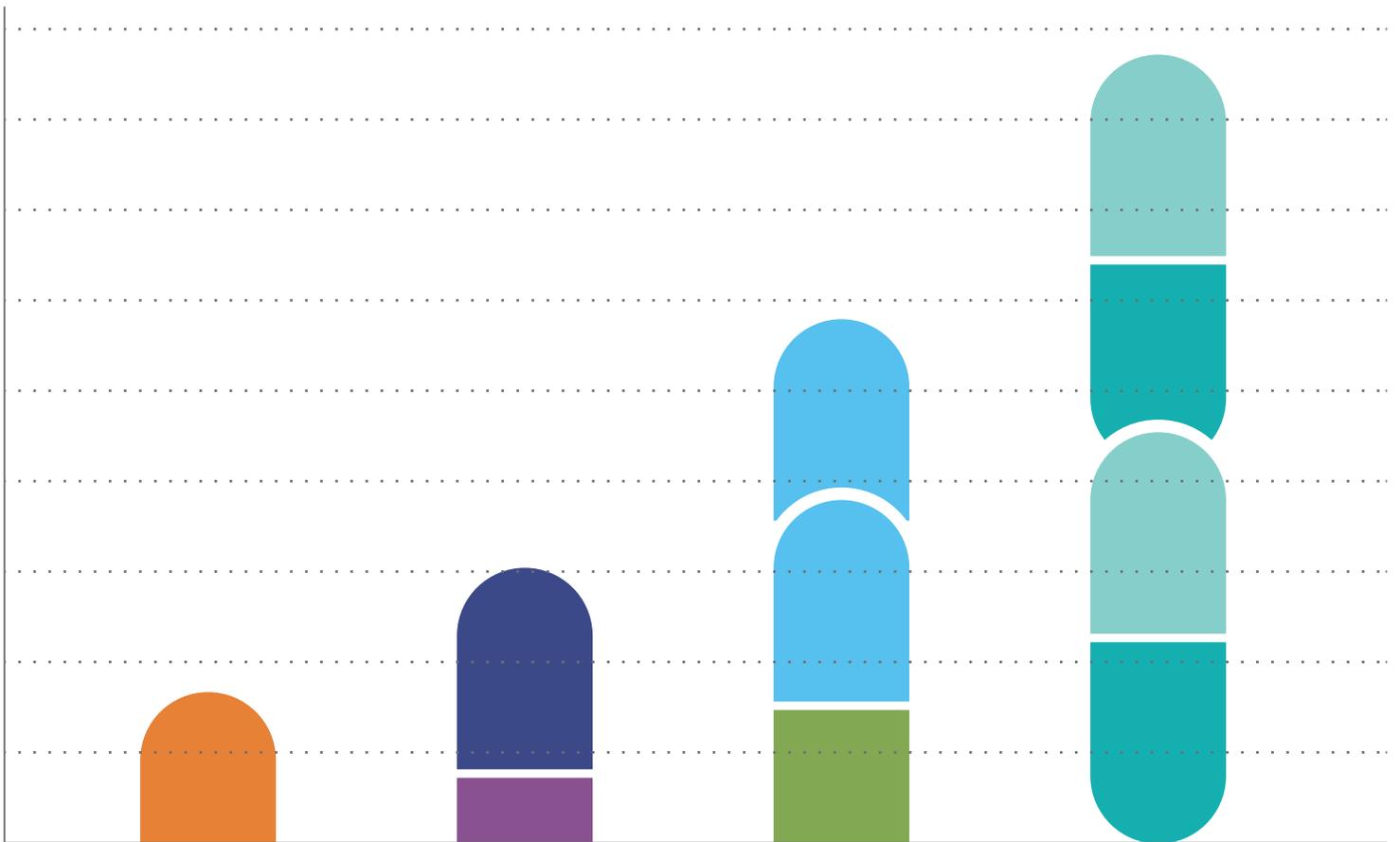


# BRANDED

Fresh Thinking About  
Branding and Marketing

## The Brand Supplement

When Hospitals Invest, Branding Improves ROI



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Hospitals today are investing billions of dollars: purchasing, acquiring, merging, integrating, upgrading, all with the goal of improving patient care at an affordable cost. But to get the most out of these investments – to connect with patients, healthcare professionals, and the communities they serve – hospitals must invest in, and leverage, one of their most important business assets: their brand.

