Geonetric

Digital with care.

EBOOK

Reimagining the Digital Healthcare Experience

A Guide for Healthcare Leaders to the Digital Front Door and Beyond

I n seven taps, taking fewer than fifteen seconds, your customized coffee order is being prepared and will be waiting with your name on it at the shop down the block. In four taps your favorite sandwich is being driven to your office. One button click on your TV remote fills the screen with hundreds of hours of entertainment options tailored to your viewing history, the shows you've loved and hated, the time of day and how long you usually spend watching.

We're surrounded by digital experiences that:

- Provide instant access to solutions
- Make complex offline operations invisible
- Get better the more we use them
- Create a long-term, "sticky" brand relationship

The last two points are critical. The experience isn't over at that first sip of coffee. Your order is followed by nudges, offers and challenges designed to build habits, expand a business foothold from coffee to pastry to lunch, and generally, cement your lifetime relationship with the brand and products.

Introduction

It's old news that expectations for digital experiences are set by the best-in-class in any industry — not necessarily by other healthcare organizations. It's set by Starbucks. GrubHub. Netflix. Now with an ever-increasing number of healthcare options available, traditional healthcare providers are feeling the pressure to stay competitive by improving the digital experience.

The user expectation is a 24/7, always-on personal guide through what can be a stressful, confusing, and life-changing personal experience.

The imperative is for healthcare organizations to:

- Begin the journey through easy access to care and targeted outreach

- Support patients and consumers in a personal, seamless way that makes communication consistent, enables self-service and prevents abandonment

- Improve performance through data-driven operational changes across the enterprise

Of course, in healthcare, things are rarely so simple.

Achieving excellence in digital experience requires a clear-eyed focus on the healthcare consumer, and an innovative, outcome-driven mindset.

Rethinking the Digital Healthcare Experience

Behind the scenes, traditional healthcare organizations are complex entities frequently formed from disparate providers that have been grafted together. They contain multiple independent entities, and huge departments and leaders accustomed to operating with a high degree of autonomy.

The inevitable result is a patchwork of disparate technology solutions, systems, workflows, processes, terminology, and policies. It's often difficult for someone inside any one organization to navigate and understand, let alone the average consumer.

Healthcare has traditionally been optimized for provider operations and payer demand. However, the increasing presence of new entrants in the market has highlighted many cross-industry alternatives. Emerging from retail and eCommerce, new players are honing in on the consumer to guide the experience around the services and products they're creating.

In a market where choice takes precedence over loyalty, the ability to optimize for the healthcare consumer creates a competitive advantage.

The Current Digital Experience: Stuck in the Past

When our current digital frameworks were imagined, it wasn't commonplace to schedule multiple types of appointments online, to receive care online via telemedicine, to access multiple patient portals, or to know what care might cost before you received it. "Digital experience" was synonymous with "website," thus heavily focused on the desktop browser.

Over the past decade, health systems have grown and expanded to collect a wider array of services and locations under a single brand. Of course, some are more successful than others, but thus far, few healthcare companies have created a truly singular consumer experience.

The next step in the digital journey for healthcare organizations will require a reevaluation of some of the fundamental thinking and architecture that has shaped the current experience.

It's Time to Reimagine the Digital Experience

There is an increasing urgency in the industry to take that next step. This momentum for change is emerging from the intersection of:

- **Consumer expectations** of what digital experiences can and should be. This bar is being set outside of healthcare by omni-channel experiences and digital transformation of other industries. As a recent Accenture consumer survey indicated, 50% of healthcare consumers reported that "a bad digital experience with a healthcare provider ruins the entire experience with that provider."

- A **competitive business environment** where increased options make consumer experience a key differentiator. Traditional healthcare providers are facing competition from all sides, including new entrants with deep consumer and retail backgrounds. Even markets that have been less competitive in the past are facing erosion of the patient relationship due to an increase of virtual and consumer-driven touchpoints.

- The **evolution of healthcare technologies** from the "walled gardens" of the past toward more open approaches that support the creation of new and better consumer experiences. The pandemic accelerated the deployment of many of these consumer-facing solutions such as virtual care and access solutions. However, while the capabilities are more prevalent, the consumer experience is still an afterthought.

These points create an opportunity and an imperative to fully break down the digital structures of the past and find new ways to construct the healthcare experience. We know that simply implementing technology isn't the answer.

