




BRIDGING THE GAP:

Why Urgent Care Needs a New Marketing Strategy

The healthcare marketer's guide to balancing performance with privacy



-  **PRIVACY COMPLIANCE**
-  **FULL FUNNEL MARKETING**
-  **VISITOR BEHAVIORAL DATA**

FRESHPAINT HEALTHCARE PRIVACY PLATFORM

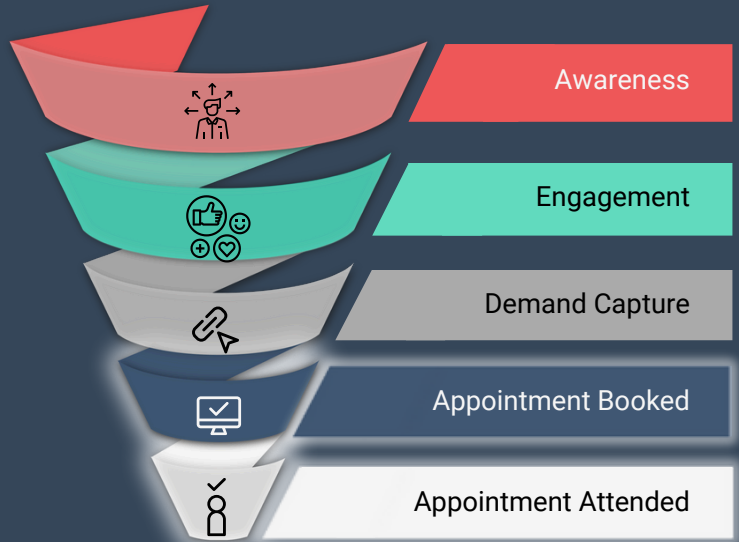








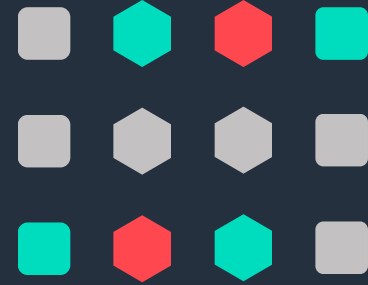


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Introduction



Urgent cares are one of the most aggressive marketing battlegrounds in healthcare. Clinics compete zip code by zip code. Patient intent is high. Digital performance, especially paid search, is the difference between steady growth and missed revenue targets.

But urgent care marketers face a unique challenge: **they're forced to compete in a game with tools that weren't built for them.** The rules of performance marketing, the ones that make Facebook, Google, and programmatic channels so powerful, rely on data. And in healthcare, data is locked down by HIPAA, state laws, and compliance teams who are rightly cautious.

This puts urgent care leaders in a double bind: You need data to drive performance. But using the wrong data, or using the right data in the wrong way, can trigger privacy law violations, lawsuits, and more.

That's why some of the fastest-growing urgent care providers are rethinking their entire marketing strategy. Not just to stay compliant, but to unlock the kind of results most healthcare organizations still think are out of reach.



Why Booked Appointments Are Lying to You ↘

If you ask most urgent care marketers how they measure performance, you'll hear the same answer: web clicks and form fills.

And at first glance, that makes sense. A potential patient fills out a form to book an appointment... your campaign did its job, right?

Not quite.

Booked appointments aren't the true conversion event because the act of booking an appointment doesn't generate revenue. What really matters is whether the patient showed up to that appointment.

If your marketing is generating lots of bookings, but a big chunk of them no-show or cancel, your reported cost-per-acquisition (CPA) is inaccurate. It's an inflated number that makes campaigns look better than they really are, and keeps you from seeing what's actually working.

This disconnect is everywhere in healthcare. Not because marketers don't care about real results, but because most marketing teams have no way to tie ad spend to actual care delivered. The data lives in silos. Your website analytics tools have some data, your EHR has more data, your CRM contains different data, and your ad platforms have something else entirely. You need to connect the dots, but HIPAA and other privacy laws make it difficult to connect the dots.

Without connecting those dots, you're optimizing in the dark, guessing which campaigns work and struggling to prove ROI to leadership.

Freshpaint

Know exactly which ads drive patient visits—without violating HIPAA.

Track Marketing ROI With Confidence—Maximize Patient Acquisition, Minus The Legal Risks.

[Learn More ↗](#)

Ad Click

Attended Appointment

That was exactly the case for one urgent care network. They were spending millions across paid channels, but because they could only optimize for bookings, not visits, their true cost-per-acquisition was hidden. That made it harder to justify spend, harder to scale what was working, and harder to defend marketing's value to the CFO.

