

Using Starbucks to Build Your Practice, Part 2

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If your practice could enjoy success like Starbucks does, would you make the appropriate changes to facilitate that success? I believe most chiropractors would answer with a resounding "Yes!" Unfortunately, that's about as far as it goes for the majority of us, because we have no plan for actually and systematically transforming our practice to resemble a giant such as Starbucks.

First, don't worry; this article is not going to focus on how you need to serve the ubiquitous Seattle beverage in your office or come up with 13 different versions of your grande, double-pump, not-too-painful, side-posture adjustment. We'll stick to chiropractic, but focus on how the Starbucks business model can help us grow our own practice.

In part one of this series, I talked about several key ideas that can help build your practice. I cited some statistics that illustrate how narrow the chiropractic "market share" is. In other words, most chiropractors are serving adult patients with low back pain. To easily expand our market share, I suggested we intentionally focus our practices on serving patients with 1) musculoskeletal conditions other than low back pain (e.g., neck pain, headaches); and 2) nonmusculoskeletal conditions; and/or begin serving more pediatric patients.

To demonstrate how a market share is expanded, I used the model of Starbucks as an example. In its infancy, Starbucks started opening up stores outside of its initial flagship store, located in Pioneer Square in downtown Seattle, and began the process of transforming the relationship we have with coffee. Prices went up, quality went up and Starbucks began serving up its unique coffee experience. As time passed, Starbucks added more and more stores outside of Seattle and also added to its menu. Soon, you could find an assortment of coffees, coffee-type drinks, teas and pastries along with the good ol' cup of joe. Before long, non-coffee items also began appearing, such as Starbuck's dolls, espresso machines, mints and CDs. At present, you can find just as much or more non-coffee stuff for sale in Starbucks as you can the bean product that made it famous.

Now, let's talk about translating the Starbucks model into a plan for chiropractic success!

Expand Your Borders

Do the math: If you are like most chiropractors whose practices are made up of about 70 percent low back pain patients, it's time to expand your borders. There is nothing wrong with treating only low back pain, if that's your intention. However, if you'd like to grow your practice from its current state, chances are you are leaving too much on the table by treating mostly patients with low back pain.

The most effective way any business launches a new product is through exposure. If you are McDonald's and you are introducing a new sandwich, you advertise your product until people are painfully aware of it. Similarly, every time Starbucks launches a new beverage, its major form of marketing involves giving away millions of free samples to existing customers. This creates an instant familiarity and desire for the drink.

Can we mimic this successful strategy in chiropractic? Certainly! Your office is an ideal environment to "advertise" or market to your current patients. However, chiropractors don't have the budget of McDonald's, Starbucks or any major corporation for that matter, to advertise to a broad segment of the population. So, what does one do with "champagne ideas" on a "beer budget?"

To expand your borders without breaking the bank, you have to focus on what brings in patients and drop the rest. In other words, to make that quantum leap in your practice - the leap that will take you to the next level - you must transform yourself from being the doctor who is only a "doer" of his thing (chiropractic) to one who is also a "marketer" of chiropractic.

When Being Good Isn't Good Enough

Let me hit you with some harsh reality: In today's marketplace, being good is not good enough. You can believe all the sugar-coated clichés you want, but "building a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door" has put many a fine chiropractor into student loan default, bankruptcy or worse.

After all, your patients actually expect you to be a good, competent chiropractor. The real reason they chose you has nothing to do with your clinical skills and everything to do with your ability to market your practice.

You say you're a referral-only practice and patients send you new patients because of your skill? Nope! Check again. Patients send you new patients because they told others about you. Your skill is the same, whether or not they talk about you. It's the talking that brings in the referrals.

When you look at your practice through this filter, everything about your practice must be examined to determine how effective it is in bringing in patients. If your Yellow Pages, your office décor, your staff's attitude, your payment policies - anything at all - gets in the way of a potential patient, they are down the road seeking the next good, competent chiropractor. Flighty? Certainly! But remember, in the new patient's eyes, you are just as good as the guy down the street ... who doesn't have a nasty CA, weird office hours, bad breath or whatever it is keeping patients from scheduling in your office. Even worse, a current patient will hesitate to recommend you for the very same reasons!

