



COLLECTIVE
MEASURES®

2026 Trend Predictions

Key industry-specific trends that will shape the marketing landscape next year

Healthcare

The rise of
consumer-controlled
health and wellness



31%

of consumers **believe hospitals prioritize high-quality care over profits**, down from 77% in 2021. This makes it clear that consumer trust in the U.S. healthcare system is eroding.

37%

of U.S. adults list their **healthcare provider as their preferred source of health information** when facing a health issue; over half now cite online and social media sources as their primary source.

52%

of Americans have **tried a new health trend, product, or technique found on social media in the past year**, illustrating the degree of influence wielded by non-traditional sources.

2026 TRENDS

Healthcare

1

Patients are becoming *their own experts*

2

AI has become a *frontline health advisor*

3

Influencers are reshaping the health *information ecosystem*

1

**Patients are
becoming *their
own experts***

7 in 10

Americans are guilty of “patientsplaining”
their online health findings to their doctor.



Health consumers take the lead, shaping how brands must engage to stay ahead

Patients are doing in-depth research before engaging with healthcare providers.

75% of U.S. healthcare seekers cross-reference products online and turn to communities like Reddit for advice and real-life experiences.

The rise of MedTech is opening new doors for marketers in self-directed care.

The adoption of wearable medical devices and remote patient monitoring puts real-time health data directly into patients' hands, providing avenues for tools and insights that reinforce brand credibility.

Brands must integrate authentic storytelling to meet consumers where they get health advice.

70% of Gen Z and 53% of Millennials have followed health advice from social media, even if it contradicts a professional.



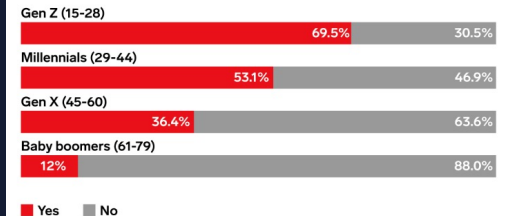
Reddit: The Internet's New Second Opinion in Healthcare

How real experiences are driving health decisions

Most Gen Z and Millennials Take Medical Advice From Social Media, Even Over That of a Provider

% of US consumers who have seen health-related info on social media, by generation, Dec 2024

Q: Have you ever followed advice from someone on social media platforms, even if contradicted what your doctor or other medical professional told you?



Note: n=1,173 who have used the internet to look up medical information; "yes" includes "yes, every/each time" and "yes, sometimes" responses
Source: EMARKETER Survey, "US Digital Health 2024," Jan 2025

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Strategies for success

Know your audience to influence every touchpoint

Effective marketing starts with a deep understanding of your patients. Audience strategy uncovers demographics, motivations, mindsets, and behaviors to guide paid and organic campaigns.

Understand how patients seek information – including online forums like Reddit, social media, wearable apps, health portals, and HCP interactions – and use these insights to anticipate questions and deliver relevant content.

Reaching patients directly is increasingly important

Move beyond solely reaching healthcare professionals and **engage directly with empowered patients by investing in channels they actively use**, including social media, online forums, and streaming services.

Direct-to-consumer marketing educates patients about diseases, treatment options, and therapies, giving them the knowledge and confidence to take the next step and have more informed, meaningful conversations with their healthcare providers while ensuring your brand is a visible thought leader.

Guide patients from understanding to action with MedTech

Leverage MedTech platforms to educate patients about their conditions and treatment options while making their health data actionable. By providing interactive tutorials, personalized insights, and peer-to-peer learning through forums, apps, or social communities, **patients gain the understanding and confidence to engage in their care.**

Use notifications, reminders, and contextual benchmarks to translate data into concrete steps, helping patients discuss treatment options with providers, adhere to plans, and take meaningful action in managing their health.

2

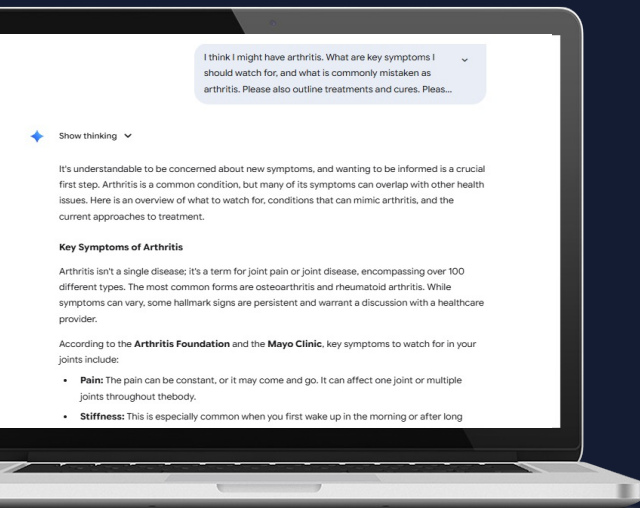
**AI has become a
*frontline health
advisor***

3 in 5

Americans have used an AI platform like ChatGPT, Gemini, or Claude for health advice.



Marketing must evolve to combat rising health misinformation, compete for visibility in AI rankings, and guide consumers through new models of care



Experts must counter AI-driven misinformation.

The likely increase in health misinformation generated by AI research will require greater involvement and weighing in from medical experts for public education and content creation.

AI ranking is highly competitive.

