


Market Your Practice

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What are some areas of consideration when marketing a practice? Why would you market?



Marketing

“An organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders”

(American Marketing Association)

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So what is marketing in a medical practice setting? Marketing is reaching out to your patients and potential patients. It can also be as simple as letting existing patients know all of the services that you provide. It is increased exposure to your business.




Why Market?

- Marketing can increase your income, introduce new providers or improve your practice image, among other things.
- A strategic marketing plan requires you to define your practice in terms of what it does for patients.
- Every goal, strategy and action in your marketing plan is subject to change as you evaluate your progress

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You might be thinking, “I am already so busy all of the time that I have no life, why would I want to market?”



Can We Really Handle More Patients?

- Look to see what your patient mix is currently-look at attrition
- What will your patient mix look like in 5-10 years?
- Can you afford not to market?

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Is your patient base primarily elderly or pediatric, will you still have the same patients in 5 -10 years? How many patients come in for a visit, but never return? Are you in an area, hard hit by cutbacks? Will many of your patients be forced to move away? Do you know if other practices or retail clinics in your community are starting to care for some of your patient base? Where will the practice be in 5-10 years without any marketing?



Marketing Strategy vs. Tactics

Strategy

- A plan identifying what marketing goals and objectives will be pursued and how they will be achieved in time available

Tactics

Specific actions intended to implement strategies`

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Strategy is the overall plan and the tactics are the steps or actions you will be taking. Without having a plan, it is easy to get lost or miss your target. A focused approach will typically yield much higher results and a much lower cost.



Planning

- Identify current situation by using a SWOT analysis

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In business, marketers often use a SWOT analysis to determine what are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and what the problem areas might be that you are facing. This helps to develop a road map and plan of action.



SWOT

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

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SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing your practice. What is identified on one practice can be completely different than another. You will want to spend some time on this project to determine how you are currently positioned in the market and where you will be in the future.

Situational Analysis

SWOT Analysis-Assess present situation

- Internal: Strengths and Weakness
 - Assess all areas of the organization that affect the achievement of goals/objectives
- External: Opportunities and Threats
 - Assess P.E.S.T.C. in light of the achievement of organizational goals

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It is important to get a good overview on where the practice is at and what needs improvement.



PESTC

- Political/legal
- Economic
- Sociocultural
- Technological
- Competitive

Must constantly monitor-environmental scanning and monitoring!

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So what threats do you face in the practice-regulatory such as HIPAA, the Red Flag Rules, a local bad economy where patients are losing their jobs and reimbursements are down? What about the culture or social barriers such as language or religious beliefs in your community. Maybe there is a wide spread faith that doesn't believe in blood transitions or possibly some service that your practice offers. Maybe due to the social and culture affecting dietary needs and restrictions, there is a problem with obesity and health-related issues.

What about technology, is there a possibility of hackers? What about the chance of computer failure? Do you have back-ups?

Are there many providers offering the same service that you are in your area? Maybe you need to offer something slightly different or maybe different hours. You know the practice and the area, what would you add to the list?



Goal of SWOT

- Build on strength
- Correct a weakness
- Exploit and opportunity
- Avoid a threat

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By conducting a SWOT analysis you should be able to build on what makes you special, identify and correct weaknesses. What opportunities are in your area? Maybe you can work with local schools to offer school exams in the evening to earn extra money. Maybe the community center would welcome your conducting educational classes that can introduce you to new patients. Maybe you are an author and can write advice for the local paper. Exploit your strengths to your advantage.

By acknowledging and planning for weakness, you can have a battle plan of action before something bad happens or even avoid it. Maybe you suspect that staff doesn't handle confidential patient information properly or there is a lack of customer service by the staff. By holding staff training you can correct this problem. Identification is the first step in resolving the problem.



Strengths

What are you good at?

What makes you different than other practices?

Maybe you offer a service or have friendly staff.

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Wouldn't it be great to be known in your community as the nicest, friendliest practice? If one of your staff is friendly, can they teach others to be this friendly? How about regular staff training or incentives for being nice?

What is it your practice does well? What are you the most proud of about the practice? Make a list and name as many strengths as possible.

Weaknesses

- What areas need improvement?
- Does your staff need customer service training?

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Maybe your staff isn't the friendliest, consider training. Your front desk is often the most overlooked area in the practice when it comes to training. Other positions require training due to legal restrictions and certification processes. The front desk is the staff member often hired as an entry level and usually has the largest turn-over and job dissatisfaction. This is the same staff that answers your phone, is the first and last contact your patient has with the practice. You are only as strong as the weakest link-how strong are you? Could you use some improvement in customer service?

Look at the entire practice and triage the problems. On the initial survey, don't try to treat-just triage the problems, you just want a list at this point. Then go back and base your care upon the triage levels. Hit the worst areas first. This helps to keep the practice on track and from being overwhelmed.



Opportunities

- What areas are opportunities for you to grow or improve?
 - Active community
 - Strong leadership
 - Technology (EMR?)

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How can you make a difference in the community and at the same time change your practice and your image? Do you have a new piece of equipment that makes your practice different? Is there something that you could consider offering as an additional service? What is an area of need in your community, maybe there is a problem with diabetes and you could offer cooking or nutritional classes. Some things you may not be able to charge for, but they would bring exposure to the practice.