GoHealth felt the same squeeze. As Senior Director of Marketing, Megan Quillian put it:

“We’re performance marketers. If we can’t track what happens after the click, we’re flying blind.”

Urgent care marketers don't need more booked appointments. They need more attended appointments. And they need the infrastructure to optimize for that, **without crossing legal lines.**



Why Traditional Tracking Tech Doesn't Work for Urgent Care

In most industries, marketing tech stacks are optimized for performance:



Marketers install ad platform trackers and pixels on their websites



Those pixels collect granular data about website visitors



That data is owned and controlled by the ad platforms



The ad platforms use that data to optimize performance in real time

That's the default. It works really well. Unless you're in healthcare.

Because the moment you step into healthcare, the rules change. Tracking the full patient journey isn't just hard, it's dangerous if done wrong. Why? Because the standard marketing toolkit wasn't built for HIPAA.

Here's the problem: Most marketing platforms, Google Ads, Meta, Microsoft Ads, you name it, do not sign [Business Associate Agreements](#) (BAAs). That means they legally can't receive [Protected Health Information](#) (PHI).

But with their tracking pixels, they do receive it. A lot of it. Every time a pixel or tag loads on a health-related webpage, it might be collecting:

- Device IDs
- IP addresses
- Page context (e.g., a URL like /services/cold-and-flu)
- Referral sources
- Click IDs
- And more

Even if you never intended to share sensitive data, you probably are. And that's a compliance nightmare. It's also a performance problem.

When regulators cracked down on healthcare marketing trackers, starting with a wave of lawsuits, followed by [HHS's December 2022 guidance](#), many marketing teams were told to rip everything out. No more analytics. No more ad pixels. No more data flowing to platforms that won't sign a BAA.

And what happened?

Performance collapsed. Cost per lead skyrocketed. Marketing became a black box. One provider saw an [8x increase](#) in CPL after removing ad pixels, because without conversion feedback, ad platforms couldn't optimize.

“We knew removing the pixels would protect us legally. But it also meant **killing performance**. For us, that wasn't sustainable.”

– Megan Quillian, GoHealth

Freshpaint

Don't Let Privacy Rules Wreck Advertising ROI Goals

70% Decrease in Cost Per Lead

Line graph showing In Network Leads (green) and Cost Per Lead (red) over 18 weeks. A blue line indicates Freshpaint Optimization, showing a significant drop in Cost Per Lead starting around Week 7. A red triangle points to the peak in Cost Per Lead before optimization, and a green triangle points to the low point after optimization.

[Learn More ↗](#)

This is the tradeoff healthcare marketers have been forced into:

1. **Protect patient data and kill performance.**
2. **Or drive results and take on legal risk.**

Neither works. What urgent care teams need is a third path, one that respects privacy, but still lets you grow.



How Leading Urgent Cares Are Driving Results Without Violating Privacy Laws ↘

Urgent care marketers shouldn't have to choose between compliance and performance. The winning teams aren't picking sides; they're choosing both by rethinking privacy. Winning teams approach privacy as an infrastructure layer. It's something you build into your marketing foundation so you can operate with confidence, not fear.

This is the model that GoHealth and other leading urgent care groups are now using:

- 1 Remove Risky Web Trackers
- 2 Add a Healthcare-Specific CDP
- 3 Reconnect the Feedback Loop

Freshpoint

Scan Your Website For Privacy Risks

Get a comprehensive view of all the web trackers on your website so you can protect sensitive patient information

[Learn More ↗](#)

Tracking tool	Pages detected	Risk	First detected
Google Analytics	6	HIGH RISK	11/1/2023
YouTube	5	HIGH RISK	11/1/2023
Google Fonts	127	LOW RISK	11/1/2023
Google Tag Manager	127	LOW RISK	11/1/2023
graph.facebook.com	84	UNKNOWN RISK	11/1/2023
pixel.wp.com	127	UNKNOWN RISK	11/1/2023

Step 1: Remove Risky Web Trackers

Ad pixels and web trackers from platforms like Meta and Google can't be trusted on their own. They collect too much, they collect by default, and they don't give you control. Worse, they expose you to legal risk, especially if you don't have a BAA.

So the first move is removing those trackers from your website.

This might sound scary. You've been told for years that those pixels are essential. But the truth is, it's not the pixels themselves that matter — it's the data they send. If you can still send that data, in a safer way, you don't lose performance.

