

## First Things First: Marketing Program Essentials

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*Editor's note:* This is the second article in a series dealing with marketing. "[Why Marketing Matters](#)" ran in the June 17 issue.

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Setting up and implementing a marketing program is a practice-building essential. [In my previous article on marketing](#), I outlined why it's so important, especially in today's challenging economy. Whether you consider marketing to be a fun and creative part of your work or simply a business necessity, there are a few basic steps to take to help ensure success, right from the start.

### 1. Take Marketing Seriously

You may not be a marketing professional, but you should approach your marketing program professionally. Make the commitment to your practice and then stick to it. What this means is structuring a program, versus approaching marketing in an ad hoc fashion. Set up a regular time each week to devote to marketing so it becomes part of your work routine.

### 2. Take It Easy

Marketing doesn't have to be hard or complicated. There are many things you can do on your own to market your practice, even if you haven't taken Marketing 101. Books and online resources are available to help you do it yourself. You also can hire professionals to help (we'll discuss using consultants in a future article). Joining professional networking groups online, such as LinkedIn, provides the opportunity to read about and/or solicit advice and tips, all without leaving your office.

### 3. Define Your Goals

Know what you want to achieve. Be clear and specific about what you want to accomplish. Do you want to expand your practice by X number or X% of patients? Increase sales of adjunctive products by X%? Increase the visits of existing patients by X amount? The point of any plan or program is to achieve its results. For that, you need to define what you are going to do, how you are going to do it, when (a timeline), how will you pay for it (budget) and how will you measure your effectiveness (tracking), so you know if you should stay the course or change direction.

You may have heard about [the "SMART" management approach](#) to projects and programs: S - Specific. Your program has a clearly defined objective. The desired results are expressed in numbers or some other measurable way. M - Measurable. You need to determine how your objectives will be measured. A - Achievable. R - Realistic. Are the objectives you set achievable and realistic with the resources you have? T - Timely. Did you set a timeline and is it realistic? It may help to set milestones along the way to have specific objectives to accomplish within shorter time periods, versus one overall goal.

#### 4. Customize Your Program

Tailor your marketing program to meet your specific needs. If you already have enough patients coming to see you for back problems, for example, but very few are taking advantage of your wellness products, focus your marketing messages accordingly. Are your patients and prospects users of social networking sites, or would using more traditional marketing tactics like direct mail be better?

#### 5. Prioritize

Establishing a comprehensive marketing program in line with your business goals doesn't mean you have to do everything all at once. Establish the top three or four things you believe are most critical to do and work on those first.

#### Putting It All Together

Most marketing programs consist of some basic elements that assist you in structuring your plan. That being said, don't get bogged down in writing your plan or making your program so complex that you can't get it off the ground. Make it a part of your regular business activities.

The essential elements of a marketing plan help focus your efforts and provide a road map to follow. A basic marketing plan usually consists of the following:

*Goals/Objectives:* Do you have an overall goal for your business, your practice, your patients? Identify specific objectives with measurement criteria as discussed above.

*Target Audiences:* Who are you trying to reach? What demographic information do you know about them?

*Key Messaging:* Key messages are the three to five points that you want to say about yourself or your practice. These are the statements that differentiate you from others, highlight your strengths and address the needs of your constituents. They may focus on your years of experience or training; your areas of specialization, e.g., women's health, sports and fitness or nutrition; supplemental services or products offered through your practice; the staff and environment in your office; your philosophies and approach to wellness; achievements; or other areas of strength.

Your key messages should be consistent across all communication platforms you may use - literature, Web site, e-mails, advertising, speeches and presentations, direct mail, and social media, to name a few. Key messages are the foundation of what you want to communicate. You'll want to adjust exact words and phrases according to the medium and audience.

*Strategies:* Identify a few ways you plan to achieve your goals. For example, if one of your objectives is to increase patients coming to see you for overall wellness, one strategy may be to position yourself as a wellness expert among your patients and prospects. If you're new to a specific geographic area, perhaps your objective is simply to grow your patient base, and so your strategy is to build awareness of your practice.

*Tactics:* Tactics are the specific action steps and activities you plan to do under your strategies. Take the strategy mentioned above, positioning yourself as a wellness expert. To accomplish this strategy, your tactics could include finding relevant speaking engagements, writing an opinion piece for the local newspaper, starting a blog, and carrying wellness products and literature in your office. To build

awareness of your practice, tactics you may undertake could include obtaining and publicizing client testimonials and professional referrals; joining a local business association or group; giving one speech or presentation a month at schools, church or business groups, women's or Rotary clubs; or holding an open-house event.

Your approach may be traditional, grassroots or guerilla. The important point is to look at your objectives, who your audience is, and determine the right action steps to match. In future articles, we'll cover the specifics of social media and traditional marketing tactics.

*Timetable and Budget:* Map out a realistic timetable, such as doing one speaking opportunity a month or sending out a monthly e-newsletter. Attach a budget to each tactic that fits within your overall financial picture.

The reality is that you can always do more marketing. Start with what you can realistically handle given your schedule and budget. Your marketing plan will help keep you focused and on track.

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