Leading organizations are prioritizing investment in creating innovative, human-centered digital experiences and seizing the opportunity to create a truly user-centered view of the healthcare experience for the future. As a result, many healthcare organizations have shifted to view the online experience from an always-on gateway to a personal, health-affirming conversation with a care provider — a digital front door.

The Reward

While this digital front door approach is focused on creating an ideal experience for healthcare consumers, there are benefits for the healthcare organization as well. The payoff for those leading the way in reinventing the digital experience will take several forms:

- There are immediate gains to be made in attracting new patients and improving follow-through on referrals

- Nurturing long-term relationships can boost retention of current patients and also grow volume for services

- Unifying the underlying processes and systems needed to create the consumer experience can lead to operational efficiencies and increasing value delivered from investments in technology

- Improved agility through current technical approaches that have become increasingly nimble, allowing organizations to move toward continuous, incremental improvements as well as accelerate the velocity of future changes to digital platforms

It's Time to Reimagine the Digital Experience

The biggest opportunity comes from the combined result of all these areas in a long- play strategy of increasing lifetime value — both delivered to the consumer over decades of interactions as well as to the organization throughout that span of time.
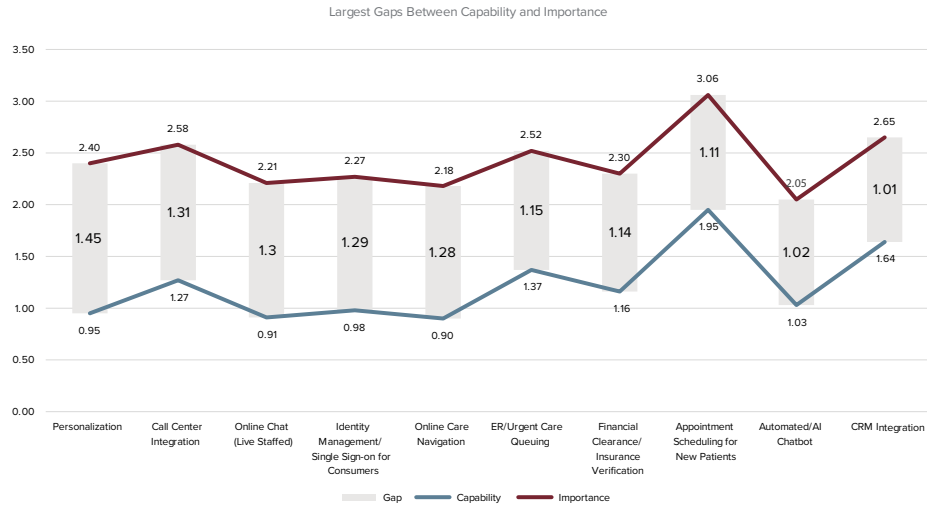
It's best to think of the effort and the reward as a sort of tortoise-and-the-hare scenario. Rather than dashing forward quickly then pausing, the technologies and processes for creating human-centered experiences favor the slow and steady approach. Start now. Focus on continually improving and iterating. The sustained pace will grow the holistic value of your efforts and produce increasing results over time.

The Challenges Ahead

Despite the pressure to reimagine the consumer experience and the potential payoff, we know that change is slow, and this is hard work. But the need to begin creating this next-generation experience is too urgent to wait for tectonic shifts in electronic medical records, practice management systems, billing software, and other systems to catch up. At the same time, organizational structures and processes that are optimized for internal efficiencies need to be optimized for the ideal user experience. And, of course, we're working within the context of the healthcare system, considering the inherent complexity of working with multiple payers, providers and different localities

In the Geonetric and *eHealthcare Strategy & Trends 2021 Healthcare Digital Marketing Trends Survey*, we asked healthcare leaders to rate the importance of a number of focus areas related to digital front door strategies along with their organizations' capabilities to execute on that area. The results highlight that while the execution gap has narrowed on several key areas (e.g., provider directories, pricing transparency and virtual care), there are many critical areas still to address. Nearly all the areas with the largest gap between importance and capability face challenges related to the integration of online and offline processes. Figuring out how to make operational changes will be at least as critical to the success of digital experience initiatives as the technology.