That's the breakthrough.

Not sure how to find those web trackers living on your website? [Get a Web Tracker Monitoring report for free.](#)

Step 2: Add a Healthcare-Specific CDP

Instead of sending data directly from your website to ad platforms, you install a [privacy-first CDP](#) between them – a platform like Freshpaint that:

- Signs a BAA
- Collects data server-side
- Gives you full control over what gets sent and what gets suppressed

Think of it like a firewall: one system, under your control, that filters out sensitive data and only sends what's legally and strategically useful. You choose what to send to Google Ads (like click IDs or booking events), and block what's not allowed (like IP addresses or condition-specific URLs).

“Taking a privacy-first approach with marketing is definitely still doable as long as you have a partner like Freshpaint to help you through the process.”

– Andrew Lacomba,
[vybe urgent care](#)

vybe urgent care



Step 3: Reconnect the Feedback Loop

The reason most urgent care teams relied on risky pixels in the first place was to send back conversion data. That's how modern ad platforms optimize.

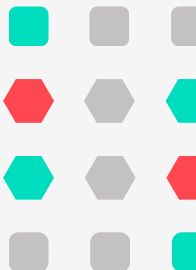
[Healthcare-specific CDPs](#) can re-establish that loop, but in a way that's governed, compliant, and documented. It lets you send “safe” signals like:

- Ad click, but not information about the landing page
- Appointment attended, but not the nature of the appointment

This means you get to keep the thing that makes digital work, conversion feedback, without exposing yourself to lawsuits or enforcement actions.

And because everything runs through one platform, you get a clean, consolidated view of the entire patient journey. No more siloed web data here, EHR data there, ad data somewhere else.

This is performance marketing, rebuilt for healthcare.



Proof: What Happened When Providers Optimized for Attended Visits ↴

A fast-growing urgent care provider with hundreds of clinics across multiple states was pouring millions into digital advertising, but lacked data to understand what was actually driving results.

Like many in healthcare, the marketing team was limited in how they could use data because of privacy laws, like HIPAA, limiting their ability to use data for marketing optimization. As a result, this provider's team was forced to optimize campaigns based on the default conversion signal in Google Ads: web clicks and form fills that served as a proxy for "booked appointments". But web clicks and form fills aren't the same as an attended appointment, and no-shows or cancellations were inflating cost-per-acquisition numbers.

Worse, the CFO viewed marketing as a cost center, and the CEO didn't fully understand what marketing platforms were providing a positive ROI. The team needed a clear, data-backed value story to justify the budget and continue innovating.

The advertisement features the Freshpaint logo in the top left. The main headline is "Connect Ads to Outcomes" with the subtext "From Click to Care—Know What's Driving ROI". A red button labeled "Learn More" with a right-pointing arrow is positioned below the text. On the right side, a funnel diagram illustrates the customer journey through five stages, each with an icon and a corresponding label: Awareness (red), Engagement (teal), Demand Capture (grey), Appointment Booked (dark blue), and Appointment Attended (white).

Seeing the Full Picture with Freshpaint

The provider partnered with Freshpaint to implement [Ad Performance](#), a solution designed to bridge the gap between appointment data and ad campaigns, all while staying HIPAA compliant. This enabled the provider to move beyond unreliable web conversion metrics and gain a clear view of ROI.

Freshpaint set up side-by-side campaign tests across different states and optimization strategies (CPA and tROAS). Each test measured cost per attended appointment, not just bookings, to reveal true marketing efficiency.

Delivering Real ROI

Freshpaint delivered measurable cost savings across multiple campaign tests. In four key experiments across different states and optimization strategies (CPA and tROAS), the urgent care provider saw consistent, double-digit reductions in marketing costs:

- The highest improvement came from Midwest Region A in which a tROAS strategy was used to drive a **27.5%** cost reduction, indicating the value of optimizing toward return on ad spend rather than cost-per-action alone.
- West Coast Region B and Midwest Region C each used different strategies, both saw **over 20%** cost reduction, supporting the national scalability of the approach.
- In Southern Region D, a CPA-focused campaign still achieved a **9%** cost reduction, demonstrating that even more traditional optimization strategies benefit when powered by deeper conversion signals.

With ad spend totaling \$3 million per year, even a conservative 10-15% efficiency gain would result in \$300,000-\$450,000 in annual savings. These results gave the marketing team exactly what they needed: clear, defensible proof that marketing was not just a cost center, but a growth driver. By showing how Freshpaint directly reduced acquisition costs while driving attended appointments, the team was finally able to shift the narrative with the CFO and demonstrate positive ROI to the CEO.

