



Insights for Your Strategy

Healthcare Marketing in 2026: Key Trends & Takeaways

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2026 will be the year of trust

Recent years have brought shifting targets and turbulence to healthcare, and 2026 will be no exception. But you don't have to feel like a passenger on a bumpy ride: Take the wheel now and choose where this year takes your health system.

As you plan for the year ahead, you're likely juggling new strategies, competing priorities, and mixed signals about where to focus. The fact that you're reading this means you're looking to lead with intention. Because only so many priorities can prevail, we encourage you to focus on one goal above all others: cultivating trust.

Trust is the differentiator in an AI-driven internet and the antidote to today's biggest challenges in healthcare. From tackling staffing shortages to getting on AI's good side, trust-building is the foundation that makes every other initiative more structurally sound.

This report reviews strategic trends emerging this year and related tactics. As you dig in, let "trust" be your mantra — and consistency, authority, and humanity your guide.

This year's trends at a glance:

- Trend 1: The website as the hub of trust
- Trend 2: Creativity is back!
- Trend 3: Authentic storytelling
- Trend 4: Practical AI usage
- Trend 5: Balancing privacy, personalization, and performance
- Trend 6: Marketing for employer branding
- Trend 7: Returning to the big picture



TREND 1

The website as the hub of trust

Doomsayers will keep trying to convince you that the healthcare website is dead. It's important that you don't listen to them.

Yes, websites lost traffic to AI this year. Yes, some patient searches start with an AI engine. But your website is still one of your most valuable marketing tools — and will be for a long time.

Your website is your brand's source of truth. It's where:

- Patients go to supplement their research and find care
- Search engines and AI platforms scrape your data
- You (and only you) control the narrative around your brand

Autonomous agentic AI (bots making appointments for patients) is still a blip on the horizon. The work we do now will set us up for that future while safeguarding our present.



Don't panic or give in to the hype that your website is dead. The healthcare web isn't disappearing. It's transforming. Those who invest in trustworthy, medically accurate, consumer-centered digital experiences will continue to lead. High-quality content and exceptional patient experiences will always rise to the top — whether surfaced by search engines, AI systems, or human referrals. Because at its core, digital strategy isn't about algorithms or rankings. It's about earning and sustaining trust. That trust is the foundation of every lasting connection we build with our patients — and it's what will continue to set leading health systems apart in the years ahead, no matter what the search experience becomes.



Amanda Todorovich, FACHE, Enterprise Executive Director, Digital Marketing, Cleveland Clinic

How to succeed in this new search landscape

Keep investing in your website, and you'll be rewarded. Focus on:

- **Human-centered content:** Start with conversational, consumer-focused content and use keyword research to extend your reach (not the other way around).
- **Differentiation:** Home in on your differentiators and refine your content around them.
- **Structured data:** Structure the information on your website's front-end and backend to support user understanding and AI scraping.
- **Recency:** Date your content on your site's backend and keep it updated to improve your chances of driving AI citations.

Want to take it further? Explore the latest search tactics in our playbook: [The Modern Search Manual](#)

TREND 2

Creativity is back!

The onslaught of AI-generated content this year has pushed us even deeper into the sea of sameness that plagues healthcare marketing. The good news about this bland landscape? It's easier than ever to stand out.

Be brave, be bold. There's no checklist for this — that's the whole point — but let this spark your imagination:

- **Experiment with new formats:** Try something different, whether it's an interactive website tool, real patient voices, behind-the-scenes content, or a kid-friendly animation.
- **Trust your social media experts:** Similarly, allow your social media specialists to experiment with native features like interactive stickers on Instagram. Don't wait for something to go mainstream before dipping your toes in.
- **Lean into short-form video storytelling:** And fight the urge to overproduce it. Raw, mobile-captured footage can be powerful.

Reframe internal resistance to creativity

Creativity in healthcare isn't risky — it's necessary. If risk-averse stakeholders are limiting your content's potential, convince them of the value of originality. Or better yet, illustrate the risk of sounding like everyone else: stunted engagement, brand trust, and results.



I don't think the challenge is for marketers to be creative — it's selling those ideas to executives to greenlight creative campaigns. The best thing you can do is show your leadership what your competitors are doing in the space to stand out. And if they're not standing out, demonstrate the sea of sameness within healthcare and ask your leadership to trust you to try something bold.