Threats

- Economic threats
- Legal
 - JC
 - HIPAA
 - Medicare/Medicaid
 - Etc.

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There are many legal threats including malpractice, DEA, Red Flag, OSHA, worker compensation claims, ADA and many others. Are you compliant? Have you identified any areas that could create a problem?

What about your billing and coding, have you done a recent audit on the practice? What does your A/R look like? Is there a major loss of jobs in the community? How will this impact your practice?

Research

- Gather data about your patients
 - Socioeconomic data (government sources)
 - Do satisfaction surveys
 - Survey monkey
 - Random follow-up calls

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Primary sources of research such as surveys can be time consuming to obtain
Secondary can be out of date and may not answer all of your questions such
as on the government websites, but it is often easy to access and might be
helpful.




Competitive Advantage

- Differentiation-be unique and have a distinct offering
- Branding- your name , phrase, term, design, symbol, sign or combination to identify and distinguish from competitors.
 - Name-verbal part
 - Mark-symbol

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Think of different slogans or trademarks that you are familiar with. How often can you have one person start a common phrase and another finishes it? How about the last time your young child saw a couple of golden arches, bet they knew what it meant. Can your patients and potential patients recognize you as easily? Do you have a recognizable name or phrase? Do you have a trademark? Not everyone needs one, but it is something to consider.



What is a Brand?

- A promise
- A pledge of quality
- A distinct image
- A combination of words, letters, symbols, etc.
- A collection on memories
- A perception of benefits

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So what is a brand and why should you have one? A brand is all of the things listed and often has an emotional connection to the viewer.



Why Are They Good?

- Patients
 - Recognition
 - Saves time
 - Reduces risks
- Practices
 - Builds recognition
 - Creates loyalty

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This is why so many pharmaceutical companies and health organizations have brands or logos. Does your competitors? Maybe you should as well.

Market

Target your market-

You can't be all things to all people!

What group are you going to focus on?

Sports med?

Geriatric?

Pediatric ?

Disease Specific?

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Many practices try to be everything to everyone. This can stretch the practice too thin. What is your area of expertise? What is needed in the community? How can you best met the needs of the community and your patients?



5 Promotional Mix Tools

- Advertising
- Sales promotion
- Public relations
- Personal selling
- Direct marketing

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There are different ways to get your message out, maybe you have a website. Have you ever considered Facebook, Twitter or other method of communication with your patients? General information can be easily shared, patient specific should be avoided. You will want to target your marketing on ways that your patient would normally look for information. Many patients look for information on the internet, this makes it important to be able for the patient to reach you. Maybe you are in a small community with limited computer access or the patient base would be less likely to use computers, consider a direct market approach.

You can advertise in local papers and in the phone book. Maybe the local school to raise money has a yearbook that you can sponsor. In healthcare sales promotions are a little harder, you will want to check on state restrictions, but you can still change your ads for the season. Maybe in the spring advertise to allergy sufferers, in the summer-sun and water problems. Around the holidays, diabetes and obesity education.

For public relations and personal selling, you might consider teaching classes or volunteering your services. Maybe all of the staff can take a day out of the office and volunteer at a health clinic-be creative,



Timeline

- Where are you at now?
- Where Do You Want to Be?
- And how long till we get there?

Have measurable steps along the way and reward yourselves as you make a goal.

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To recap, where is the practice now? Are you just breaking even? Where do you want to be want to be in 6 months, 1 year, 5 years and beyond? How are you going to get there? What measurements will you use to know that you are still on track? Maybe in 6 months, the A/R will improve by 10%. Think about where you want to be and looking at the steps it will take, how long will it take to get there? What then? Will you have a plan of action once you reach your goal? Once you make it to the top, don't slide back down, but start planning for the climb on the next mountain over. Keep growing and developing.

Ideas

- Newsletters, articles for paper
- Class for schools, teams, senior citizen, youth groups, churches
- Blogs, internet, website
- Mailings, flyers at local stores/windshields
- calendars
- Referrals
- Have a party

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A few ideas from other practices include:

Television, radio, local magazines, trade papers, newspaper, internet outdoor signs, blogs

Have a party and event news, EMS nothing says a party like a firetruck and it builds relationships with EMS crews

Have give aways-say speak at on team sports and give away water bottles with your logo

Public relations-press release, news conference, public service announcement such as on a disease or new treatment, public appearances

I have even heard of having a placard on a bike as you exercise around town. How about movie theater advertising?

Consider on holidays (or create a holiday) doing unique things such as a local musician. My favorite was the harpist that came in for next to nothing and played holiday songs or the massage therapist who came in one day, or the practice that had an artist sketch the patients for free. All of this was done in the waiting room. Be original and be different than all of the other practices in your area. Consider offering alternative or different treatments.

Marketing

Marketing can help your practice by increasing brand recognition, improve your image and bring in new patients. Strategic adaptable marketing can improve your bottom-line.

There are many ways to market and many resources available. Be creative and look at others that have been successful.

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Source:

<http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2006/0700/p50.html>

<http://www.aafp.org/fpm/981000fm/marketing.html>

<http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2001/1100/p39.html>

<http://www.aafp.org/fpm/2002/0100/p33.html>

<http://www.aafp.org/fpm/980300fm/marketing.html>

<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/42280810/Marketing-Your-Medical-Practice>

For additional information:

<http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/practicemgt/mgmt/marketing.html>