Performance Without Compromise

Freshpaint enabled this urgent care provider to transition from guesswork to precision, while still protecting patient data. By optimizing around actual care delivered, they not only **reduced costs** but also **built trust** at the executive level, with data to back it up.

How to Build a Privacy-Safe, High-Performance Marketing Engine ↘

By now, the path forward is clear.

Urgent care marketers don't need to compromise. You can hit your performance goals and stay compliant if you build the right foundation.

If you're ready to follow that lead, here's your playbook.

1. Inventory What's on Your Website

Before you can fix your data flow, you need to see it. Most marketing teams have dozens of tags, scripts, and pixels firing across their site, and little idea of what's actually being collected.

Start by:

1. Auditing all third-party trackers (Google, Meta, Hotjar, CRMs, etc.)
2. Identifying which tools collect patient-identifiable data
3. Checking which vendors will sign a BAA – and which won't



Bonus tip: Freshpaint's Web Tracker Report can automate this audit for free.

[Get your free report here.](#)

2. Align Marketing, Legal, and Compliance

This is not a one-team project. Marketing needs to explain why tracking and feedback loops matter. Legal needs to flag what's risky. Compliance needs to sign off on the solution.

Make it a habit:

- Set up recurring syncs across teams
- Bring legal into vendor reviews, not just procurement
- Translate risk into business terms, and marketing value into legal ones

"It took months of education and collaboration, but once we were aligned, we could actually **move fast.**"

– Megan Quillian, GoHealth

3. Build a Privacy-First Data Foundation

Rip out the risky trackers. Replace them with a governed infrastructure that gives you control.

With Freshpaint, that looks like:

- A single, BAA-covered tracking layer that replaces all third-party trackers.
 - This isn't just a best practice, it's [the path HHS has outlined](#) for safely using tools that won't sign BAAs.
- Event-level filtering to prevent PHI from flowing downstream
- Visual controls to approve which data goes where

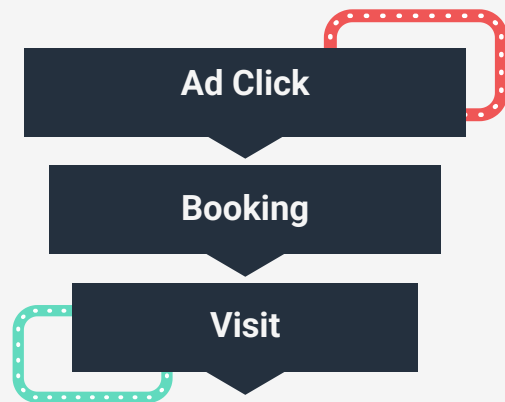
The result? You get the performance insights you need, and your legal team gets peace of mind.

4. Shift to Down-Funnel Optimization

Once your foundation is in place, it's time to move beyond bookings.

Start sending attended appointment data back to your ad platforms, and watch performance improve. Ad engines learn faster. ROAS increases. Cost per visit drops.

You don't need to rebuild your whole stack. You just need to connect the dots from:

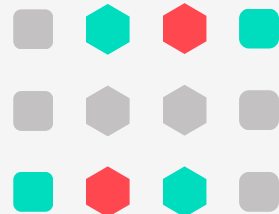


And do it in a way that's compliant by design.

5. Tell a New Story Internally

With this approach, you'll finally have the data to tell a story your CFO will believe:

- Real acquisition costs
- Actual ROI by region, service line, or campaign
- The value of marketing, proven in clinical outcomes



When you can show that marketing isn't just a cost center, but a growth engine tied to patient visits, the budget conversations get easier.

Final Word: The Gap Is Closing ↘

The distance between compliance and performance used to be a canyon. Now, it's a crack in the pavement for the teams willing to rewire how they work.

Urgent care organizations that embrace this shift will gain an unfair advantage:

- Lower acquisition costs
- Higher trust across leadership
- Smarter, faster, safer marketing

The future of healthcare marketing isn't just privacy-compliant. It's **performance-optimized**. And it's already here.



About Freshpaint

Freshpaint's Healthcare Privacy Platform empowers healthcare companies to use the industry's best marketing tools while remaining compliant with a growing list of privacy regulations like HIPAA. Freshpaint replaces untrusted tracking technologies from tools like Google Analytics, Facebook, and Google Ads, then provides a governance layer that controls what data gets shared with those platforms.

Want to keep learning?



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