

The Million Dollar Phone Number

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Many chiropractors in today's competitive market underestimate the value of choosing an office phone number -- we'll call it the "Million Dollar Phone Number" -- that will easily stick in the minds of regular and potential patients.

Whether you are concerned with new patient referrals or become discouraged by regular patients who fall out of the habit of scheduling new appointments, you will be surprised at the results an easily remembered phone number will have on your practice.

Referrals are a large part of any health services field, and chiropractic is no exception. But referrals can be difficult to come by if you don't make the job of referral as easy as possible for your existing patients.

Put yourself in their shoes. They're satisfied with your treatments, you've alleviated much pain and suffering in their lives, and they say they'd be happy to refer their friends to you. What happens next? Your patient runs into an acquaintance at a restaurant who says she's been having some nagging back pain recently.

"Oh, I've been seeing a great chiropractor, he's done wonders for me," your patient explains. "His name is Dr. Antoinette and he's on Elm Street. I don't remember the number offhand, but you should check him out." End of referral.

The prospective patient now has to remember your name, then dial information or look in the phone book under "chiropractors," where dozens of other doctors are smiling back at her. Maybe she finds your number, maybe she doesn't. Wouldn't it be better if the conversation went like this:

"I know a great chiropractor. His name is Dr. Antoinette and his number is 555-1000. Here, I'll write it down for you." By choosing a number that was easily stored in the patient's memory bank, you've eliminated a major hurdle in the referral process.

What about those patients who are seeing you on a periodic maintenance schedule. Perhaps their own schedules are too scattered to nail down a new appointment with your receptionist as they leave the office. They say they'll call in a couple of weeks. Months go by and still no call. With the "Million Dollar Phone Number," spur-of-the-moment calls will increase dramatically.

To a large extent, people have become slaves to convenience, especially in today's fast-paced world. If they don't respond immediately to a thought (I better make an appointment with my chiropractor), they may not respond again for weeks or months. A phone number lodged in the mind will be dialed sooner than one that has to be looked up.

How do you find your "Million Dollar Phone Number"? First, compile and prioritize a list of phone numbers that you feel would be easily remembered. They could represent acronyms (976-BACK, 234-HEAL, etc.) or they could be a thousand number (976-1000, 234-2000, etc.) Thousand numbers are limited and obviously harder to come by.

Call your local phone service (a number for business customers is usually listed near the front of your local phone book) and tell the operator you would like a customized number. If one of your preferred numbers is available, you're in luck. If not, you will have to revise your list or be willing to wait for your favorite number to become available.

Although not standard procedure with most phone companies, you may be able to entice the operator to do some extra research and call you back when your preferred number is available. You will have to pay extra for any number you request, even if it is a number that became available from another business that closed or moved away.

The only way you will not be billed is if you accept one of the three numbers the phone company gives you the option of choosing when installing a new phone number. Who knows, maybe your assigned number happens to be right for you. In California, for example, we pay a \$38 one-time fee and \$3.50 per month for a customized number. Rates in other states may vary.

To test my customized number, I polled 168 of my patients and found that 60 percent remembered my number instantly. That equals about 100 patients that would have no trouble calling me for an appointment or referring me and my phone number to others. That is proof the "Million Dollar Phone Number" really works.

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OCTOBER 1991