



YOUR PRACTICE / BUSINESS

## Let Your Fans Spread the Love

Rob Berman; Cindy Donaldson

Nirvana in marketing is when you can create a team of *brand evangelists* or people who completely, 100 percent not only believe in your brand, but also willingly, without being prompted, share your brand story with others. Think of it as free marketing and a source for unlimited referrals.

In health care, brand evangelists can be other health care providers, people in the community or your patients. We call them *patient advocates*.

Word-of-mouth marketing is incredibly powerful because it relies on a human emotion that's difficult for marketing to create - trust. If you trust a friend and they make a recommendation, you're going to take it more seriously than if a marketer were just advertising to you.

That's why it's worth spending time and effort finding and nurturing patient advocates - patients you have worked closely with to preserve and improve their health, and who are willing to spread positive information and recommendations about you and your practice.

Make the Patient Experience Matter



Here's how robust practices tap into the power of their fans: It starts with *you*. It's all about the experience. The health care you provide is only a small piece in the patient journey. Patients expect so much more than great chiropractic care:

- Wait times may seem like a little thing, but to patients it could make or break your practice. Watch the wait times and have a system in place to address anything longer than about 10 minutes.
- Make your waiting area enjoyable to be in. Trust us - the wait times won't be as annoying to patients if they are sitting in a calming area, with comfortable chairs, soft lighting and up-to-date reading or viewing material. **If you have a TV**, make sure it's not too loud!
- Offer other services? The waiting area is a great place to subtly promote them.
- If you have a spot for a bulletin board, it's a great place to put client testimonials and letters for the world to see.

#### Add Value

Go above and beyond what's expected of you. It's all about building a deeper connection with each patient and doing something that's a little beyond what they might expect.

- Follow-up with calls to patients who are struggling with a certain diagnosis or just had a bad day during their last visit.
- Ask them if they would like to be on your email list so they can get all your great content!
- Make it easy for them to schedule appointments or cancel one if need be.

#### Shoot for the Stars

Encourage your patients and referral sources to give you testimonials on Facebook, Google and Yelp. Having a four- or five-star rating goes a long way with prospective patients. Have you ever purchased an item on Amazon that had no stars when there was a similar item that had five stars - even if that item was at a higher price? We doubt it. Patients are no different.

The best time to ask for a testimonial is when the patient is happiest. When you hear - "Doc, my back feels amazing - thank you!" ask for the stars!

### Engage Online

Engaging with you patients and referral sources online is a great way to keep your practice front of mind. Facebook is an excellent place to share content, comment and encourage conversation. Make sure to monitor carefully for any unhappy patients and to ensure no [HIPAA violations](#) are occurring. Be clear that patients should not share any private information.

### Incentivize Patients to Spread the Love

People like to be rewarded and you can use that emotion to create patient advocates. You might invite patients to special talks, provide small incentives like tote bags, or donate to charities on your patient's behalf for every person they refer to you. Ask your patients about the things they care about and support, and target your incentives at those areas. Even a \$5 gift card to a local coffee shop will go a long way in saying, "Thank you."

Taken together, these techniques can build a strong network of patients willing to evangelize for your practice. Referral marketing really works, and a combination of care, value and encouraging patients can pay dividends when it comes to marketing and growing your practice.

In the end, it's all about nurturing your patients and centers of influence by not only giving them the care they are seeking, but by going above and beyond what they are expecting. If you go the extra mile, you will notice an uptick in your referrals because you've created a band of patient advocates and brand evangelists!

JUNE 2017