

GROW YOUR PRACTICE: BOLD MARKETING IDEAS TO ATTRACT NEW PATIENTS

What is it about the thought of “advertising” that sets the medical world on edge? For some time it was simply just not allowed. Then it somehow became unseemly. It was even thought to be gauche to put out information about your practice so that potential patients might be able to decide whether you could help improve their health! How backward is that? Wouldn't it just seem to make sense to let people know how you can help them? Despite the many well-known benefits of advertising, or implementing an in-depth marketing plan, many physicians and medical practices are still reluctant to promote their own capabilities. They might feel uncomfortable about it, they might think they don't have the time to develop a plan, or they may somehow still believe that it is not worth the effort. Despite these misgivings, perhaps it is time to rethink medical marketing in the words of the master of advertising himself, David Ogilvy:

“I do not regard advertising as entertainment or an art form, but as a medium of information.”



If the man who became known as the father of advertising should choose to look at his creative communications as a way of transmitting information, then that is how the medical community can reframe its thoughts about marketing as well. Instead of just putting out that a practice exists, the medical professional who seeks to share information with potential patients will be better positioned for future growth.

Medical practitioners have witnessed an upheaval in the way patients choose their providers. While some decisions are forced upon them by insurance companies, most patients have become actively involved in their own medical care selection process. Some may choose to leave a long-term association if they feel they are underserved, and those who need to find a new medical partner may use online and social media sources to first gather information.

Certainly the primary concern of the practice should be to provide a high level of care, but then it is crucial to invest the effort into continuously letting the target patient population know how your practice benefits them. As the medical community evolves into a patient-centered focus, its marketing must also adapt to that direction. Standing out should become paramount in the face of increased communication efforts from hospitals, medical centers, and other providers.

The fact is that today's medical consumers are more likely than ever before to turn to their online resources when in need of medical care. They want to find a practice in their search results, gather helpful information from a website, and receive assurances that the facility has a positive reputation among family and friends. Once interest is aroused, and a patient relationship is initiated, they expect an exceptional degree of care, but also want to have a high level of education, engagement and communication.

This Knowledge Drop will demonstrate why marketing is crucial for practice success, outline some mindset musts, and provide some bold ideas that will help attract new patients. An effective marketing strategy leads to the ability to attract more patients, and then engage them in solid communications. Patients who are connected are less likely to leave, and more likely to provide positive reviews about your capabilities. All of this can result in dramatic practice growth.

WHY IS MEDICAL MARKETING SO CRUCIAL NOW?

According to Managed Healthcare Executive, providers are advised to adapt to the ongoing rise in consumerism. Far from being the passive patients of yesterday, who continued to go to the same physician as their parents, today's consumers want to be more in control of their healthcare choices. Those practices which are not able to clearly delineate their features and benefits will not be able to attract a sufficient stream of new patients to generate any real practice growth.

So how will medical consumers differentiate which of the many available practices can help meet their specific needs? Healthcare marketing is crucial because it helps to build awareness to meet the need. The problem with traditional advertising is that you never know exactly when a patient is going to be searching for a qualified medical professional with your specific capabilities. Therefore, it is important to have an ongoing and searchable presence, as well as a strong testimonial base, so your practice will come to the forefront when there is a need.

In addition to attracting new patients, a strong marketing program can help to strengthen relationships with current patients and shore up the existing patient base. It can also affect the practice's ability to attract top-quality personnel. Just like the internet-savvy patient, medical professionals are also searching the internet to find information on their next job opportunity.

BUILDING A STRONG HEALTHCARE MARKETING MINDSET

Because you are creating something that could very well affect the financial future of your medical practice, here are some guidelines to establishing your marketing mindset:

Quit Doing the Same Thing

"We've never done it that way" or "We tried it that way once and it failed" are not helpful statements when it comes to crafting a marketing plan. Think about what you continue to do the same way all the time and ask yourself if you are really satisfied with the results. Do you know for a fact that something will not work just because you haven't tried it before? Or, if something did not work, did you ask yourself why, make some adjustments and try again? Even the best of marketers are constantly testing A/B strategies to find out which one will work better at achieving their goals.