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*Facing the need to provide quality care to more people at an affordable cost, hospitals are changing business strategies, striving to stay competitive – and solvent.*

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## A Healthy Dose of Change

American hospitals are undergoing transformational change. Facing the need to provide quality care to more people at an affordable cost, hospitals are changing business strategies, striving to stay competitive – and solvent – in the face of rapidly changing regulations amidst the need to invest in new technology and infrastructure while reducing costs.

Investment in the face of such change has taken many forms. A number of hospitals are investing in centers of excellence, or focused facilities that leverage research and best practices: 82% of these centers are now accredited by the Joint Commission. Government regulations also drive investment, as with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 demanding the implementation of electronic health records (EHRs), pushing hospitals “to spend billions of dollars over the next decade to upgrade their IT systems,” according to McKinsey. The need for investment has also been a key factor in a trends towards consolidation: the number of hospital mergers has nearly doubled since 2009 because of “ongoing pressure to deliver higher quality care at lower cost,” also according to McKinsey.

As business models evolve to include investments in new systems, technology, mergers, physician groups, and other improvements, the way hospitals brand themselves must evolve as well. Simply making investments does not ensure an acceptable return. Investments – and the rationale behind them – must be communicated as part of an overall brand that conveys the most meaningful benefits to each of its constituent groups. For patients and the community, this might mean greater availability of quality and convenient care. For healthcare professionals, an investment might mean a new opportunity to provide care in a more efficient or effective manner.

*At a time of increasing investment – and competition – a brand can be one of a hospital's most important business assets.*

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## Just Because You Built It Doesn't Mean They Will Come

At a time of increasing investment – and competition – a brand can be one of a hospital's most important business assets, helping it attract new patients as well as skilled healthcare professionals, and become the provider of choice within their region.

We observed this first hand when working with an integrated healthcare system in New Jersey formed by the merger of three regional hospitals. By combining the resources of three institutions, the new entity aimed to provide patients with coordinated care across a broad network of specialties and specialized technology. Striving to build an entire integrated system from the ground up, the hospital group invested in new technology, created an impressive physician group by acquiring leading practices, launched an insurance subsidiary and created a network of centers of excellence.

To play off a line from “Field of Dreams,” just because you built it doesn’t mean they will come. Although the system was coming together, the challenge this group was facing was to translate their business strategy into a compelling value proposition for all key stakeholders, conveying precisely how these investments would affect the quality of healthcare.

*Research helped uncover discrepancies and get to the heart of what patients really cared about.*

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## Brand Diagnostics

Communities vary, and the needs and expectations of patients – even within a single county – can differ vastly. Research helped uncover these discrepancies and get to the heart of what patients really cared about. In-depth conversations and quantitative surveys revealed that one population segment, for example, was driven mainly by convenience and cost, while another was focused on the importance of the doctor-patient relationship. To be successful, the new brand had to appeal to both types of patients.

Research also revealed the types of questions people would be asking: how would the consolidation of three independent hospitals into one integrated system benefit patients? Why should a physician group sell its practice to the new system? Would accessing healthcare become more bureaucratic and less personal?

This research led to a compelling brand idea: “360 Degrees of Coordinated Health Care.” The brand is focused on the patient experience: the new integrated system would be more responsive to patient needs by pulling together all facets of their care, from the hospital to the doctor’s office to the home. It presented the newly formed organization as a positive contributor to quality healthcare, not just a bottom-line-focused business. The new brand strategy was supported by a visual identity system that projected the key values and tenets of the brand: a strong sense of approachability, warmth and inclusion.

