

Effective Public Relations and Marketing

COMMUNICATION IS POWER

Christopher Malter

Chiropractors are entrepreneurs by spirit. In working at a practice and/or creating a new practice, all chiropractors will be confronted with the development of a comprehensive business plan. The business plan is a three-year guide for the chiropractor, focusing on these key elements:

- marketing;
- management/personnel;
- vision;
- description of business/products and services;
- financial data;
- operating procedures;
- business insurance;
- competition; and
- sales and projections.

In examining these elements, one underlying theme interconnects each aspect of the business plan: communication. Communication is power, and in every element you must effectively communicate through body language; verbally; written; entertainment; etc., to establish your practice.

The chiropractic profession is evolving. No longer can the average chiropractor solely rely on advertising or telemarketing techniques to promote a practice. Chiropractors must substantiate their worth. Unlike advertising that conveys opinionated messages, public relations relies on the credibility of editorial coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio and television news segments to communicate key messages about doctors and their practices. In other words, public relations taps into the credibility of others to communicate and establish positive message points about you and your practice. For example, if you were making a presentation to 500 potential patients, and you told them that you would offer the most advanced chiropractic treatment, and that they must use your services, you might recruit a few patients with little retention. This is advertising.

However, if someone else spoke on your behalf, or an article appeared in the local newspaper about you and your practice, you'd recruit hundreds of potential patients, and significantly increase your patient retention level. It is through the credibility of others that you retain patients and recruit new patients. That is the power of public relations!

Media exposure in your local newspaper will have a huge impact on your practice! It will create an image and perception among existing and potential patients that you are an expert and leader in your field. It will also directly endorse the benefits of chiropractic treatment. Remember, you are challenged every day to communicate and maintain a positive image of your profession and its health-related benefits.

Now that you understand the power of public relations, your efforts must not stop there. In the past, public relations was thought of as intangible. For example, if an article appeared in your local newspaper about you and your practice, how could you measure its effectiveness? Would the

article bring in 10 new patients? It is for this reason that you must incorporate a public relations and marketing strategy.

Another example: If you were to use that same article that appeared in the newspaper, perhaps you would use it as part of a direct mail campaign to all your existing patients and potential patients. You would mail the article with a letter offering a free consultation, focusing on your concern for the recipient's health and overall welfare. You would also state in the letter that the recipient must bring in the article to receive the free consultation. (You should be extremely lenient in this capacity, in that many people will give reference to the article, but forget to bring it in.) In this case, you will use the power and credibility of the article to substantiate your worth, while also utilizing a marketing tool to measure its effectiveness.

Once you've established credibility and an identity through media visibility, marketing programs that utilize communication tools targeting key audience groups and demographics must be deployed.

Media visibility establishes brand identity and conveys a consistent image. It is through marketing programs, such as a direct mail flyer, or an electronic newsletter, that people will make the connection to newspaper articles and radio and television news segments, to support your role as a credible leader in the community.

It is also through media relations and marketing that people will respond to a "call to action" to seek out more information about you and your practice through your website, brochure, and newsletter. Look for my next article on the creation and incorporation of these three vehicles of communication in the development of your image.

Christopher Malter
Weston, Florida
(954) 349-9102
www.imcomm.net

SEPTEMBER 2001