

Future-Forward

6 Sales Management Strategies to Accelerate Growth for 2021



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The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everything in health care, including sales and marketing. No longer can sales teams depend on the in-person visits that previously drove referrals and patient contact. In the coming year, sales and marketing efforts in home health care must account for this change.

This means using market intelligence data to drive growth from both your top accounts and new customers. This white paper reveals the six sales management strategies that home health leaders are using to accelerate growth for 2021.

- Use market intelligence data
- Study your competitors
- Drive growth from your top accounts
- Sell the solution of a continuum of care
- Re-train your sales team
- Retain your customers

1

Use market intelligence data to develop valuable benchmarks

Home-based care agencies need to use market intelligence data to develop valuable benchmarks for the challenges that defined 2020 — both expected challenges, such as Patient-Driven Groupings Model (PDGM), and unexpected ones, namely COVID-19.



How market intelligence data can boost business

Vital to any home-based care agency's success is finding the right patients. For instance, in home health, identifying the patients who have been discharged without home health services, and having their primary care physicians refer them to a home health agency within that 14-day post discharge period, is paramount to the success of the entire process.

Gaining that referral at the right time is what keeps patients from going back to the hospital.

"If an agency can get them on their services within 14 days from the patient's discharge from an institutional setting, there's a higher payment rate for those patients," Ferris says. "It's good medicine and is a strong predictor of eliminating unnecessary rehospitalizations, but it's also good for the reimbursement that the agency receives."

Using this data will help them survive the year's uncertainty while setting themselves for success in 2021 as more family decision-makers look for the right organization to care for their loved ones during these trying times.

While the post-acute care industry remains largely a relationship-based business, the providers that will emerge stronger on the other side of the pandemic are the ones utilizing data in all facets of their business. Just as tracking data for readmissions and emergency room visits is important, understanding the data and trends within an agency's market is similarly crucial.

"That's obviously of tremendous value to the system, to the hospitals and to everybody else," says Mike Ferris, the CEO of the strategic growth company Healthcare Strategica.

2 Study your competitors

Home health providers should be aware of how they compare with their competitors on a market share basis. They should also be cognizant of how they fare with higher-value patients and how they are driving referrals within each specialty — particularly when it comes to physician referrals.

“Having really good market intelligence data, such as the PlayMaker Health claims data that they have, is critical to that,” says Ferris.

As the health care landscape changes due to COVID-19, so will sales trends. Tactics from sales teams should follow suit. That starts with understanding the market and where new referrals will be coming from.

“We’ve used COVID-19 as an opportunity to gain access to referral partners that we haven’t really used previously,” says Alyson Cutshall, the chief growth officer of Teleios Collaborative Network, which uses PlayMaker’s post-acute software and CRM to advance the organization’s sales strategy.

Using market data and studying competitors doesn’t mean that providers need to rid themselves of past strategies, or lose business that’s been built up previously. It means driving growth in other areas, areas that could be more valuable down the line.

“Historically, being in the not-for-profit space, we focused primarily on hospitals, skilled nursing centers and assisted living communities — and physicians to some extent,” says Cutshall. “We’ve changed our whole focus to really dial in on physicians. And not only have we been able to maintain our business, we’ve actually been able to only grow our referral volume, and also grow the average length of stay of our referrals.”

3 Drive growth from your top accounts

Organizations seeking growth in 2021 must take the easier wins where they can find them. That means making the most of their top accounts.

Sales teams should go through needs assessments of their referral partners to identify their challenges and frustrations. The agency can then demonstrate how they can help those accounts — and further drive business.



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Chief Growth Officer
Teleios Collaborative
Network

“From top accounts, what we know is that historically — and it continues to be true — is that even the very best primary care practices that use a lot of home health don’t do a good job of identifying all the patients in their population that would benefit and qualify for home health services,” says Ferris. “The sales team has to continually be asking those good, probing questions. The default question that we teach is, ‘Which of your patients are taking up too much of your time today?’”

4 Sell the solution of a continuum of care

Identifying what competitors are doing elsewhere is one thing — but selling an agency as a unique brand with specific offerings that are superior to other choices is another.



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Mike Ferris, CEO
Healthcare Strategica

A sales communication plan must reflect that. Even if more referrals are available and more patients are flocking to home-based care, how a team communicates their own business will allow them to capitalize off of the macro trends.

“The most important thing for us to keep in mind coming out of this is that we have really cemented our position in the health care continuum, and that a lot of the value we brought to the table during the pandemic is equally as valuable, if not more so, coming out of it,” says Ferris. “Not only is home-based care a safe way to keep people out of more dangerous venues of care, but it’s also better for controlling costs and improving quality. At the end of the day, those are the keys to population management going forward.”

5 Re-train your sales team to execute your strategy

All the data and competitive intelligence in the world won't matter unless the sales team understands it conceptually and can apply it every day.

Concepts such as geo-targeted referral trends, physician profiles and historical trends and competitive agency trends will improve sales and also save time by allowing the team to focus on outreach that will drive growth.

But that data alone will not do the driving. If the sales team is not proficient in articulating trends that should guide agency sales, they'll spend more time analyzing the data than applying it.

"One of the things that we know is that if a salesperson spends a whole lot of their time analyzing data, it means they're not selling," says Ferris. "You have to have that balancing act of having your salespeople be good at identifying opportunities by looking at the data, but not spending all their time trying to sort through it."



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Introducing the sales team to smarter practices is undoubtedly an investment — but one that will pay off in the end.

6 Retain your customers

Finally, agencies need to retain those customers once they get them.

Personalizing retention strategies based on opportunity and finding right retention metrics will ensure that they keep coming back.

“Repeat business is certainly business that’s at the top of our mind,” says Cutshall. “Once we open a door, we want to make sure that we keep it open.”

Maintaining sales access in assisted living facilities and nursing facilities is harder than it is elsewhere right now. Getting around that means implementing innovative approaches and putting forth effort that may not be required elsewhere.

“We’re really tapping in and providing coaching and training to our clinicians so that they can affect referral volume in those facilities as well, because we’re not able to access them directly,” says Cutshall. “This is a slow moving strategy, but it really has begun to affect nice referral volume taking up from our facilities.”

Driving growth in 2021 will come with unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities. Harnessing the latter and taking measured approaches to data and sales training will allow agencies to see success while the COVID-19 pandemic lasts, as well as after it.

“Most of it is really simple, and I’m a huge fan of the concept that simply works,” says Ferris.

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