, *Telehealth and Medicine Today* or *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, can show you've gone the extra mile to back up your claims.

### JOIN INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Becoming more actively involved as a member in leading organizations such as the *American Telemedicine Association* can open the door to new relationships. Associations also offer research, webinars, blog, news, social properties and other resources you can learn from, engage with and contribute to.

### DON'T IGNORE ONLINE REVIEWS

From review sites like *G2* to vendor listings and rankings in publications such as *Healthline* and *Healthcare IT News*, your

buyers are reading what your peers and media authorities are saying about your product. Share early insights into your product with potential buyers to help validate your offerings and even incentivize your happy customers to leave reviews.

### UP YOUR SOCIAL NETWORKING GAME

Building your executives' online personas is more important than ever—and it's more than tweeting random news stories once a month. Take the messaging platform you refined in step one and extend that strategically across all of your social media platforms. For example, have your thought leaders become active members of online communities aligned with your company's area of focus and business objectives. LinkedIn groups like *Telecare and Telehealth* or *Healthcare Information Technology Professionals* can be a great place to engage and add to the industry conversation.

### LEVERAGE YOUR PARTNERS' REPUTATIONS

You're known by the company you keep, and aligning your organization with partners that have already built credibility in the telehealth space can be an easy way to make new connections, influence peer relationships and boost your brand. But whether you're working together on sponsoring virtual events, authoring a report or marketing to prospect lists, make sure you engage partners in a way that's mutually beneficial; building strong relationships is a two-way street.



# 3

## BECOME *THE* LEADING AUTHORITY ON TELEHEALTH

Distributing a press release and believing that if you write it, they will come simply does not work. To become the telehealth solution of choice, it's vital your executive team be viewed as industry thought leaders. This means going beyond talking about product and services superiority. Your team must demonstrate it has its fingers on the pulse of where the market is headed as telehealth delivery advances and evolves.

### HERE ARE A FEW STRATEGIES TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF YOUR CEO AND OTHER EXECUTIVE TEAM MEMBERS

Become an educational resource for providers AND their patients. Own the industry conversation by becoming the definitive source on everything telehealth. Publish data-driven reports on care delivery trends; distribute best practices on how to approach technology deployment; deliver fact sheets on how to code for Medicare or process insurance reimbursements; and create a resource center with tutorials and how-to videos to make getting started easy for physicians and patients.

### DRIVE HOME THOUGHT LEADERSHIP VIA EARNED MEDIA

Whether your buyer is reading an online article, listening to a podcast or watching a publication video, your CEO/execs need to be front and center. Develop PR platforms for your executives around key telehealth issues and trends and bring those to market in leading healthcare publications your buyers are reading as *Healthcare Innovation*, *Modern Healthcare* and others.

### TAKE THE SPOTLIGHT AND PERSONALIZE YOUR BRAND AT ONLINE EVENTS

From landing a keynote at now virtual conferences like [ATA2020](#) and [HIMSS20 Digital](#) to hosting an intimate remote roundtable discussion on the latest telehealth trends, meet your prospects and their peers where they are online. Work twice as hard on your content to make it worth their time so everyone walks away with fresh insights and a positive impression of your brand.



## 4

## ALIGN DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES WITH COVID-19 SHIFTS

We recently published a deep dive into [COVID-19 and the state of digital marketing](#). Through that analysis we were able to identify key opportunities for marketers. Here's how these can be applied to the telehealth market specifically:

### PRACTICE GOOD DATA HYGIENE SO YOU CAN PERSONALIZE AND GEOFENCE

There's no better time than now to get your house in order. Personalization is very important in the space, so the more accurate your data, the better you can segment and serve healthcare providers the right content at the right time in the right way. Location-based marketing can also be an effective strategy, allowing you to conduct geo-targeted campaigns in regions where COVID-19 outbreaks are the most acute and where providers would most likely be in need of telehealth services.