Attention is a scarcity in today's economy, and the only brands that will win are those that stop the scroll and cause the pause. Push for fresh campaigns and standout content in 2026, so you can dodge the AI slop circulating on the web today.



Ahava Leibtag, CEO and Founder, Aha Media Group

TREND 3

Authentic storytelling

Storytelling never went out of style, but we're seeing a growing interest in this tried-and-true format. As polished-but-stale content became the norm in 2025, many enterprise healthcare leaders shifted their attention to storytelling for its **power to influence brand perception and build trust**.

For this reason, storytelling has topped more than a few health systems' strategic priority lists for 2026. More specifically, brand leaders are prioritizing authentic and unfiltered narrative content.

Focus on relevance, empathy, and realism in your stories. Create narratives that patients can relate to and connect with. And don't forget to repurpose them across your channels — great stories can have many homes.



Even as a large healthcare system, being personal with our stories is how we connect. Because healthcare is personal. It's your provider. It's your body. And that relationship matters.

At the end of the day, what we're really trying to do is build trust — in our communities and in the individuals we're privileged to serve — through stories that are truthful, transparent, and help people navigate their own healthcare decisions.



Jeremy Harrison, AVP, Consumer Engagement & Experience, MultiCare

Storytelling lessons from the box office

No two cancer journeys are alike, but healthcare stories are often so templated that they start to sound the same. To tell an engaging story — including patient narratives and employee spotlights — draw inspiration from this year's blockbusters:

- Embrace what makes us human: emotional depth, messiness, and humor (*One Battle After Another*)
- Combine formats in unique ways to tell a first-of-its-kind story (*Sinners*)
- Tell a story from multiple perspectives (*Weapons*)
- Activate existing communities who are likely to engage and share (*A Minecraft Movie*)
- Capitalize on nostalgia (*Lilo & Stitch*)

TREND 4

Practical AI usage

As larger and university-affiliated health systems continue scaling AI across marketing efforts, teams that have paused AI implementation — or those waiting for their clinical departments to lead — risk falling further behind. Bandwidth is an issue for every team in 2026, and **AI could help lighten the burden.**

Save creative tasks (like content writing) for humans. And use AI for marketing tasks that can be automated or done without much strategy, such as:

- Taking or summarizing meeting notes
- Organizing, analyzing, or comparing datasets
- Testing content variations

The marketers seeing the greatest gains are those integrating AI into team workflows and building policies to act as guardrails. Need help with this? Read our new resource: [Building Your AI Toolkit: A Starter Guide for Marketing Teams.](#)



Hospital teams are done waiting for perfect clarity on AI. In every workshop and session I've led this year, I've seen marketers taking real steps toward implementation — like embedding AI into their organization's workflows. It's still messy, and clinical versus operational use cases can feel confusing, but the momentum is real. This is the year AI moves from theory to practice.



Lacey Reichwald, Director of Marketing, Aha Media Group

But what if your organization is anti-AI?

Follow internal policy — but consider reopening the AI conversation with leadership.

Competitors are finding safe ways to capitalize on AI, and their wins will keep compounding. It's worth exploring your options to mitigate the risk and see the same benefits.

Even if stakeholders won't budge, keep yourself informed about the space. Use AI in your personal life and follow creators who share what they're learning. See our list of resources (including courses, podcasts, and experts) in our AI Toolkit Starter Guide linked above.

TREND 5

Balancing privacy, personalization, and performance

Access to data is becoming more critical and more complicated. The calls for attribution and personalization are getting louder, yet many healthcare marketers are missing the data needed to deliver on those priorities.

Success in the coming year means **aligning with legal, auditing your martech stack, and rethinking how you define “performance.”** Attribution is still possible. It just may require you to:

- Clean up your data
- Adjust your KPIs
- Research new tools
- Replace (or retire) tech that isn't serving you



The increasing enforcement of complex and idiosyncratic state privacy laws will significantly impact healthcare marketing in 2026. Things like consent and data inferences will become top-of-mind, C-level concerns.

Despite the complexity, don't give up on attribution! It's harder now, but that just makes it more valuable once achieved. With the rise of modern CDPs (customer data platforms) that can connect clicks to appointments, you don't need to settle for proxies.



Adam Putterman, Cofounder, Ours Privacy

Did you know?

