

Why Marketing Matters

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As chiropractors, most of you are also entrepreneurs. That means you need to manage the business of your practice, as well as the treatment of patients, on a daily basis. Marketing is a key element in the business of starting, maintaining and growing a successful practice. It's particularly important in today's economic climate. The chiropractic field is seeing increased competition - from other chiropractors as well as multidisciplinary practices - and a prolonged recessionary economy.

The good news is that the chiropractic field is expected to enjoy job growth. Employment of chiropractors is projected to grow 20 percent from 2008-2018, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, while popularity of the discipline may signify an increase in patients, it also indicates an increase in competition.

And according to the same statistics, the distribution of chiropractors is not geographically uniform, as many establish their practices in close proximity to the small number of chiropractic educational institutions around the country. This means your clients have more choices within their reach, and it's likely they have less money or less disposable income they are willing to spend.

While it may seem counterintuitive, a weak economy is the wrong time to cut expenses by cutting back on marketing. It's more critical than ever to incorporate a strategic marketing program into the business plan for your practice, whether you're established or just starting out as a practitioner.

A Daily Dose of Marketing



The question is: How do you fit marketing into your day and incorporate it into your practice? As a practicing health care provider, time is one of your chief assets. You don't want to squander your time on too many activities outside of your core competencies. At the same time, most chiropractors today realize that in order to survive - and thrive - they need to evolve beyond basic services.

From a marketing perspective, the answer is to construct a program that's easy to implement, fits your business and can be integrated into your practice on a daily basis. Before addressing the nuts and bolts of a marketing program (making your Web site more powerful, developing and delivering direct mail or e-mails, starting a social media program, etc., which will be discussed in future articles), let's talk about where to begin. You want to ask yourself three questions that will help you define your goals, identify your universe and determine your resources: Who are we and what do we offer our clients? What problems are we solving? What solutions do we provide?

From Services to Solutions

Moving from a *service-provider* mindset to a *solutions* model is one way to expand your practice beyond your core competencies to help maximize patient results, retention and referrals - a sound strategy in good or bad economic times. The current focus on health care reform presents an opportunity for health care practitioners who are seen as a resource for prevention and maintenance. In fact, the projected job growth for the field is based in part on the number of aging baby boomers and because chiropractors emphasize the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Evolving your practice, then, from providing chiropractic services to a wellness practice is one way to grow your business by offering solutions for patients seeking healthy lifestyles. This can mean including lifestyle counsel, corrective exercises, nutritional products and more as part of your practice. This is where marketing plays a key role. The 2003 survey of chiropractors by the

National Board of Chiropractic Examiners reported that *wellness care* accounted for just 8 percent of the most common reasons people seek chiropractic care. (Back pain was the leading reason.)

Significant attention has been given to healthy lifestyles, obesity and contributing factors to illnesses and conditions such as heart disease and diabetes since the time of that survey. Still, the transition from services to solutions requires education, awareness and a consistency of message and mindset throughout your practice. Your colleagues, assistants, family and friends, in fact, can be some of your best resources as advocates and champions of your cause.

Other industries have followed the path from services to solutions with success. Twenty years ago in corporate accounting, for example, there were the "big five" firms. At the same time mergers and acquisitions changed the accounting landscape, the "big five" transitioned into providing consulting services in the form of business solutions - helping companies manage their operations, finances, marketing and employees.

Similarly, as products in sectors such as telecommunications became commodities and "gee-whiz" services transformed into commonplace offerings to consumers, the industry transitioned into providing solutions for businesses to operate with all their systems networked and integrated, and for consumers to easily connect with others using multiple forms of communication.

For the chiropractic community, marketing your solutions will help you stand out from your competition, reach out to prospective clients and keep your current patients coming back. Future articles will advise you on how to develop and implement your marketing program.

The second article in this marketing series will focus on formulating a hands-on direct-mail campaign to prospective and current patients.

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