### REFINE YOUR BUYER'S EXPERIENCE TO BOOST CONVERSIONS

As detailed in our [How to Market & Sell When It's Not 'Business as Usual'](#) guide, COVID-19 has driven more people online—up to 25% in some major cities. Your website is where you'll be driving your potential customers, so providing a positive user experience is paramount. Invest in heat mapping, survey and behavior analytics tools such as [HotJar](#), [SmartLook](#), [FullStory](#) that can help you better understand your buyer's journey and determine where you can update your website to increase conversion rates. For example, if visitors bounce each time they hit your telehealth solution product description, swap in a more engaging, easy-to-consume explainer video instead.

### EMBRACE VIDEO AND AUDIO

With ad rates down, social media platforms and over-the-top (OTT) paid campaigns are ideal for grabbing physician and provider eyeballs. Video and audio also present the ideal format for allowing your physician advocates to participate in your social media marketing and help tell your story straight from the user's mouth for greater impact. Beyond paid, [integrate video throughout your holistic content marketing strategy](#)—from embedding video on your website to make your company more searchable to tripling response rates for your nurture email campaigns.

### DEPLOY CONVERSATIONAL MARKETING USING TOOLS TO ENGAGE PROVIDERS

Chatbots can help you engage your customers in a personalized way much faster than email. [Drift](#) customer sites, for example, have seen engagement through chat-bots increase as much as 500 percent, and one of their healthcare industry customers was able to onboard 35 new clients in 40 days during the COVID-19 outbreak.



## 5

## ARM THE SALES TEAM TO WIN MORE DEALS

Be a partner to your sales organization by taking the time to understand how together you can advance the buyer journey and grow the business. Help them answer their providers' most pressing questions—such as why your telehealth solution is better, easier to deploy, more cost-effective, etc.—and implement proven strategies that can move the needle.

### DEVELOP AUTOMATED WORKFLOWS TO SAVE TIME AND ENERGY

Marketing automation platforms like HubSpot, Marketo, Salesforce and **others** can help drive ROI for your company in **less than a year**. From qualifying leads to automating nurture, engagement and retention workflows, these platforms can greatly enhance the effectiveness of your sales team, drive action and track prospects, particularly as COVID-19 shifts buying behavior.

### SEGMENT, GRADE AND SCORE TO PRIORITIZE LEADS

According to **Forrester**, companies that excel at lead nurturing generate 50 percent more sales-ready leads at 33 percent lower cost. Start by building lead scoring and grading models that allow your team to prioritize the prospects that have the highest propensity to buy. **Segment** your data against your ideal customer by evaluating demographic, firmographic, needs-based and authority data. From there, use your ideal customer profile to grade your leads from the perfect target customer to aspirational ones, or A to F. Lastly, determine how interested your leads are in your company and product by scoring how actively they engage with your company, and start with those most likely to buy.

### DEVELOP THE RIGHT CONTENT TO FEED YOUR NURTURE STREAMS

For prospects that need more time to make a decision, build multi-touch, multi-channel nurture streams and retargeting to convert more leads. Your content marketing strategy should include assets that support the entire buyer journey, so make sure you're supporting sales through webinars, product demos, case studies, trainings and other sales enablement materials providers need to make their buying decision.



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## TO SUCCEED IN TELEHEALTH MARKETING

The COVID-19 public health crisis has prompted healthcare providers around the world to invest in and scale up telehealth services. Cultural acceptance coupled with relaxed regulations on telehealth offerings have kickstarted a growing telehealth trend that's unlikely to die out anytime soon.

Telehealth is certain to be a growing part of the healthcare industry, so don't get left behind. When developing a healthcare marketing plan for today's virtual world, remember to:

- + Find the white space to differentiate your telehealth messaging
- + Build peer-to-peer credibility and brand trust
- + Become the leading authority on telehealth
- + Reboot your digital marketing strategies to drive leads
- + Arm the sales team to win more deals

With these strategies, you can break through the noise to make your solution the clear choice.

For a free consultation on how your telehealth services company can beat the competition and accelerate growth, contact **Tom Rice** at [rice@merrittgrp.com](mailto:rice@merrittgrp.com).