Interview: Carlos Mateos – CEO, COM Salud, Spain



"Big data is the main opportunity that the healthcare sector can capitalize on in Spain, with this possibility increasing the productivity of the healthcare sector. The current technology platforms allow for more personalization in the sector and will change the way in which professionals in the industry work, as well as providing a positive change for the patients too."

20.06.2018

Tags: Spain, COM Salud, PR, Digitalization, eHealth

Carlos Mateos, founder and CEO of Spanish digital healthcare PR specialist, COM Salud, discusses opportunities for the healthcare sector in eHealth and big data as well as the benefits that holding eHealth congresses in Spain can bring to the entire healthcare sphere.

What was the idea behind the creation of COM Salud and what niche did you see in the market?

The idea behind the creation of COM Salud 11 years ago arose from a lack of specialised PR companies in the healthcare sector in Spain. Indeed, there were many PR and communication companies set up, but they were not open to the possibilities of digital health. Therefore, this was the niche I saw in the market, a PR company adapted to the possibilities of digital health.

What have been the most important achievements for COM Salud over these past 11 years?

COM Salud's philosophy is to bring together the whole value chain in the healthcare sphere, so our most important role is the organisation of several eHealth events in Spain. Through the events we organise, we strive to bring together individuals who work independently, such as health professionals, managers, patients, authorities and technicians, to collaborate and network with one another. We have organised a range of different events, such as the eHealth Congress, in addition to the Health Hackathon, with a strong impact on social media. Beforehand, the key stakeholders in the industry used to hold individual congresses. This was the idea behind the eHealth Congress,

which had 55 million impacts on twitter consecutively for the past two years.

One of our most recent initiatives hopes to promote the effects of fake news, through the hashtag '*#SaludsinBulos*'. We have a good outreach in the media and this initiative has been our most successful so far.

What are the main opportunities that the healthcare sector can gain from implementing digital health?

Big data is the main opportunity that the healthcare sector can capitalize on in Spain, with this possibility increasing the productivity of the healthcare sector. The current technology platforms allow for more personalization in the sector and will change the way in which professionals in the industry work, as well as providing a positive change for the patients too. This use of big data is going to take some time to implement, however, it will help ease the pressure of cost-cutting in the healthcare sector and can better regulate the whole value chain, achieving better great results.

How can we better educate the healthcare system with regards to digital health?

The most effective way to communicate throughout the whole value chain will be to collect more data. Many understand the benefits of data, but we rarely see any solutions to collecting and consolidating it. WhatsApp is used by so many people, because of its efficiency and ability to remain user-friendly. It is necessary to educate professionals within the sector that they need similar applications to communicate with patients and provide a better service, allowing patients to have access to assistance anywhere and anytime.

[Featured_in]

What are your views of the giant technology companies as potential partners in the healthcare sphere?

There are negative perceptions and uncertainty surrounding these giant technology companies, such as Google and Amazon. In addition, the recent update of the data protection law is due to take effect this month, and so there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding the future of digital health. However, I feel that the digital aspects of our lives are sometimes overprotected. COM Salud has conducted an analysis of social media before the change, and we plan on doing the same after the change in the law is implemented, to get a better understanding of how our clients are feeling towards this change.

Anonymous data can be very useful in the healthcare sector, making the system more effective. However, with this change in the law, companies will have to start from scratch with their database and request permissions again to use people's data. There needs to be an agreement from all participants in the healthcare system to find a way to use the data we already have acquired. It is a shame to waste what we already have collected, however, the government and the local authorities need to be involved and manage this restructure.

What are COM Salud's main priorities and goals in digital health?

Our main aim is to join health professionals, patients and health technicians to create digital health solutions. In the past, we have seen developers creating applications for the healthcare system that was not relevant or effective for the industry. This is a common problem, with over 300,000 apps in the market which are not used, due to a lack of their efficiency and inability to be user-friendly. Hence why we created the Health Videogames Congress, to help combat this problem. An example of what this event aims to achieve saw a participant, a nurse, present a brilliant idea to educate children in health. However, the design was incredibly poor and there was no strategy behind the idea and thus no possible chance of engaging with the target audience. At this event, we were able to guide this idea in the direction of a developer, who worked together to successfully create a working concept. This congress is a platform that paves the way for those with an idea to collaborate with patients and developers to create an application that can be integrated into the healthcare system. Many healthcare professionals have an idea or a solution to implement the system but have never had the opportunity to develop it further.

Despite this success, we wanted to further develop this collaboration opportunity, and so last year at the second edition of the hackathon, we created a mentoring programme with different institutions helping to create business plans for some of the ideas we saw. We also aimed to join start-ups with the big companies we work with, so they can engage with entrepreneurs. Many start-ups already have a business plan and a strategy, however, are lacking in financial backing, and so they need investors and companies to invest in them.

Can you please elaborate on the different services you offer to your clients?

We offer our clients many different services in the range of communication, not only through traditional aspects but also as experts in SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and working with social media to reach the target audience for our clients. In addition, we organise training courses with the media and influencers in the industry.

What do you think is the biggest challenge that your clients face and how does COM Salud help them?

The challenge of communication is that it is constantly changing, and nobody knows exactly what the best way forward is. Traditional forms of media are no longer as useful, for example reading a newspaper or advertising on television. In addition, if you do not pay, you do not get the best communication options, which we at COM Salud are totally against. Our niche offering is our openness to innovation and the creation of new communication techniques. We aim to create other types of exciting content for companies to engage with their target audience.

[related_story]

In the changing technical environment, how do you ensure COM Salud is the leading provider of communication services in healthcare?

We try to innovate to the needs of our clients, adapting to their different budget sizes. Collaboration is key, in addition to a flexible structure. We are involved in a large network called eSalud, expanding the range of services that we can offer. This optimal model of collaboration sees companies in different areas of the value chain, such as developers and other communication teams, working together to meet our client's needs. We cannot all be experts in everything and so we need to coordinate activities and collaborate with others. We offer big media value through innovative solutions of communicating to the whole healthcare sphere, from patient associations to policymakers, who collaborate with COM Salud because we involve them in the formation of solutions.

Where do you envision the healthcare sector in Spain in the future and what role would you like COM Salud to play?

I would like the company to participate more in projects with prominent companies right from the beginning. When it comes to health, joining a project halfway through does not have the same benefits as overseeing from the beginning, and so we need to become more integrated at the very start. The question now is how to bring together the different channels at our disposal, allowing the participation in the strategic vision of companies. As experts in digital health, our background knowledge allows us to have a vision and become more integrated into the system.

Furthermore, COM Salud will strive to create an eHealth Hub in Spain at a national level, working in the two aspects of eHealth; technical and content. This has not been achieved yet and is only available at a regional level.

What would be your final message to our international readers looking for a potential communications partner in Spain?

The healthcare system is changing and that of everyone in it. Companies need PR agencies that know the sector and who can easily adapt. Here at COM Salud we practice what we preach, and our website is number one in search engine results, so we can confidently offer this service to our clients.

See more interviews