



CHIROPRACTIC (GENERAL)

Event Planning: 10 Steps to Put the Spotlight on Your Practice

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Have you always thought about planning a holiday event for your patients, but you just have no idea where to start? With the holidays approaching quickly, I think I can help you make this dream a reality.

Have you ever heard of Small-Business Saturday? First, there is Black Friday (the Friday after Thanksgiving), then Cyber Monday (the Monday after Thanksgiving) and a fairly new day to celebrate and support small businesses known as Small-Business Saturday - is the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Although your event doesn't have to be during the holiday season, with that time of year quickly approaching, I thought it might be a good time to share the top 10 tips for throwing a successful event.



You can also reference these at other times during the year; for example, if you are planning a grand opening or customer appreciation day. For several of us, October through January is that time of year when most people are making their plans and if your practice normally takes a little dip in appointments, you might want to consider planning an event during that time.

Whether it is an online or live event, sometimes the thought of hosting can be intimidating for small-business owners. And it can be even more overwhelming if you are a solo practitioner. Granted, there are lots of details to manage when you are planning an event, so I have compiled these 10 tips to help you plan and execute your next event with ease.

Step 1

Start with an end in mind - what is the ultimate purpose of the event? (Besides the obvious, which might be to sell services and products.) What are other possible outcomes you would like to achieve? Is it to attract local radio, TV or newspaper attention? Is it to create local awareness of your practice? Increase your mailing list of potential new patients? Get rid of some slow-moving products? Whatever the objective is, always start by setting achievable goals. Once you have that completed, you can start building on your foundation.

Step 2

Determine what kind of event it will be - will there be any food and beverages? What is going to be the main draw? Will you invite a guest speaker or provide an educational training? If you are just getting started, I recommend trying to keep it small and manageable your first time. Consider how many people your facility is capable of handling. You may even want to limit the hours, rather than have a full-day event. Sometimes manufacturers are willing to send in samples or a sales rep to answer questions or demo products to help with launches.

Step 3

Select the right date - because "timing is everything." When you are selecting the best date for your event, be sure to coordinate with your community calendar so you have the least amount of conflicts; or plan your event as part of your community event. Also, consider how much advanced notification people need to plan to attend. Will it be kid-friendly or do people need to get a sitter? Are most of your patients working during the day, so an evening or weekend event would work better? You may want to ask some of your best patients for their feedback so you can figure out the best time.

Step 4

Create and set a budget for the event - things start adding up when you have an event. You need to set a limit ahead of time to determine what you can afford and have an estimated return on investment (ROI) planned. Perhaps you hadn't planned on actually making money the day of the event, because your ultimate goal is to build your mailing list or acquire some new potential patients. As long as you can afford to invest the amount of money and never expect a return, because nothing in life is guaranteed. Don't spend more than you can afford.

Ultimately, no one ever plans on losing money; I just don't want you to overspend or create undue stress in your life because the results didn't happen as planned. Unforeseen circumstances can happen in any community. Sometimes it makes sense to partner with another local business to share some of the costs. Getting a sponsorship or selling tickets in advance might be options to help defer some of the costs.

Step 5

Craft a marketing plan - no surprise on this one, right? Determine how you are going to best promote the event. Emails, direct mail, social media, print media (such as radio or newspaper), fliers, postcards, signs at your facility, local TV spots, online community calendars, Craigslist, social media or other online ads, telephone calls; the list goes on. There are many different ways to get the word out. Be aware that some advertising spots have to be planned 60 days in advance, and always allow a minimum of three weeks for any print materials to be ordered. (If you wait too late, you may incur rush fees for getting a job completed quickly.)

Step 6

Contact your local media - they can be your best friend when it comes to building awareness of your event in your community. Most magazines, newspapers and radio stations have a submission section on their websites. This is the perfect place to submit a press release to the local reporters and bloggers about your event and invite them to attend. Also, send them a follow-up press release after the event so those who couldn't or didn't attend will see a value and make more effort to attend your next one.

Hint: Consider adding in a charity drive, as this helps encourage local media to participate. Toys for Tots, Make a Wish or having a local food drive for your community's food pantry is a great way to encourage participation and build local goodwill.

Step 7

Start the social buzz - use social media to get your ideal target audience excited about your event. Post photos or get your fans to participate in your prep work by asking for their advice. Maybe even create a social contest around the event. Remember, social buzz isn't just prior to the event; enlist the help of a friend, co-worker or staff member to post and tweet photos and updates during the event to encourage participation and drive up your social engagement.

Step 8

Lead capture promotions: In order to make the most of the event, you'll want to develop a way to capture all your attendees' contact information. Whether your goal is to build your lead list or make sales, you will want to continue to connect with your guests for future events, offers and services. You have multiple ways to capture their information; the most common is to have a prize or drawing for which they enter their name, email and mobile number on a form. You can make it really simple and have a guest book for people to sign when they enter.

If you are looking for a new-tech way that is lots of fun, set up a mobile contest campaign. People opt-in using the mobile text feature on their phones and then random text messages are sent out during the event notifying people they have won. It's a lot of fun and you can schedule the texts at various times. There are specific rules and spam laws you need to follow to perform this type of drawing, so consult an expert before you try it. The important thing is to capture information from as many of your guests as possible so you can continue to connect with them after the event.

Step 9

Make it a *fun* experience - if it doesn't go according to plan, almost nobody will know, unless you make it known. We all know nothing ever goes off without a hitch. Keep a cool head and look for ways to make it work with a smile on your face. No matter what, there is always a bright side and learning experience from the situation. Make plenty of mental notes and give yourself permission to decompress afterward so you can make corrections for next time.

Step 10

The money is in the follow-up - one of the most overlooked parts of planning an event is in the follow-up afterward. In the rush of planning for the event, remember to make plans for the follow-up email, social media posts, press releases and other direct-mailing pieces. So many times, we get so busy with the pre-planning and concerned about the day of that we forget all the names, emails and follow-up to do afterward.

Have a way to evaluate the response from the event. How many new patients did you get? How many of them were already your patients? Did you get to spend time with your ideal customers? How many attendees booked appointments following the event? Did your current patients increase frequency of treatments after the event?

It would be a good idea to create and schedule three to four follow-up emails to send out after the event. This is a good way to have it automated and be cultivating all your leads and encourage any potential new customers to want to make an appointment. More than likely, you are going to be excited, happy and exhausted for several days after, so the more pre-planning you do and can automate the easier it will be for you.

Whether you are planning for Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Small-Business Saturday, a grand opening, customer appreciation day or any other event, with a little bit of planning, you can make it a great success - one that will leave all your friends and customers talking for days and asking when your next one will be! Follow these tips and you should be less stressed and enjoy more success.