Consumer Digital Experience Challenges

Largest Gaps Between Capability and Importance

	Personalization	Call Center Integration	Online Chat (Live Staffed)	Identity Management/ Single Sign-on for Consumers	Online Care Navigation	ER/Urgent Care Queuing	Financial Clearance/ Insurance Verification	Appointment Scheduling for New Patients	Automated/AI Chatbot	CRM Integration
Gap	1.45	1.31	1.3	1.29	1.28	1.15	1.14	1.11	1.02	1.01
Capability	0.95	1.27	0.91	0.98	0.90	1.37	1.16	1.95	1.03	1.64
Importance	2.40	2.58	2.21	2.27	2.18	2.52	2.30	3.06	2.05	2.65

Designing Our Way Forward

Given this need to innovate the consumer experience within a complex and evolving environment, how do we go about setting a direction and moving toward it? Luckily, the discipline of design is built around envisioning the future and is no stranger to dealing with numerous challenges, limitations and friction points surrounding the problem to be solved. In the design process, these are referred to as "constraints." Creating an optimal design requires embracing constraints. As annoying as they can be, they're not going anywhere. It's no use to throw up your hands and say, "HIPAA makes it impossible" or "these systems can never talk to each other" or "they'll never change the way they do things." The existence of constraints makes each project unique — and perhaps even fun.

The design process examines the walls created by these constraints, determining which are truly solid and which may be permeable, flexible, or movable. The resulting design for the consumer experience is then custom fit in and around these walls, creating the best possible consumer experience while addressing the limitations.

Faced with these constraints, it's easy to lose sight of the kind of experience you're trying to create. It can be helpful to have a set of design principles as a compass to ensure things are moving in the right direction. Some examples might be:

- Human-centered

- Consistent and personal

- Makes it easier

- Enables autonomy

- Promotes health

- Contributes to the holistic value

These are only the starting point for more developed principles that might guide a digital experience project, but you can imagine how they can be useful for maintaining focus over the long term. Asking, "how could this also 'promote health'?" or "is there an opportunity to do more to 'enable autonomy'?" moved the conversation from being mired in constraints to focusing on creating opportunities.

In this way a user-centered design process creates a path forward, overcoming the challenges of the status quo and guiding us toward a reimagined digital experience.

How the Digital Healthcare Experience Will Change

MOVING FROM	MOVING TO
Multiple disconnected consumer websites, portals, apps and contact points	Single consumer identity and coherent user experience
Episodic interactions, volume-based metrics	Continuous health and wellness, improved patient retention, loyalty and lifetime value-based metrics
Experiences that may feel dictatorial, restrictive or bureaucratic	Experiences that feel empowering
Reacting to consumer requests	Guiding next steps, prevention, wellness
Siloed (or non-existent) customer data	Unified enterprise view of customers
Multiple, disparate pathways to booking care	Unified, trackable funnels toward conversion
Payment as an afterthought	Transparent costs, accurate financial clearance and simple payment
Designed for a single individual	Addressing the needs of multiple decision makers and caregivers as well as the patient
Marketing as campaigns and reacting to internal demand	Data-driven, always-on marketing programs

"Consumers" and Healthcare

The use of the word "consumer" in the conversation around digital experience has frustrated some in healthcare. We believe that this term better represents this audience today. While we don't want to lose sight of the compassion implied by words like "patient," we use the term "consumer" as it can be helpful for a few reasons:

- Consumers are empowered individuals who are actively involved in their care. They shop and compare healthcare services and providers rather than being "your patientt."

- Consumers can be people other than the patient who are involved in and are often making choices on behalf of the person who is directly receiving care.

- The terminology encourages us to do better, seeing commonalities and opportunities in new places, other industries and shared experiences.

The ultimate goal is to take positive approaches to developing human-centered services and products — ones that acknowledge that the people involved face huge pressure to make choices and decisions — and to use them to improve care.

Imagining the Digital Front Door

The concept of a digital front door represents ease of access, a way for consumers to connect with your organization and receive a high level of service with the convenience of digital. While in the physical world there are numerous "front doors" to an organization, the advantage in a digital world is the same "door" can reveal a different, highly relevant set of access points, interactions, and information each time it's opened.

The digital front door can simultaneously exist in multiple forms — a website, a mobile app, a phone call, or text message — the challenge is to create an experience that, though not identical, is consistent in each channel.

