Chapter I

The Development of a Web Strategy in a Healthcare Organization:
A Case History

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Abstract

Many writers have described the advantages that the Internet can bring to a healthcare organization in terms of consistent improvements in efficiency and efficacy, the reduction of access time to services, and an improved awareness of these. Bankruptcy costs and devastating failures of investments in technology would have us believe that the go-to Internet has taken place, at least in the healthcare field, with a certain improvisation and without a thorough knowledge of the full potential that the Internet offers. This chapter presents a way to define a Web strategy by aligning a company's corporate strategy, in which there is an acceptance and awareness of the possibilities that the Internet offers by the principal company stakeholders, with a general strategy of utilization of information and communication technology.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a veritable literary frenzy on the theme of healthcare and the Internet. In these works, however, there has not been adequate attention paid to the role that potential users of the site (patients, general practitioners, healthcare personnel, students, private doctors, other healthcare organizations, etc.) could and should play in the process of defining the Internet strategy.

To overlook these aspects while planning the information content and services of a Web site would have the same consequences as failing to do a stakeholder analysis while planning corporate strategy. This, in fact, allows the identification and analysis of the importance of people, groups, or institutions that can influence, positively or negatively, corporate activity, consequently determining the success or failure of a strategy. The objective, in the final analysis, is to identify their expectations, needs, and requirements so as to ensure correct alignment with the corporate strategic policy. This process is much more important when you are about to change the logistics of the production or provision of a product or service.

To put it more simply, you cannot hope to develop a high-profile Web strategy when patients do not have access to the Internet or lack technological skills, when the doctors of the organization are not interested and do not want to collaborate in providing the various content for services to be offered by the site, or when the general practitioners (GPs) do not regard the Internet as a tool that can improve their working conditions or results.

Objectives and Research Methodology

This study had the aim of determining the best methodological approach to take for a healthcare organization to determine and develop its own Web strategy. In particular, our intention was to look for useful knowledge that would allow us to understand the following:

- How does one determine the best strategy for the "colonization" of the virtual space made available by the Internet?
- How does one use the Internet to the best of its potential to provide information, offer services, make transactions, and interact (in real time) with patients, doctors, and whoever has an interest in any way in the organization?
- What will the impact be on corporate strategy and clinical, organizational, and management processes?

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