Achieving visibility in AI platforms can be challenging, especially when competing against key healthcare aggregators and established authoritative sources.

Independent diagnostics drive new care models.

Non-traditional, independent diagnostics will lead to the need for new care models, including transparent health plans, telehealth, and integrated health apps and wearables.

Strategies for success

Expand into generative engine optimization (GEO)

SEO is no longer just about ranking on Google; it's about making your content attractive to AI models.

This means expanding traditional SEO to include GEO (generative engine optimization) – efforts like monitoring brand presence in AI results, focusing on content chunking, and auditing messaging for consistency across the digital landscape.

Build authority outside of search to benefit search

In search, **authority is everything**. While ranking once relied mainly on credible, relevant website content, today, brand mentions across the web function as the new backlinks – directly influencing both traditional and AI-driven search visibility.

This makes earned media, influencer relations, and SEO critical partners and underscores the need to build authority beyond your website through brand media, earned coverage, and thought leadership from creditable voices.

Don't fight independent research behaviors – adapt to them

As AI becomes the new health advisor, **the goal is not to fight consumers' independent research behaviors but to adapt to them**. Brands can do this by providing easy-to-use tools, resources, and engagement experiences that guide the journey with credible, brand-led support.

Examples include AI-informed FAQs or chatbots to provide reliable answers, coverage and cost calculators to clarify benefits, wearable and app integrations to connect health data, personalized content hubs that adapt to user needs, and decision support tools for plans or treatments.

3

Influencers are reshaping the *health ecosystem*

85%

of physicians say their patients mentioned social media posts during a medical appointment.

Social Media Accounts US Social Media Users* Follow for Health-Related Content, Dec 2023

% of respondents



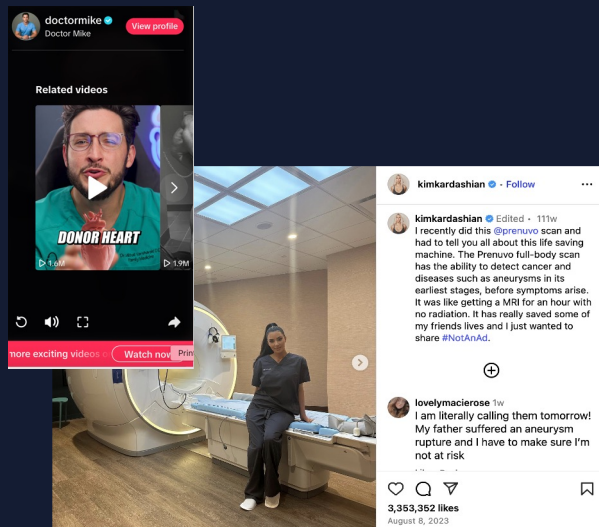
Note: n=485; Q: "Is the person you follow for health-related content on social media platforms one or more of the following? Select all that apply."; *who followed/engaged with a health influencer on social media platforms

Source: EMARKETER Survey, "US Digital Health 2023," Jan 2024

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Influencers are becoming a primary source of health information, especially among younger populations



Trust is shifting toward relatable, peer-like voices.

The movement of trust toward relatable, peer-like voices gives content creators an outsized influence compared to traditional brand authorities.

Noncompliance in creator content poses risks for brands.

The stakes are high, as inaccuracies or regulatory noncompliance in creator content can rapidly erode brand trust and invite legal and public scrutiny.

Influencer content drives awareness and stronger engagement earlier in the funnel.

Content from influencers shapes consumer awareness and decisions earlier in the marketing funnel, often delivering significantly stronger engagement than traditional branded content.

Strategies for success

Elevate the right voices through smart identification and activation

Influence grows **when brands know when to speak directly to patients and when to elevate other voices** – from executives and employees to trusted creators and health influencers.

Through influencer efforts, brands can identify genuine partners that are already part of the conversation, making their presence feel natural and credible.

A deep dive into audience relevance, engagement quality, content style, and brand alignment ensures partnerships are authentic and effective. This intentional approach builds credibility, expands reach, and drives meaningful engagement at scale.

Extend, amplify, and scale influencer content

Don't let influencer content live in a silo.

Proactively amplify it across owned channels, paid media, and social search to multiply reach, reinforce messaging, and maximize ROI. The goal is purposeful amplification – not just dividing content into paid and organic, but ensuring your brand shows up in active discovery (through social SEO) and passive discovery (through paid campaigns and distribution).

Done well, cross-channel amplification drives visibility, influences audiences, and supports objectives across the full funnel.

Adopt a more holistic measurement approach

Develop a measurement approach that **goes beyond impressions** to include brand lift, intent, lead conversion, and lifetime value. Stop siloing channels and connect the dots across a fragmented landscape – from how an optimized TikTok video drives direct traffic days later to how an AI-powered search result influences a downstream conversion.

This integrated view reveals the true impact of influencer-led visibility across the funnel and enables optimization for both reach and resonance.

Let's chat

Collective Measures is a 100% employee-owned media agency specializing in full-funnel connections strategy and advanced analytics. With origins rooted in search and an expertise in understanding consumer intent, we are a collective of media strategists, brand engagement experts, and data scientists who make the complexities of modern marketing simple. With numerous accolades for our client work across paid media, content marketing, search engine optimization, and marketing analytics, we are simply accountable to driving results.

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