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Hospital Magazines: Top Tips From an Expert



Kathy Smith

*****@***jhm.edu

Vice President, Marketing &
Communications - The Johns
Hopkins Hospital
Senior Director, Strategic
Marketing & Outreach - Johns
Hopkins Medicine
Director of Administration - Johns
Hopkins Medicine

[Twitter](#)

Following *HealthManagement.org's* articles on [blogging](#) (La Calle et al. 2015) and [tweeting](#) (Wong and Mathieu 2015), in this issue, HealthManagement.org puts the hospital magazine in focus. Kathy Smith, Vice President of Marketing & Communications at [The Johns Hopkins Hospital](#) and director of the quarterly publication, [Johns Hopkins Health](#), shares her tips on how to create a magazine that works for both readers and the hospital.

How long have you been involved with the publications for Johns Hopkins Hospital?

We created the concept for Johns Hopkins Health, our primary consumer health and wellness newsletter, in 2007. We first started producing the publication in 2008, following comprehensive research via focus groups to ensure we would produce a publication that was useful and well received by our target audience.

Tell us about your publications. As well as your online presence, do you have print versions?

Do you have to approach them differently and, if so, how? For Johns Hopkins Health, print and online strategy go hand-in-hand. One of the main goals of the publication is to drive readers online to our consumer health resources for more information about topics featured in the publication. These resources include our consumer health hub, video galleries, health library, social channels and patient stories.

We also make Johns Hopkins Health available online (hopkinsmedicine.org/news/publications/johns_hopkins_health) and post individual articles in our social media channels so we can share its content with a larger audience. Prior to posting content online, we optimise articles for keywords so it's easier for our online readers to find relevant information. We also re-package stories for our primary consumer health e-newsletter, [Your Health](#).

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What in your view makes an effective and successful hospital publication?

Engaging, digestible content that showcases the innovative work of our researchers, clinicians and staff, while keeping the readers' interests and needs front and centre makes for an effective and successful hospital publication. We use Johns Hopkins Health to share useful health information with our readers from Johns Hopkins' unique point of view, and keep our focus on keeping our readers well and out of the hospital. We inform them about topics that can help prevent disease, but also provide information about diagnosis and treatment of disease should they encounter health issues and need to make decisions that can impact the rest of their life.

How important is it to keep in touch with your readers' wants and how do you do this?

It's very important to stay in touch with our readers' wants and needs. To accomplish this, we periodically survey our readers to check in. Additionally, we look at website traffic and event registrations to see what topics are resonating with consumers. This information influences the content we feature in the publication.

What is the most challenging part of producing publications for Johns Hopkins Hospital?

The most challenging part of producing any print publication at Johns Hopkins Health is deciding what to include. We have so many amazing stories to tell and knowledge to share. We know we can only capture a reader briefly, so we need to make tough choices about what to include that will entice our audience to engage with our content.

What is the most satisfying part?

The most satisfying part of producing Johns Hopkins Health is sharing the amazing and often life-changing work of Johns Hopkins experts. From providing simple health tips to translating complex advances in research and new treatment options, our publication serves as a resource to improve the health of the populations and communities we serve.

What has been the most surprising part?

One of the most surprising parts of producing Johns Hopkins Health is that we still receive hand-written letters from our readers thanking us for the publication — in this fast-paced, digital age. It's a joy to hear stories from readers who found support from a patient story, wanted to share the publication with friends, or brought an article to an appointment to show their physician.

How do you decide on content for the publications?

The publication's content is determined by an internal team that represents a wide variety of Johns Hopkins research and clinical areas. Our goal is to include content from across the institution, including cutting-edge research, new treatment options and tips for everyday health and

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wellness. It's very much a team effort.

What is your top tip for hospital administrations considering producing a publication on their activities?

Publications are a great branding tool for healthcare institutions and generally serve long-term goals. As a result, it may be difficult to measure immediate engagement and response. And, remember that you need to engage readers with content that they want to receive when they are healthy, or to stay healthy. Many want to read more about tips for preventing cancer, not about the newest piece of surgical equipment to treat cancer. We're competing with many other mailbox items and periodicals — major consumer health and news magazines, the school newsletter, coupons and bills. We need to stand out and draw the reader in with something they want to spend a few minutes of their precious time with that might be very different than what we want to grow patient volumes for.

Finally, what is the most important characteristic of a good team?

Good teams listen to each other. When you bring a diverse group of colleagues together to produce a deliverable such as a publication you get many ideas and rich perspectives. good teams respect each other's thoughts and ideas even if not everyone is in agreement. And the outcome is usually something great!

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