Fueling "Referral Magnets" and Creating "Chiropractic Fanatics"

So, let's say you actually agree with the ideas presented in these two articles. You realize that, yes, you literally are sitting on acres of diamonds in your practice, if you could just get beyond the lumps of coal sitting in front of you and begin caring for the myriad of conditions other than back pain that chiropractic can help. You also understand that just being the best doctor you can be truly is not good enough. Instead, you must actively, systematically and effectively market your expertise to current and new patients, in order to transform your practice out of the "back pain only" mode. Where do you go next? The final step in really expanding your practice is to fuel and create patients who will recruit and refer for you.

Certainly, you have had the pleasure of treating patients who are natural "referral magnets" for

your practice. These patients are natural salespeople; they tell all their friends, co-workers and relatives about you and are among your top referral sources. Marketing expert Seth Godin calls people who act in this way, without any prompting from you, "early adopters." These are the first people who run out and get the newest gadgets or cars, and typically are the ones who also are first to try out the latest trendy restaurant or hotspot in your area. These people only need "fuel" for their already burning fire. Thank them, encourage them and do whatever is necessary to keep them happy, and they will keep sending you patients. These are simple, pleasant people to deal with and require little effort for the amount of potential rewards they generate for your practice. Unless you "repel" them by taking them for granted or seriously compromising their care, their magnetic personality will continue to attract patients to your practice for quite some time.

The vast majority of patients, however, are not such people. Instead, we need to create a chiropractic fanatic out of Mr. or Mrs. Average Joe. This actually is a two-step process. However, the potential rewards for "chiropractic fanatics" are even greater than for "referral magnets," who can move on to the next health care trend or fad before you know it. Fanatics, however, usually remain so for life, unless a major transgression takes place.

The first step is creating the "wow" experience for them with chiropractic. This is an all-encompassing achievement that relates as much to your ability to help the patient manage their problems and also involves your office exceeding all their expectations in terms of what a chiropractic visit "should be." Once you literally have shocked them with your superior customer service and chiropractic skills, you can work on the second phase - creating the fanatic. This includes giving the patient the proper tools to become a walking chiropractic recruiting machine.

Copycat Starbucks? Why Not - It's Legal!

To achieve a true expansion of your practice and chiropractic market share, here's where you need to start following in the footsteps of the big boys. Starbucks doesn't just make coffee; it also creates an "experience."

Take notice of Starbucks' methods and see what you can do in your office. Can you have ultra-friendly chiropractic "baristas?" Can you speed up the efficiency of your office to process more patients in less time? On the other hand, can you create such a comfortable environment for those who are not in a hurry - so much so that they would love staying and "hanging out in your clinic" half the day while receiving chiropractic, massage or other therapeutic services?

Can you expand your backend to better serve your patients by offering chiropractic supportive devices, nutritional products, pillows, ergonomic chairs, etc.? Can you create a "gift card" to encourage cash patients to use your services more often without having to write a check for each visit?

Do you utilize display advertising around your office to market upcoming events, new practitioners or special promotions? Do you create topics of the day, week or month to further educate your patients on chiropractic benefits about which new patients might be completely unaware?

Knowledge Is Not Power, It's Only Potential

Self-help guru Tony Robbins is fond of saying, "Knowledge is not power, but only potential for power." After all, you can be the most knowledgeable person in chiropractic, but if you never use or implement the knowledge, you won't achieve any change or transformation. Similarly, even though there are numerous ways you can mimic the marketing methods employed by Starbucks in your own practice to expand your market share, recruit new patients and better educate the ones

you have, there is at least one method that will work best for you.

How do you know which one(s)? Try them! If you only think about the concepts discussed in this article, none will work. However, if you begin to consistently and systematically implement even just one of these ideas, I guarantee you will be on the way to transforming your practice beyond back pain and toward the practice of your dreams.

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