

The Hottest Marketing Trends of the New Economy

TAKE YOUR PRACTICE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Mark Sanna, DC, ACRB Level II, FICC

As the chiropractic profession enters the dawning days of the new health care economy, emerging trends and technologies present a host of compelling strategies that savvy chiropractic marketers will adopt to ensure their practice occupies the thoughts of today's ever-more-cost-conscious and choice-savvy health care consumer.

Branding Your Practice

Creating a brand experience has moved to the top of chiropractic marketers' priority lists. The American Institute of Graphic Design defines *brand* as "a person's perception of a product, service, or company." That definition has nothing to do with your mission statement, logo or tag line, or the color of the walls of your reception room. Instead, a brand is defined by the perception, good or bad, that your patients or prospects have about you and your practice.

Your brand experience is made up of the cumulative impressions your current and potential patients garner from their visual, verbal and experiential encounters with your practice. This encompasses a range of intellectual, sensory and emotional connections. Some experiences are controlled, such as your office environment, how you answer the phone, your advertising, the services you deliver and your Web site. An uncontrolled - but just as important - experience is the word-of-mouth about your practice. Strong practice brands arise from consistently excellent patient experiences that combine to form a clear, differentiated overall impression of your competence, capability and level of service. Savvy marketers will look at every impression in the context of and their overall brand experience.

Service. In the new health care economy, marketing is less about what you say and more about what your target actually hears. It has become essential that you learn the needs and aspirations of your patients and provide value through each communication. Let's get back to basics and look at the difference between features and benefits.

Most inexperienced marketers are unsure of the difference and place a lot of attention on features instead of benefits. So what's the difference? Features talk about your practice and the services you deliver. They talk about the finer details of your practice, such as your technique, level of education, conditions treated, convenient hours or ease of parking. Most people don't care about features. Benefits tell patients what results they can expect from chiropractic. They explain how patients will feel and about the time and money they'll save from chiropractic care compared to the alternatives. To achieve maximum impact, you must be sure that every message sent from your practice is benefits-focused. Do your patients the service of highlighting the benefits of chiropractic.

Going green. Every day, another major company commits to a sustainable future. It's your turn. While it may not seem like a marketing strategy at first glance, you can be sure your patients will appreciate, expect and acknowledge your green efforts. The next time the opportunity arises, take

the trash from your office out to the dumpster and look at how much material is wasted. Most of us don't realize how much recyclable garbage our practice produces every day. A "green" plan is no longer a luxury or an option for your practice. This year, expect to add a symbolic new member to your practice team, a chief green officer (CGO). It's time to take the responsibility to educate yourself and your employees about how easy it is to save money and resources by going green.

Here are just some of the ways your office can function in a more environmentally friendly way. Set a monthly goal to consistently lower the utility bill by 2-3 percent or reduce the office supply expenses by 15-20 percent. Go through the office and replace all incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent ones, which use less energy and last longer. By reducing paper waste in the office, you save not only money, but also some beautiful trees. Buy recycled office supplies whenever possible. Almost everything needed to run your office, from toner cartridges to paper goods to plastics, is available in recycled form and costs much less. Instead of just throwing away misprints or unneeded printed pages, use them as scratch paper around the office. Set a date by which you will make the commitment to go paperless by doing everything electronically instead of printing.

Get the Word Out

Now that you have established your brand and focus of your practice, you need to get the word out. Follow these fast-growing trends of marketing to get people talking about your practice and the services you provide:

Mobile: President Obama's election campaign was one of the most talked about in history, not only because of the barriers it broke down in terms of race, but also because of the innovative ways in which it engaged with the electorate. In many ways, it was a turning point for mobile messaging, employing the most coordinated text-messaging, get-out-the-vote campaign in U.S. history. Mobile marketing delivers highly personalized and useful information when and where it is needed. More than 90 percent of text messages are read by the recipient, which creates the opportunity for an instant link between you and your patients.

Google "mobile messaging" and you'll find an industry of companies that can help you implement an appointment reminder/patient messaging program that can send the text message of your choice directly to your patient's mobile device. Be sure not to "spam" patients with nuisance messages; ensure that they opt-in to your service and do not communicate any HIPAA-protected personal health information. While still in its infancy, this up-and-coming technology deserves a closer look as mobile-phone improvements continue to create new communication and marketing opportunities.

Join the club. Not just for kids any more, [35 percent of adult Internet users](#) now have a profile on at least one social networking site. Wise marketers will capitalize on the growing appeal of social networks like MySpace and Facebook. According to *USA Today*, social networking grew [93 percent](#) from 2006 to 2008. During that time, Facebook grew [500 percent](#). Just as with every new communication technology, there are those who use the medium in overbearing, unwanted ways. Social networking sites are no different.

The key term here is *networking*; give and take. Social networking success stories have one thing in common: they're all about the ping-pong effect. It's you sharing information about yourself and your practice with dozens, and then perhaps hundreds, of potential patients. In turn, those people mention you to their friends. Like all worthwhile business relationships, online networks must be nurtured. Make the effort to do so, and you will reap the rewards over time.

Think narrowcasting. So, what's narrowcasting? It's place-based video displays that aim media

messages and content at specific segments of the general public. Narrowcasting networks can be found in elevators, taxis, malls, supermarkets, gas stations, restaurants, health clubs, schools and now chiropractic practices. A recent Arbitron health club network study showed that **70 percent of members** watch television while at the gym and spend an average of 40 minutes each actively watching per visit. You can turn the time your patients spend in your reception room, on adjusting or therapy tables and in your exercise suite into an educational opportunity by installing a digital information system that provides compelling, entertaining, informative programming that engages your patients while teaching them about how chiropractic can improve their lives and the lives of their friends and families.

Roll the video. Online communications are changing. Chiropractors are now sharing information about their practices using podcasts, online video and now live video streaming. With the Web evolving to also include these richer media channels, the savvy marketer must learn how to listen, understand and use the same media. **Broadband penetration is 70 percent** in the U.S., making streaming video a “must” marketing tool for your practice. According to eMarketer, an estimated **154 million Americans** watched at least one video in 2008, and three-quarters of those told a friend about one.

Video provides you with an enormous opportunity to engage, educate and entertain your patients – the “Three E’s” of successful marketing. Chiropractors are producing specialized videos to help their patients get the most from their chiropractic experience. These video messages include virtual tours of the practice, welcome messages from the doctor, new-patient orientation sessions and even customized home-exercise programs, all streamed over your practice’s Web site.

Get in on the game. Gaming now permeates just about all of society, creating a fresh way to connect with patients. Millions of non-golfers are swinging virtual golf clubs in **Nintendo’s Wii** and **playing guitar in virtual rock bands** on PlayStations. **Senior-citizen centers** are buying Wii to entertain guests and connect with grandkids. Having fun in the workplace seems like an oxymoron. However, having fun at your practice is not only good for team-building, but also makes for more productivity. You can use gaming in the practice to give a fresh look to patient education, as you practice healthy biomechanics, and as a tool to make staff training more fun. People learn best by doing, and the opportunity for group interaction provided by gaming’s virtual environment can make the office a bit more enjoyable. It can also be used to show appreciation for work well-done. Work doesn’t have to be one big party, but a little bit can make the work day go more smoothly.

Take Action

As the pressure cooker of the economy heats up, chiropractors are well-advised to employ self-restraint to avoid the overhyped marketing opportunities that they, no doubt, will be barraged with as companies with less than the purest of motives move in to take advantage of the turmoil in the marketplace. My advice: Focus on measuring your success one satisfied patient at a time, and be an early adopter and market dominator by being the first to implement these marketing trends during the coming year.

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