

Downsizing Pays Off Big in Yellow Page Advertising

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Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the Journal of the Ohio State Chiropractic Association (OSCA).

It is not just a doctor's name, address, and phone number printed in the yellow pages anymore. Currently, chiropractic physicians spend thousands of dollars a year for advertisements in phone books. "The bigger the ad the more patients a doctor will see" illustrates the prevailing attitude among chiropractic physicians. I used to be one of those doctors until a group of Akron, Ohio doctors got together and decided it was time to re-evaluate the current trend in yellow page advertising.

The decision to change came after the 1990 phone book arrived, and I looked through the chiropractic section. Page after page contained advertisements ranging in size from full-page, three-quarter page, and several half and quarter-page ads. The Akron phone book had become a source of competition, as simple column ads grew to full-page. The local chiropractic physicians were paying approximately \$250,000 to promote themselves -- not the profession. Some doctors even altered their ads or names, so they could be first in the phone book.

Disappointed in the image chiropractic was presenting, several chiropractic doctors and myself voiced our concerns at an OSCA District 5 meeting. We addressed the unprofessional image we presented in the yellow pages and how that image hinders the growth of the profession. To correct the situation, we called all the doctors in our area and explained that the district wanted to re-examine our yellow page advertising.

In our efforts to rally more doctors to our side, we emphasized why health care consumers turn to their yellow pages. From my experience, if patients are using the chiropractic section of the yellow pages, they have already chosen the services of a chiropractic doctor. The interested patient opens the phone book to determine a doctor's location, office hours, and the phone number. Based on this fact, it is unnecessary and quite costly to develop ads with graphics and/or pictures that run either a full, half or quarter page.

Our educational efforts paid off; over 90 percent of the chiropractic doctors in the Akron area agreed to participate. Some doctors were even relieved: In previous years, they had been swayed by their yellow page's sales representative to purchase larger, more expensive ads.

After generating district-wide support, the first step was to establish prudent advertising guidelines that were realistic for both short and long-term goals. For the 1991 phone book, OSCA District 5 doctors agreed that a quarter-page advertisement would be the maximum size. In 1992, OSCA District 5 doctors have reduced their ads to only an eighth-page, and eliminated the word "free" from all advertisements.

The district's new approach to yellow page advertising has been exceptionally favorable. For the past five years, my office staff has kept accurate statistics on the referral patterns of our patients.

In comparing my 1990 full-page ad to my 1991 quarter-page ad, my office experienced an increase of over 30 percent in yellow page referrals. Other OSCA District 5 doctors also reported an increase in referrals from yellow page advertising, although not every doctor experienced an increase. While some doctors saw no change in referrals, so far in 1992, no one has reported a decrease in yellow page referrals, demonstrating our decision to go smaller and more conservative was a wise one.

By choosing a more conservative approach to yellow page advertising, OSCA District 5 doctors saved thousands of dollars and eliminated many of the unprofessional ads. Now, doctors channel their advertising dollars into a public relations fund managed by the Greater Akron Chiropractic Society (GACS), a separate organization from the local association and from OSCA District 5. The main goal of the GACS is to improve the professional image of chiropractic in the Akron area, and to produce weekly educational pieces for our local newspapers.

On February 12, 1991, the Akron Beacon Journal ran a four-page educational pull-out funded by the GACS. This professional ad was the first of its kind and was developed by the district's own public relations firm with help from the ACA and the OSCA. The ad featured chiropractic education, an overview of the British Study, an explanation of vertebral subluxation, and a segment on chiropractic's approach to wellness and natural health care. Complementing the information, Akron doctors chose tasteful graphic elements that tied the entire educational piece together. Since then, several other educational ads have appeared in the Akron Beacon Journal.

As a group, the GACS has the capability to reach a much greater audience than any one person could. Since the first ad in the Akron Beacon Journal, Akron doctors have produced several other educational projects. Currently, we are providing information on chiropractic education, philosophy, research, and treatment protocols.

The time has come for chiropractic doctors to re-think their attitudes on yellow page advertising. Based on the success of the OSCA District 5 yellow page advertising, it is a waste of your advertising dollar to have a large yellow page ad. This money can be used far more effectively to educate more people on the cost effective, non-drug and non-surgical approach to chiropractic care.

How to Analyze Your Yellow Page Advertising

Have your office staff keep statistics on every new patient that comes into your office. Determine the referral patterns of each new patient by asking the following questions:

How and where did you hear about our office?

If not from the yellow pages, then ...

Were you referred by a current patient or by another doctor?

Did you see our educational ad in the newspaper?

Did you receive our office brochure?

Did you see a sign or a television commercial?

Did you select us from a telephone book?

If yes, then ...

Was the yellow pages the first place you looked?

Did you choose us based on location or because we had the biggest advertisement?

- When a patient has used the yellow pages, Dr. Battaglia suggests that doctors ask specific questions. Recently, Dr. Battaglia has discovered that some of his yellow page patients actually heard his name through a friend first, not the phone book. By sitting down and talking with his patients, Dr. Battaglia was able to pinpoint when his patients first heard of his clinic. And, in most cases, it wasn't via the yellow pages.

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JULY 1992