



Information is Power: How Hospital Administrators Research Online

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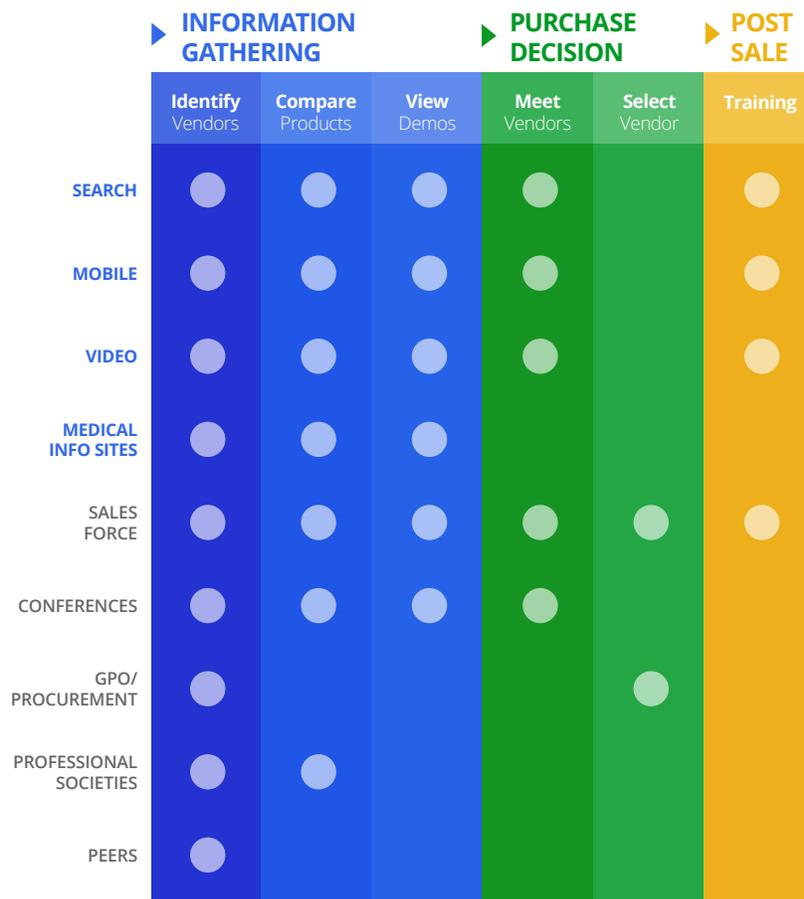
THE **RUNDOWN**

Before spending a bunch of money on a big-ticket purchase, you do some research, right? Doctors and hospital administrators are no different and, in health care, almost every purchase is a big one. Before meeting with sales reps, decision makers conduct online searches to become better-informed, more powerful buyers. Learn exactly which digital channels they're using, what kind of information they're looking for, and how to meet these valuable buyers at every point along their journey.

We might not think of them this way, but doctors and hospital administrators are the ultimate shoppers: They're spending large sums of money on expensive equipment and systems that can save lives. Buyers put a lot of care and thought into those purchase decisions, and with the uncertainty around health reform, these decisions are more important than ever.

In trying to understand more about how medical devices and electronic health record (EHR) systems are purchased, we surveyed more than 700 hospital administrators. We also conducted 60 in-depth interviews with hospital CFOs, CEOs, CIOs, physicians, OR and radiology directors and other key influencers.

We found that hospital buyers looking to replace, update or replenish medical equipment face a myriad of options. To gather information and help make up their minds, they turn to digital resources — search, mobile and video — throughout the purchase process. These research habits create new opportunities for marketers to reach them in the moments that matter.



How do hospital administrators decide?

The shopping process is constantly changing for B2B buyers — they now complete more than half of the purchase cycle before even contacting a sales rep.¹ They're gathering information, comparing options, and doing so without your input.

Doctors and hospital administrators are no exception. We found that every phase of their decision journey is evolving thanks to the web, from information gathering to post-sale and back again.

They filter options through online research

Buyers must maintain a delicate balance of improving clinical outcomes while lowering costs. That requires the right equipment, and more than half of hospital administrators turn to the web to research equipment options and become informed buyers.