With that malleable, digital mindset, the thinking flips to the consumer experience. Where and why does that experience begin? How is it sustained? How do we know this reimagined approach is working?
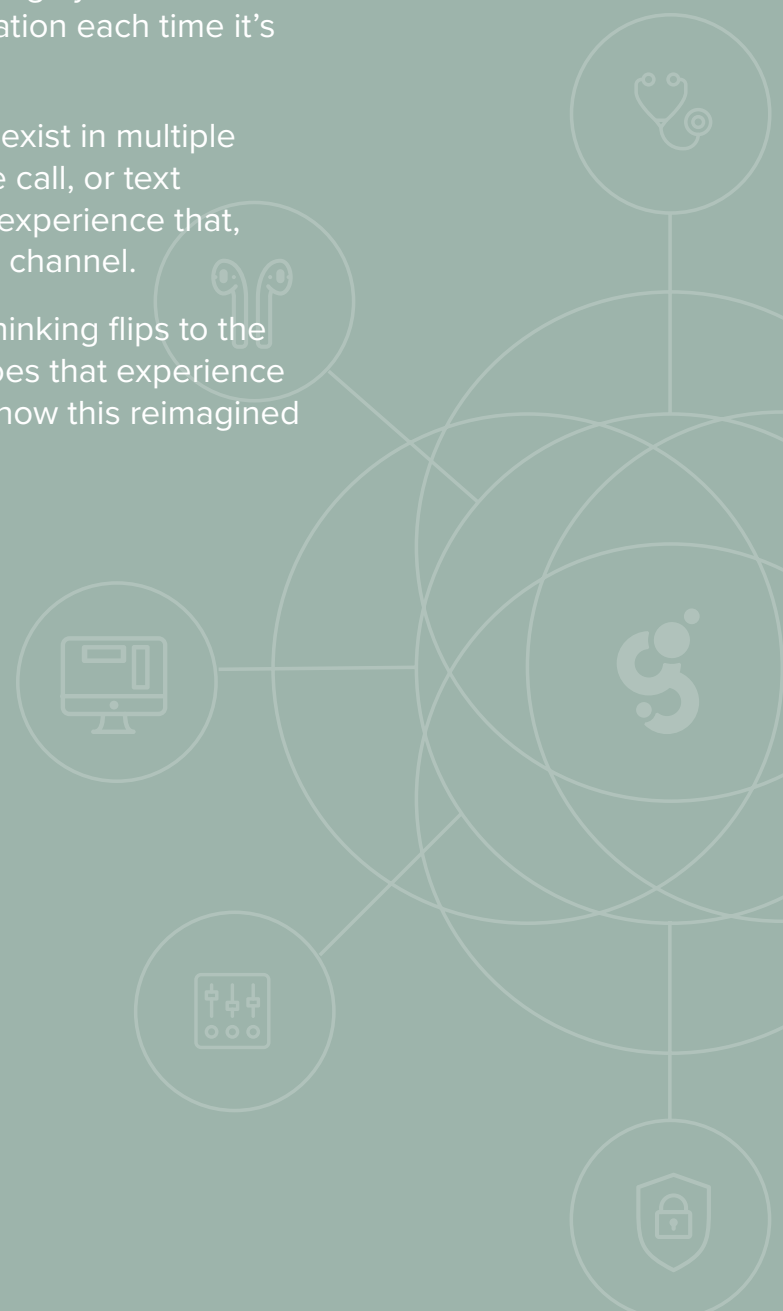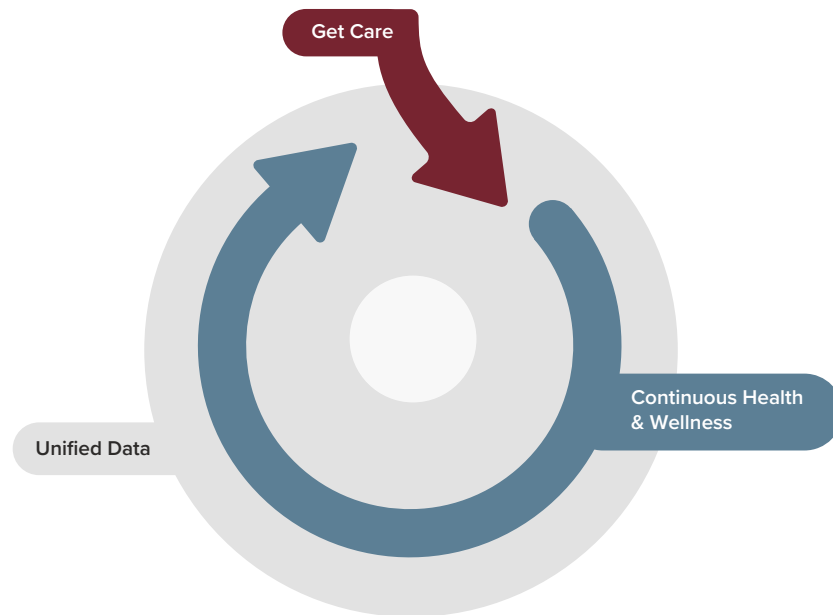
To keep things relatively simple, we'll look at three broad areas:

- How people **Get Care**, whether that's finding a primary care provider, queuing for urgent care or initiating a virtual care visit

- From there, how care is provided and health is proactively managed in an ongoing cycle of **Continuous Health & Wellness**

- And surrounding and woven through those experiences is a set of **Unified Data** that enables this personal, proactive experience while also assisting in understanding how multiple touchpoints contribute to the long-term value of these relationships

Get Care

A New Beginning to the Care Journey

The most critical component of a digital front door strategy is the basic connection between patient and healthcare provider. The patient needs to "get care."

In the past, the main digital options given to healthcare consumers reflected how the healthcare system is structured: select a physician through the provider directory, identify a care location that's convenient or research service offerings. The digital journey then typically ended with a phone number to call and book an appointment.

The Challenge

This journey places many difficult questions onto the consumer: What is the appropriate care for my concern? What is my best starting point to get that care? What might the journey forward look like?

Key Opportunities

To create a new experience requires reconsidering what the healthcare consumer is trying to find, what action they need to take and how to guide their decisions along the way. Rather than directing them through the major internal divisions of the organization — physicians, care locations, service lines, and virtual care options — we have the opportunity to reorient the digital experience to represent pathways to care. These units of content can help guide the consumer more directly toward options for addressing their unique needs and situation with clear choices and actions to be taken.

Convoluted pathways and weak call to action
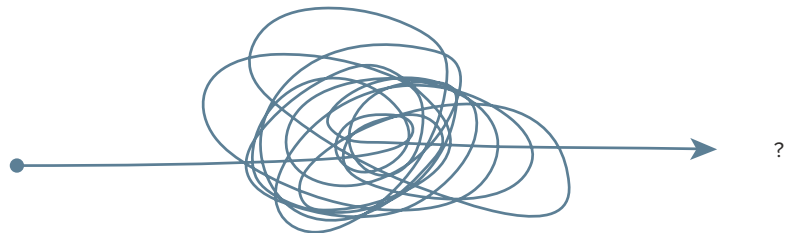
Clear funnel for conversion

microconversion ——— microconversion ——— microconversion ——▶ Booking

Where before the pathway was a convoluted muddle of steps leading to the inevitable phone call (and likely more phone calls after that), we want to create a clear pathway along the journey with incremental steps leading toward an easy, online booking. Not only does this streamline the consumer experience, but it also makes tracking and optimizing that digital pathway much more manageable.

What It Takes

- Developing a shared understanding of the thought process and needs of healthcare consumers at this stage of their journeys

- Designing an information architecture and content structures to support the navigation of care options from a consumer perspective vs. an organizational perspective

- Creating online conversion points for booking care, working to ensure usability and consistency for the consumer

- Using search-driven experiences and AI-powered relevancy to assist healthcare consumers in navigating the variety of options

- Considering chatbots and live chat options to offer additional choices for facilitating this stage of the journey

Continuous Health & Wellness

An Omni-channel Patient Relationship

With the care journey under way, the next challenge is how to sustain and support that journey in a consistent way across multiple digital and offline touchpoints.

The current experience for many care journeys lacks any digital follow-up at all. For some areas there may be touchpoints triggered and delivered through multiple different systems. Offline interactions through phone calls or in-office conversations may be completely disconnected from the digital experience. The challenge is bridging these multiple back-end systems and processes to create a consistent and connected care experience for consumers.

Key Opportunities

The vision is to create an ongoing experience that gets better the more you use it, to enable improved, more efficient and proactive care, to incorporate wellness into the experience and to build a strong relationship between your brand and the consumer. While initial priorities for supporting that journey may be primarily focused on follow-through and follow-up, the ultimate goal is to create an easily accessible experience that is predictive and incorporates personalized care planning, individualized wellness, and tools for navigation and shared decision making.

