

## Effective Public Relations and Marketing

### SUBSTANTIATE WORTH: EVERY CHIROPRACTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY

Christopher Malter

It's elating to see more and more stories of chiropractors that have become successful in their practices. Yet from an industry perspective, how successful is the chiropractic profession?

Since its inception, chiropractic has always played second fiddle to the medical profession. However, over the last 10 years, chiropractic has made significant headway in positioning itself as a more mainstream health care profession. Nowhere is this more visible than with the congressional mandates to incorporate chiropractic into the military and the VA.

Chiropractic has always been a discipline founded on sound treatment and a commitment to the patient, but the profession's status and image in the general public's mind is largely based on the integrity and honesty of its practitioners.

Today, the chiropractic industry is at a crossroads. The school of thought in which a patient is seen as a "sale" must be replaced with one of care, effective treatment, and a bond between the chiropractor and the patient. To accomplish this evolution, each individual chiropractor must be responsible for creating and maintaining a positive image.

Over the last 15 years, there have been hundreds of fly-by-night, superficial marketing schemes offered to chiropractors. These "get-rich-quick" plans have no substance and position chiropractors in a negative light. As a chiropractor, you are challenged every day to communicate and maintain a positive image of your profession and its health-related benefits.

How do you do this? Is it through screenings, expos, shows and advertising? These are all extremely effective marketing and advertising techniques that undoubtedly communicate messages. As the mainstay means of communications, these techniques are taught at virtually every chiropractic product management seminar throughout the country. However, how successful are they to the average chiropractor?

Do general practitioners collaborate with their local supermarkets to conduct free exams? When you visit the local retail store, are you greeted by your dentist conducting free check-ups? Absolutely not!

Although effective, these marketing and advertising tactics are unsophisticated and shortsighted. They position the chiropractor alongside the shoe salesman focusing on the two-for-one deal, rather than the validity and benefits of chiropractic care.

Today, to effectively market yourself and your practice, you must first substantiate your worth through public relations and marketing. Public relations incorporates positioning, branding and image through credible vehicles of communications. It is only through integrity and credibility that you can create a positive image, recruit new patients and retain existing patients.

I truly believe screenings are effective, however, it's imperative that you incorporate the perception and image of you and your practice into the equation.

For example, perhaps you identify a large retail outlet to conduct 15 screenings over the next six months. In conjunction with these screenings, you also identify and collaborate with the American Cancer Society. You create a six-month campaign corresponding with your screenings where the retail outlet will donate \$5 for every examined person. Now you've incorporated a public relations and marketing approach to your practice.

Let's evaluate what you've accomplished:

1. Since you've substantiated your worth, it will be much easier to generate media visibility for you and your practice.
2. You've positioned you and your practice as a good corporate citizen within your community.
3. The image you've created among existing and potential patients has changed from one of the "quick-sell" to one of integrity, honest care and concern for others.
4. You've created the following methods of communications to educate and convey key message points to potential patients in:
  - newspaper articles;
  - television news segments; and
  - radio news segments

It is the responsibility of every chiropractor to incorporate this evolving school of thought where substantiating your worth is imperative, to create a successful practice. Every chiropractor must embrace more sophisticated public relations and marketing strategies and techniques, to correspond with the ever-changing role and overall acceptance of the chiropractic profession.

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