*Using the brand as a springboard, these teams ultimately drove a fundamental redesign of the hospital patient experience, and created a multi-year blueprint for investment and transformation.*

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## Bringing the Brand to Life From the Inside-Out

Success of the new brand – and the new model of healthcare delivery – hinged on the health system’s people: as the face of the integrated system, their behaviors shaped the majority of each and every patient experience.

*A powerful brand is delivered via consistent behaviors and communications.*

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A number of internal engagement initiatives were set up to gain buy-in and to ensure internal stakeholders were empowered to deliver on the new brand promise. First, brand-based training materials were developed for the management team to deliver to staff. These helped everyone in the system understand their role in bringing the brand to life. Next, leadership teams from the three formerly-separate hospitals came together in a series of working and planning sessions to create system-wide policies, procedures, cultural norms, employee training and evaluation criteria. Using the brand as a springboard, these teams ultimately drove a fundamental redesign of the hospital patient experience, and created a multi-year blueprint for investment and transformation.

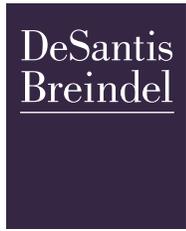
All of these efforts lead to specific promises to patients as well as measurable behavioral expectations for medical staff and employees. Everyone in the organization is challenged to continuously ask what he or she can do to credibly offer “360 Degrees of Care.” This new brand – now at the center of the unified system – offers a vision of patient experience that all hospital group doctors, medical staff and employees can rally behind. Healthcare professionals are constantly encouraged to live up to that experience, and are now evaluated in part on their success at doing so. In this way, the brand provides a solid foundation for a more patient-centered way to think through issues, operations, and standards, serving as a guide for many key decisions and measuring success.

With internal stakeholders firmly on board, the brand was launched externally through a synchronized marketing campaign. This included print, online and outdoor advertising, direct mail, a new literature system, and a mobile-optimized, responsive website that communicated a clear promise to patients and other external constituents.

## Maximizing the Value of Health Care Investments

As hospitals continue to spend billions to deliver exceptional health care, if they expect to truly see the business impact of these investments they must translate this spending into powerful value propositions for patients and caregivers. By focusing on what these investments enable – by focusing on the story, the experience: the brand – hospitals will be more successful in attracting new patients and highly qualified healthcare professionals. A powerful brand is delivered via consistent behaviors and communications; it conveys the relevant benefits and rationale of investments, revealing a system that better serves the patients, healthcare professionals and communities. It presents a set of values that are shared by the entire staff. This sense of unity and purpose is translated to patient care, and in turn elevates patient experience. After all, that’s the goal that all health professionals share: providing compassionate, quality care.

*By aligning brand strategy with business strategy – by supplementing investments in technology, people and infrastructure with an investment in brand – a hospital can maximize the value of these investments and connect with all of the constituents most critical to its success.*



30 West 21st Street  
New York, NY 10010  
212 994 7680  
[desantisbreindel.com](http://desantisbreindel.com)

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## About DeSantis Breindel

DeSantis Breindel is a branding and marketing firm based in New York. At critical inflection points, we work with our clients to align brand strategy with business strategy— creating stories and experiences to engage customers, influence prospects, rally employees, inspire investors and build communities. To learn more go to [www.desantisbreindel.com](http://www.desantisbreindel.com)

## About Brenda Smith + Associates

Brenda Smith + Associates is a branding and marketing firm based in New York. We're passionate about helping brands, organizations and products connect with the customers who matter most, and have deep experience solving complex brand challenges in dynamic industries and environments. We get to the heart of what target customers believe, how they behave, what drives their purchase decisions, and what they have to hear and experience to say yes – and then work with our clients to act on that understanding to drive internal action, external messaging and revenue growth.