While the consumer preference has appeared to trend toward more transactional care in the place of deeper provider relationships, in many ways we've given the consumer no choice in making this tradeoff if they are seeking convenient, timely care options. For healthcare to be as frictionless as other purchasing decisions, the consumer, up to this point, has been limited to choosing from more transactional forms of care — urgent care, virtual care, retail health clinics — often outside of the health system.

The challenge here is twofold: to reduce friction in accessing traditional care while simultaneously working to better integrate more transactional modes of care making them a true continuation of the care experience.

What It Takes

- Using UX research tools such as journey mapping to create a user-centered understanding of the overall experience and touchpoints along the way

- Selecting technologies that can support omnichannel delivery of the digital experience, thinking beyond the website into mobile, email, text messaging, and voice

- Implementing identity management and consumer-facing single-sign-on systems, creating an umbrella over multiple back-end systems, and shielding the user from internal complexity

- Developing unified approaches to orchestration and message delivery to ensure that multiple on- and off-line channels work together in harmony

Unified Data

A Singular Customer View for Digitally Driven Business

In order for these consumer-facing experiences to be reshaped and continue to evolve, substantial changes need to happen backstage both to directly support the reimagined

experience and to guide and validate the efforts.

Peter Drucker is credited with originating the business truism, "what gets measured gets managed." In healthcare it has been a challenge to see a long-term view of the value of a consumer relationship, including both patient lifetime value and how a consumer contributes to the choices of those around them.

Without the ability to measure long- term value, the tendency is to manage to the short-term result. While many organizations have made progress in tracking end-to-end conversions for specific entry points and services, these, though valuable, are not always consistent or widespread. To make a sustained case for a unified, reimagined digitally driven experience, the metrics need to align with the cumulative experience of the healthcare consumer.

Key Opportunities

With shifts from volume-based to value-based reimbursement models happening across healthcare, the change in point of view has already begun. The goal is further expanding that point of view into more areas of the organization and ensuring that the voice of the consumer, not just the medical chart or pocketbook, is considered.

With these shifts already beginning, the pressure is on digital experience teams to connect to these enterprise-wide initiatives and leverage the momentum to benefit the consumer experience. This will require incorporating consumer experience metrics into that enterprise view of the individual to ensure that experience is considered at the same level as clinical or financial metrics. These internal changes will enable a true change in focus outputs to outcomes.

Additionally, unifying this data is essential to creating a seamless digital experience. Experience strategies such as personalization are best served by as expansive a view as possible of the organization's interactions with a particular consumer.

In the past, siloed data has led to user experiences that undermine the idea of personalization. If, for example, the information about a consumer's preferred primary care provider, recent flu shot or ER visit aren't reliably available, the messaging delivered through personalization and automation may make it obvious that parts of the organization don't talk to each other rather than creating the intended feeling of a close patient relationship.

What It Takes

- Considering customer relationship management (CRM) solutions from an enterprise-wide perspective in order to create a consumer-centered, long-term view that spans departments

- Using consumer-facing identity management and single-sign-on systems in conjunction with a CRM strategy to assist in analyzing the results of multiple touchpoints over time

- Expanding tracking and reporting to focus on end-to-end conversions and, ultimately, taking a lifetime perspective in how the outcomes of the digital experience are measured

What It Takes to Achieve Success

Creating a digital front door experience draws on the efforts of multiple functional areas requiring change and realignment across the organization. Ensuring success involves considering five essential aspects of transformation: strategy, consumer focus, process, technology, and readiness to change.

Strategy

A concrete business strategy clarifies the organization's reason for pursuing a change. Of all the ways that we could engage and delight healthcare consumers, which are the ones that matter to the business? What will success mean to the organization? A defined strategy helps to align thinking, prioritize efforts, and set the wheels of change in motion.

Consumer Focus

Gaining a deep, ongoing understanding of your healthcare consumers begins with a user research program, a customer data strategy, and the creation of artifacts such as personas, patient journey maps, and customer data dashboards that encapsulate this understanding.

This information leads to insight — the vision for the desired consumer experience. Successful organizations will put consumer experience goals at the same level as other organization-wide, business-critical metrics such as financial targets, quality, and patient safety.

Process

To be successful, the internal workings of the organization must be synchronized with the digital experience. Depending on the aspects of the experience, this may require alignment with office staff, call center, billing, customer service, information technology, communications. or marketing. This work doesn't — and can't — fall into the responsibilities of a "consumer experience department."

