



MARKETING / OFFICE / STAFF

Common Mistakes That Keep Patients From Ever Coming to Your Office

Noel Lloyd, DC

I was excited when asked to write this article. Why? Because people have been calling me for close to 30 years to help them correct or avoid making the common mistakes that keep patients from ever coming into their office. What's more, every year I make an intense study of the current top five mistakes great chiropractors make that keep them from seeing enough new patients – and consequently fail at building the practices they've always dreamed they would.

This title is the hanging curve ball left out over the center of the plate I was hoping for. Now, let's see if I can knock it out of the park.

Mistake #1: A Bad Website

A poorly produced website can keep people away in droves. Your website is the first place most prospective [new patients](#) see you, and that includes most referrals. "Jim liked this guy. I think I'll Google him."

I don't know what your website looks like, but I was critiquing a client's site the other day and was amazed there wasn't a large button that said, "New Patients HERE" or "Start HERE" – not even a phone number on the home page! I struggled through the nearly-impossible-to-read print copy looking for his phone number. I finally found it on an obscure subpage, but in a font so hard to decipher, I had to squint to read it. I'm convinced this website hurts more than it helps.



My critique and suggestions were simple, direct and worked. Here they are: Make the site super simple, with easy-to-understand instructions on how to make a new-patient appointment and get into the office ASAP. Include pictures of doctors and staff in friendly individual and staff team photos. Add a two-minute "Welcome to our office" video tour led by the doctor. This is easy to do and can be done with an iPhone.

Don't forget, by the time people are on your site, they already know they want a chiropractor. A long, detailed explanation on how chiropractic works might actually hurt your web efforts by getting in the way and confusing people.

Hot Tip: Do what the big boys do. It's simple - less is more - and there's a big button in the upper right that promises you can "Get started NOW!"

Mistake #2: No New-Patient-Friendly Phone Procedures

People may learn how to find you on the web, but they make their first appointment by phone. When you call some offices, you wonder how they stay in business. The line rings too many times, you're put on hold without your permission and when they get back to you, there's a sense they just aren't ready for new patients. Here's my short list for avoiding phone mistakes:

- Practice a short, standard and cheerful greeting. For example: "Our Chiropractic Center, Mandy speaking. I can help you." And always answer by the third ring.
- Follow with this courteous phone etiquette that promises we won't lose you: "In case we're disconnected, Jason, is (repeat caller ID#) the best number to reach you?"
- Create a "right now" policy. Once you know it's a new patient, don't put them off until tomorrow. They'll just call the next office on their Google search. Part of your phone procedure needs to be, "Is there any reason you can't come over right now?"

Hot Tip: Have the phones forwarded to an office mobile after hours, and give a motivated and

trained CA a bonus for each new patient they book at lunch, after hours and weekends. You'll be amazed how many new-patient calls you're missing now.

Mistake #3: A Shabby, Rundown Look That Says You Don't Care

As a consultant, I request that new clients send me still pictures or a video tour of their office – starting from across the street or parking lot, taking me through the front door into reception and through the entire office. I review, critique and offer suggestions to make their office look more inviting to walk-by or drive-by prospects. Sometimes what I see scares me.

To start with, clean up the parking lot, sidewalks, flowerbeds, mini-blinds and windows. Freshen up with a new welcome mat, a new accent color for your door, or vinyl window graphics with your logo. And kill the clutter in reception.

Hot Tip: Have your spouse or friend with a discerning eye give you a critique, and then make suggested changes ASAP. Momentum is important.

Mistake #4: Not Having "Customer-Service Centered" New-Patient Procedures

Years ago, I was greeted at a luxury hotel by a VIP concierge who made me feel like royalty. It was so well-done and as far as I could tell, not that expensive – just polished and practice courtesy. The young woman stepped from behind the desk to greet me with a warm handshake. "Dr. Lloyd, my name is Teresa, how very nice to meet you." She wanted to know how my flight was; did I want sparkling or still spring water, and if she could invite me into the VIP registration suite.

I was so impressed that I wrote up a procedure for greeting new patients in my offices. It starts on the phone call, becomes more personal as they enter the office and extends to meeting the doctor. Our goal is a warm, personal greeting that shows we care about the patient. I love hearing my front-desk CA say, "You must be Kate. My name is Mandy. It's nice to meet you and welcome to Sound Chiropractic."

Hot Tip: Script a greeting along with a helpful explanation of your initial paperwork and practice it until it's the way you want it.

Mistake #5: Not Doing External Marketing

After literally decades of study, I know the best way to build a strong practice quickly is through external marketing. By not letting people know who you are and what you do, you are literally hiding your practice from thousands in your community. Marketing your practice is at least a series of articles – or even a regular column – but for our purposes, let's just lay the foundation.

Medicine has a several-hundred-billion-dollar pharmaceutical industry constantly schilling for it by telling people in every media possible that "if symptoms persist, see your doctor." But we don't have that and if chiropractors don't take the very attractive chiropractic message to their community, who will?

I was conducting a patient focus group for one of my offices. We invited seven of our best patients to be our guests at lunch with the understanding that I'd ask them questions about what they liked or didn't like about our clinic.

"How did you hear about us?" I asked the group. A gracious woman with silver hair answered first. "I met the doctor at the mall. I was so impressed that he'd take his time to help people that way. I did that posture thing and I was really a mess back then."

This wonderful lady had been a faithful wellness patient for years. But I wasn't prepared for what followed. Six of my seven guests – our most cherished patients – said they'd heard about us because of external marketing – and all thought we stood above other offices because of what another patient called our "[chiropractic missionary](#)" work.

Hot Tip: In a way that suits your personality, package up the chiropractic message and take to a world that so desperately needs it. I promise you'll meet the best people in your community and they'll be grateful you took the time.

Here's another promise: All these fixes are easy to do, inexpensive, and will help you care for more people, have more fun and be more successful.

JANUARY 2014