

## Patient Profiling: The Key to Marketing to the Right People

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Profiling is not considered politically correct by police, airport security or employers, but it is one of the most important tools you can use to improve the performance of your marketing. In marketing, profiling is based on understanding the demographics and psychographics of your best patients and where can you find more just like them.

For example, if you choose to promote decompression to the entire marketplace, only a select group of people will be receptive to the message. Most of your marketing investment will be wasted on those who do not have a need for decompression therapy. On the other hand, if you receive a referral from a MD for a patient considering spinal surgery, your targeted marketing (decompression) will likely be much more effective (high conversion ratio).

The essence of profiling is understanding who is most likely to be receptive to your brand of chiropractic. Not all spines are created equal. Not everyone in your marketplace is ready, willing and able to seek out your care.

The most difficult form of marketing is a product or service that must modify or change the perception or knowledge of people before they will purchase what is offered. The reality is that it is much easier to attract people who have an experience with chiropractic than those who have elected not to include it in their health care plan. That's why purchasing a practice with thousands of inactive patients is a great marketing opportunity.

Consider this: If you had a list of contortionists in your marketplace, you could direct your marketing message to this targeted audience. Of course, there may only be three people on the list, so it is not a valid list to grow your practice! Let's dig deeper and see how we can apply patient profiling to your marketing efforts.

### Demographics

The first level of targeting is "demographics," such as age, gender, marital status, family size, education, geographic location, and occupation. Using this information, you can profile your patient base to see "groups" of demographics that have been successful with your brand of chiropractic, and then apply those groups to your new patient marketing plans.

### Psychographics

The next level of profiling is "psychographics." Psychographic elements include lifestyle, attitudes, beliefs, values, personality, buying motives and product usage.

Combining demographic and psychographic profiling allows you to gather the optimum information for selecting not only the right media for your marketing, but also the actual marketing message itself.

## The Patient Audit

The first step to developing an appropriate marketing strategy using demographics and psychographics is to conduct a patient audit of your existing active and inactive patient files. You don't need to "audit" all files; you can do a random selection of every 25th patient record, for example.

Create a simple form to gather the demographic and psychographic information on each of the selected files, and then tabulate the results. You may not have psychographic information on your patients, but you should have most of the foundational demographic data. Often you will find that a group of demographics forms the majority of your patient demographics. You may find that most of your patients are female, age 30-55, employed, married and residing within 15 minutes of your office.

This initial audit will give you solid information about your patients and the profile that has been the most responsive to your brand of chiropractic thus far.

## Upgrade the Base

The next step is to take your patient list (inactive and active) and submit it to a service that will append your list with a full range of demographics and psychographics. To find a vendor to append your list, look in the Yellow Pages under "mailing list brokers" or search online: "append demographics."

Once your list is appended with a comprehensive set of profiling variables, you can produce reports, using cross-tabulation for multiple data points, to segment your list into "groups" of patients who offer you the best opportunity for reaching and converting new patients. Using your patient profiling database, you can actually get a list of people who fit the profile!

You can also use the data to select other media with the demographics / psychographics you most want to reach. In other words, you can select a radio or TV program that has the right "people" in the audience. This is how to wisely invest marketing resources.

By the way, while you are appending your list, you can also have it updated with current mailing addresses and e-mail addresses, and even include people who purchase OTC pain pills or have had back surgery.

## [pb]Practical Applications

Applying patient profiling to marketing is fairly simple. Consider these examples:

*Case Study 1:* Forty-two percent of your patients are female, ages 30-45, and members of the fitness chain Curves. You could create a marketing initiative with Curves, including membership incentives or cross-promotions.

*Case Study 2:* Thirty-seven percent of your male patients play golf, of whom 67 percent belong to a single golf course. You could target your marketing to the course with cross-promotions and workshops to enhance golfing skills.

*Case Study 3:* Sixty-two percent of your patients have families; 47 percent have children in high school. You could put together a sports performance program for high-school students to improve sports performance and improve eligibility for college athletic scholarships.

*Case Study 4:* Thirteen percent of your patients are employed by one employer with hundreds of employees. You could do a viral marketing initiative to induce co-workers to visit the office for a special event.

*Case Study 5:* Forty-nine percent of your patients are overweight. You could offer a number of solutions, from workshops to exercise programs to nutrition or weight-loss programs - perhaps even with an alliance partner. Then roll it out to others in the marketplace that match the rest of your patient profiles.

*Case Study 6:* Twelve percent of your patients are known to purchase OTC pain pills. You could launch a patient-education marketing initiative targeted to only the patients who are purchasing.

### Changing Your Target

There are definite situations in which your current patient profile does not meet your desired target. Maybe in the past, you served more patients who were impacted by the economy and lost their employment and insurance. You can take a closer look at smaller segments in your patient records and then design a new marketing initiative to reach and attract more of the patients who were *not* impacted by the economy.

Once you know the specific elements of the demographics and psychographics you most want to serve, you can tailor your marketing and message to this target audience to change your patient profile. You may desire to move toward industrial care and away from personal injury, for example.

Your patient profile may indicate that your marketplace is declining in terms of your desired demographics and you need to consider relocating to a different marketplace. It's a simple principle: If you are trying to farm in the desert, move to greener pastures!

### Trust the Numbers

The best decisions are made with numbers; not emotion, guestimates or your gut. You can convert patient records into demographic and psychographic numbers. The numbers can guide your decision-making process to ensure you invest your marketing resources wisely and with the best opportunity for success.

During a recent office audit, I asked the source of most of the doctor's referrals. The answer was, "patient referrals." "Great!" I responded. "What was the percentage of your new-patient referrals from patients in the last 12 months?" The response was slow and lacked conviction.

But here's what we found: Only 11 percent of his total new patients were from patient referrals; 48 percent were from centers-of-influence, 19 percent were from an insurance plan directory, and the balance came from spinal screening events. The numbers clarified the lack of performance from his marketing plan. His focus was all wrong in terms of his source of new-patient production. Garbage in, garbage out.

### Strategy and Tactics

It is important to understand the difference between a strategy and the tactics employed to achieve a strategy. It begins with your desired outcome, goals and vision. What would you like to accomplish over the next 12 months? For simplicity purposes, begin with the triangle of growing your practice: new-patient production; patient visit average; and average visit income collected.

With specificity, you determine your desired results in each area. That is your practice growth

model. Next, take your current results and subtract from your desired outcome. The difference is your gap. Some gaps require a shovel to fill; others a backhoe. Once you know what is needed to achieve your desired results, identify the specific strategy you will employ to fill the gap.

Think of your marketing strategy as your high-level vision that will shape the choices you make for your marketing mix. Once you have your targets and strategy developed, work on the specific tactics, tasks, activities - your marketing mix that you will implement and execute to achieve your strategic desired outcome.

The final step is the most important: Write your marketing plan based on your demographic and psychographic profile, your financial business model, your specific strategy that you will use to achieve your business model, and the specific tactics you will implement. Your plan should be for the next 12 months. Plan early and then work the plan.

Follow this plan and you will be much further ahead than most of your competitive colleagues in terms of controlling your future and achieving the practice that you desire.