Don't Just Be Busy, Be Mindful

Oprah has it right when she stresses "being in the moment," even if this applies to marketing. Don't think that you have a marketing plan just because your practice has a website and a Facebook page. It takes a lot more thought than that to build a purposeful communication strategy that connects with people you want to bring into your practice.

It's an Investment, Not an Expense

Don't look at marketing at a necessary evil. Look at it instead as an investment in the future growth of your practice and you will be making much better decisions about what you want to do.

You Offer Solutions, Not Services

Many medical professionals get so caught up in the nuts and bolts of what they do that they forget to tell prospective patients what it means to them in terms of better health and improved lifestyle habits.

Remember That You're a Doctor, Not a Marketer

Remember the original Star Trek series where McCoy was always responding, "I'm a doctor, not a... (engineer, mechanic, bricklayer, escalator)"? Well, there was some ring of truth in that. With the right mindset of being open to new marketing ideas, it can be helpful to work with marketing professionals who can point you in the right direction, so you can concentrate on providing outstanding patient care.

BOLD MARKETING IDEAS THAT WILL HELP ATTRACT NEW PATIENTS

While you may know the fundamentals of website design, search engine optimization and social media marketing, here are some bold marketing ideas that can help your medical practice attract new patients:

Bold Idea One: Have a Website That Really Works

Don't just settle for a functional website with pictures of your office. Make it work real hard for you:

- Contact information, practice specialties, and hours of operation must be front and center.
- Make it easy to make an appointment online.
- Have more videos and graphics than words.
- Include patient testimonials.
- Provide educational information.
- Solicit questions from current patients and answer them online.
- If you work with patients who have Chronic Care Management needs tell them how your practice keeps in touch and monitors their care more closely to better manage their conditions.
- Make sure the site works on mobile devices and can respond to voice searches.
- Above all, make sure you let them know you are accepting new patients!

Don't forget your technical capabilities. Prospective patients want to know you make the patient interaction easy. Let them know you have EHRs to make charting faster, more efficient billing practices that get more insurance claims paid the first time through, telemedicine services to deliver remote care, and a patient portal where they can gain access to their lab reports and test results. If you comply with interoperability standards, make sure they realize how that helps coordinate healthcare in a more efficient manner.

Bold Idea Two: Put Your Current Patients to Work for You

Have you heard the saying that a satisfied customer is your best advertisement? That applies to medical marketing as well. There are professional ways of having current satisfied patients help spread the word about your practice:

- Will they write a letter or provide a sentence or two that you can use in print materials or on your website? Better yet, will they appear in a video?
- Do you make it part of the visit to ask current patients to refer your practice to their family and friends? Do they even know how? Do you at least have business cards they can use?
- Can you direct them to a review website where they can post positive remarks?
- Are there ways they can send an email or make a social media post about your practice that doesn't violate their confidentiality? Can you suggest points they can include?
- Can you sponsor an online webinar or in-person seminar on a topic of importance to your patients, and ask them to invite their friends?

Bold Idea Three: Work With Large Local Employers

Employers have a vested interest in looking after the health of their employees. Turn to some local employers and find ways to help improve employee health. You might be able to offer lunchtime seminars, have onsite appointment hours, or provide information about injury prevention.

Bold Idea Four: Communicate, Educate, Motivate

Pay heed to the rise in consumerism and be the practice that participates. Provide information in your blogs, have an e-newsletter, work with local social media influencers who are interested in healthy living ideas, share a column with a local newspaper, get interviewed on local radio shows, or be interviewed on TV. Just make sure that people realize who is providing this valuable information, and they make the association with turning to your practice when they need medical assistance.