When considering a long list of possible options, search plays a heavy role in narrowing them down to something more manageable. More than 90% of hospital administrators rely on search engines to identify vendor and product options and to research features. An imaging equipment customer offered, "The primary reason we conduct online research is to limit the number of vendors... We cannot deal with all 50 of them, and [we] try to pick the top three or four."

As hospital administrators begin to narrow their list of possible vendors, they also look for deeper education through clinical data (75%) and product reviews and comparisons (82%).



"Online research gives me the knowledge to ask the right questions," said one medical device buyer. "Information is power."

Armed with information, eight out of ten respondents move on to contact a vendor directly for more information, and more than 60% issue an RFP as a result of their search.

There's a simple way to become a part of the consideration set for hospital administrators

who research online: Provide information to would-be buyers to help in all aspects of their search, and make sure to be there when they're narrowing down the options.

They research to ask the right questions

Digital channels can provide a 360-degree view of the seller and their products, and that info can then transform the nature of a sales meeting. Now buyers can use their research to hold sales reps accountable. "Online research gives me the knowledge to ask the right questions," said one medical device buyer. "Information is power."

And they use that power, so be ready. Hospital decision makers bring up their research during sales calls and expect sales reps to be able to validate or counter their findings right away.

They move across screens

Mobile devices are a constant companion of hospital administrators. Fifty percent use smartphones while making purchase decisions, and of those, at least one in three use them to research with — such as reading product reviews and customer testimonials, and requesting product information.

And this trend isn't slowing down anytime soon; we predict that medical device-related searches on mobile devices will overtake desktop searches by mid-2014.² Meet that growing demand by developing your mobile strategy now.

For instance, a mobile-optimized site is essential. Buyers start conducting quick research on their mobile devices while in meetings and then return to their desktops to complete their reading. A mobile-optimized site should make that transition as fluid and frictionless as possible.

Videos provide a deeper look

Showing is better than telling, and online video plays a huge role for hospital decision making. Every customer we surveyed said they watch videos to see product demonstrations, and more than 60% watch online procedures and product comparisons. They want to see how the equipment is placed in the room and how the technicians, staff and patients interact with it. Buyers of medical devices and implants use videos to educate the surgeons who use the products, and electronic health records (EHR) buyers watch

demo videos to decide whether or not to meet with a rep.

Quick video hint: Shorter is better. “The perfect video is five minutes or less and shows the equipment being used,” suggests one buyer.

What’s more, videos drive researchers to act. After watching a video, 79% continue on to the manufacturer’s website for more information, and 63% talk to others about the information. Plus, a majority of these respondents directly contact a vendor, demonstrating the effectiveness of online video in landing a coveted spot on the buyer’s shortlist.

Don’t underestimate your efforts

Keep an eye on your metrics. Only one in three buyers are inclined to fill out an online contact form, something that may understate the effectiveness of digital tactics for buyers who reach out directly.

Tracking is even more important for mobile: While 45% of buyers reach out for more information after researching on their mobile devices, they do so directly, with less than 20% of buyers filling out contact forms on-the-go. Use tactics such as incorporating an “email me this” feature that enables mobile visitors to revisit your site later on their desktop, or Google Analytics’ Universal Analytics feature to track effectiveness of your mobile marketing.

Check in more often, post-sale

After the sale, digital tools can make it easier for sales teams and marketers to maintain the relationship. Online training videos and video chat services like Google Hangouts allow you to scale your customer service and support even when you can’t meet buyers face to face. So when it comes time to replenish supplies or upgrade to newer technologies, they’re more likely to stay loyal.



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About the methodology

Unless cited otherwise, the research for this article is from the Hospital Decision Makers Study, conducted in May 2013, by Google and HIMSS Analytics.

The study consisted of a survey to 749 hospital decision makers in April and May 2013 and 60 in-depth interviews, with a focus on four product areas: Electronic Health Records (EHR), Imaging Equipment (MRI, Ultrasound, CT, PACS), Implants and Medical Devices, and Surgical Equipment.

Respondents included hospital CFOs, CEOs, CIOs, physicians, surgeons, directors of surgical services, directors of materials management, directors of radiology, and IT directors.

Sources

- 1 Google & CEB's Marketing Leadership Council, [B2B Digital Evolution](#), February 2013
- 2 Google Internal Data