The mindset shift here is away from a vertical orientation within organizational silos toward horizontal integration, ensuring that the consumer's digital journey is seamless even when the path winds through multiple internal functions.

Technology

The work of selecting and implementing software and technical solutions really begins with creating a vision for the desired consumer experience. From there the challenge is ensuring the technology can support the demands of that experience, adequately support the back-end needs, integrate into internal users' workflows and, ultimately, deliver on the business strategy.

The other critical aspect is not the specific technologies selected but an overall approach to building value through a product rather than a project mindset. Where a project lays out an end state from the start and takes a series of steps to get there, a product mindset focuses instead on value creation and uses a process of prioritizing incremental steps that continually increase the value created. This approach begins delivering value sooner and incorporates learning along the way.

Readiness to Change

Even with all the individual pieces in place, creating and sustaining a new direction requires an organizational readiness to embrace change. The groundwork of this process is in communicating the need for change as well as the urgency for acting now. Communication and stakeholder engagement are critical throughout the effort as is sustaining the changes over the long term.

Where to Begin

Completely reimagining how consumers interact with your organization is no small task. Starting points are certainly not a simple to-do list to knock out in an afternoon. Think of them as conversations to encourage your organization on the path.

1. Establish clear ownership for consumer-facing digital experiences.

One of the challenges of creating an immersive platform is that many systems and processes that have historically been seen as internally facing — think of electronic medical records, credentialing databases, and scheduling systems — have a substantial impact on the digital consumer experience.

Truthfully, these systems have likely always impacted the offline consumer experience, but the direct connection between systems means that their impact is much more direct with no human front-desk person to put a friendly veneer over the rough patches.

Because of this, it's critical that there is a stakeholder for the consumer-facing digital experience inside the organization. The intention is not to create a turf war. To begin with, it's an opportunity to be curious, build awareness of the effect internal decisions have on the consumer experience and to spread information and insights about the consumers you serve.

2. Create a relentless focus on the consumer experience.

To have information and insights to share requires an ongoing focus on gathering information whether that's through market research, interviews, analytics, observation — anything you can get your hands on. Leading healthcare organizations have been laying the groundwork to make sure the process of gathering information is as frictionless as possible. Having an established patient panel, regularly scheduled user research sessions or a go-to partner can help to prevent the tendency to guess rather than find out what your actual audience thinks, says or does.

3. Combine short-term wins with a long-term vision.

Somewhat counterintuitively, a smart approach to creating widespread change is to start small, focusing on creating early wins and making sure that this success is visible. Armed with a long-term vision and a product mindset, you can focus on iteratively improving slices of the digital experience that create substantial value for the organization. These focus areas may be selected to build on the momentum of enterprise-wide initiatives. However, you choose to begin, these opportunities offer a chance to break down silos and to illustrate for the organization what a better digital experience looks like — and the results that can be created.

4. Let the experience vision and strategic objectives drive the technology.

It's tempting to let a shiny piece of technology get the better of us. A flashy app or trendy bit of AI may seem to offer a solution to all our digital experience challenges. The result can fall short, however, by further complicating the situation. Starting instead from a deep understanding of the consumers' needs and the desired experience works to ensure that time and resources are focused where they can add most value to that experience.

How Geonetric Can Help

Geonetric works with health systems and healthcare provider organizations to create consumer-oriented digital strategies and exceptional digital experiences that drive value.

Digital Strategy

Deliver more meaningful digital experiences on digital experience platforms with thoughtful strategy.

- User Experience Research & Strategy
- Personalization Strategy
- Digital Front Door Strategy
- DXP / CMS selection

UX Design

Bring your brand to life with user experience-focused design for new builds or upgrades.

- Sitecore Implementation
- Drupal Implementation
- Website Redesign
- Upgrades & Migration

Continuous Improvement

Refine your site and grow the value of your investment in DXPs.

- User Testing
- User Interface Design
- Content Strategy & Development

About Geonetric

As a digital experience agency with deep technical and creative expertise, we provide hospitals, health systems, and medical groups with digital experience strategy, user experience consulting, website redesigns, and creative digital marketing services optimized for the unique needs of the healthcare industry.

We have our own popular healthcare-specific content management system, VitalSite®, and create compelling experiences on Sitecore, Drupal and other digital experience platforms.

For more information visit www.geonetric.com.