A helpful hint from Ours Privacy: If your website uses **Google Maps embeds or YouTube-hosted videos**, there's a good chance you're triggering third-party cookies and noncompliant tracking pixels — even without Google Analytics installed.



But don't panic.

You can fix this, and we're here to point you in the right direction for data compliance options.

TREND 6

Marketing for employer branding

Talent acquisition and retention shouldn't fall on HR's shoulders alone. Enterprise-wide priorities need cross-functional solutions, and marketers have valuable know-how and institutional knowledge to help approach these challenges.

Expanding access in 2026 will take an all-hands-on-deck approach. Here's how your team can help:

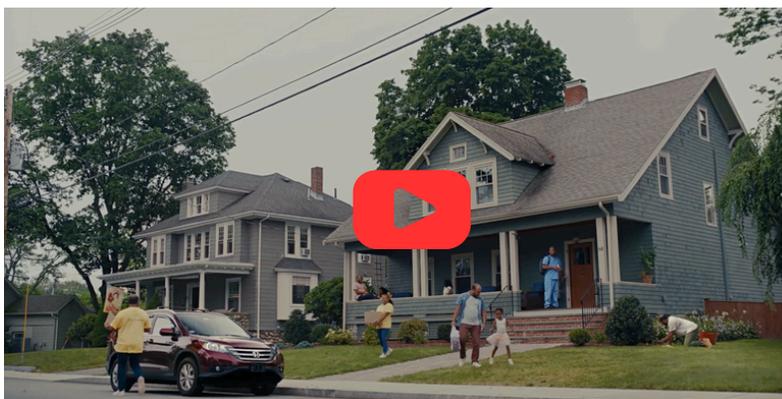
- **Partner with HR:** Align on what makes your organization an employer of choice and how you'll get the message out.
- **Define your differentiators:** Why should candidates apply to your health system, especially if a local competitor pays more?
- **Assess your candidate-facing content:** Is the messaging compelling? Are pathways clear? Is the hiring site user-friendly?
- **Support the paid strategy:** Ensure recruitment ads are on-brand and on the mark with your key messages.
- **Encourage employee advocacy:** Potential applicants (and patients) care about how staff are treated. How can you uplift your brand's reputation as an employer?
- **Pull the right levers:** Tap into social media, internal storytelling, and video content to support recruitment and retention efforts.

See it in action by UMass Memorial Health

Faced with growing pressure to recruit and retain top talent, UMass Memorial Health launched "We Hire You," an award-winning recruitment campaign. The concept behind the creative recognized employees as real people beyond their job titles, centering on messaging like "We see people, not just positions."

The campaign helped strengthen culture, support retention, and attract new talent.

[Watch the commercial.](#)





The past few years have forced many of us into “survive” mode; to truly thrive, consider taking time to step back, assess, and “pause for poise.”

*Ensure your team is aligning with organizational priorities and think of your role as an enterprise *leader*, not just a functional manager. Lean into cross-functional initiatives that strengthen relationships with your service line/operations, clinical, and other administrative counterparts. Earn a seat at the strategic table. And fiercely seek to better listen to, understand, and represent the voice of the consumer/patient in all your efforts.*



Laila Waggoner, Chief Dot Connector, Strategy for Hire

TREND 7

Returning to the big picture

Today’s unpredictable reality has led to a collective “brace for impact” mindset. Issues around reimbursement, privacy concerns, and workforce struggles will continue to plague healthcare next year, but remember what your mom always said, “It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.”

As we plan for the year ahead, let’s pause, take a deep breath, and assess the landscape in front of us with a fresh mind. What if we reframed “doing more with less” to “achieving more while doing less”? What if we slowed down before moving forward, so we could focus on what’s truly making a difference?

This year is about refocusing on the big picture and taking a proactive, protective, and — dare we say — aggressive stance:

- **Identify your greatest priorities and most meaningful needle-movers.**
- Put your marketing strategy and workflows under the microscope.
- Subtract the distractions and energy dilutors.
- Plan with foresight and intention.

And know we’re all in this together.

Want to talk about anything in this report?

You’ve got friends rooting for you at Aha Media Group. Whether you need a thought partner, an execution arm, or a little bit of both, the door is always open.

Have questions, concerns, or ideas for the next year?

[Let’s talk](#)