

MARKETING YOUR PRACTICE 101

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In a perfect world, it would not be necessary for those who deliver life-giving services to market themselves, and, indeed, at one time, it was considered unethical. But times have changed. In an age where most people get their information and make their connections through the media, it is not only ethical, but in fact, professional and effective, for the healthcare community to use the advanced tools of marketing to reach the people they serve.

Experience with healthcare and medical companies across varied specialties has proven that often times great ideas, companies and services are overlooked because of poor marketing strategy.

Marketing is also one of the most important steps you can take to gain and retain business. The key is to create an image for yourself and encourage a person with specific needs to seek out your care. When marketing yourself, or your new, small business, it is important to keep in mind both the important information you need to communicate and the type of patient that you envision walking through your doors.

Healthcare providers are most often selected based upon credibility in the community, word-of-mouth reputations and first impressions. Therefore, it is your responsibility to ensure that your potential customers can quickly recognize the value of your business, understand the services you provide and easily recall this information when making a treatment choice.

Ask yourself: *How will patients know what I have to offer? Why should patients choose me or my services?*

When beginning a marketing campaign, first evaluate your strengths. Highlighting your expertise will often help you to immediately stand out among your peers, and showcase specific reasons why a patient should choose your practice over the one next door.

- Identify your strengths. What is your specialty? How does your training set you apart from others in your specialty?
- Identify the strengths of your business or clinic, such as convenient location, number of staff, beds available, hours of operation, etc.

Once you've identified your strengths, turn them into your key message. A key message is essentially the most important information that you want to convey to anyone and everyone with whom you discuss your practice.

- Focus on 3 points. These points will become your identifying characteristics and what you will consistently refer to in conversation, advertisements, interviews, speeches, etc. Most people won't remember more than three things about you, so concentrate on defining these clearly.
 - Consistency is key. Work these three points into all of your marketing materials.
 - Repetition delivers the best results and by reiterating these three key messages, customers will begin to recognize you, your efforts, and your business or clinic.

In a city of many doctors, professionals, small businesses, corporations, and generally tenacious entrepreneurs, it may be difficult to decipher your space within the San Antonio market.

- Appreciate and cater to your ideal consumer rather than trying to please everyone. As Guy Kawasaki, the marketing genius of Apple, says "Niche Thyself"
- Use conversational language to connect with the average person.
- Understand the needs of your audience – senior citizens need different care than young mothers. Who are you trying to reach?
- Find your hook, or rather – what differentiates you from other physicians trying to market to the same area. What do you offer that your competition doesn't?

Understanding your competition can allow you to know what strengths you should stress and what you need to do for your business to thrive. Showcasing what you offer to a community will build credibility, interest, and appreciation.


- Know your competition as well as you know your own business.
- Talk to your patients about why they selected your practice and continue to highlight those positive characteristics.
- Most importantly – be prepared to answer the question: "Why should I choose YOU?" (Think 3 key messages.)

The "who, what, where, and when" of your business are certainly important, but what you really need to tell your customers is WHY you are the best.

- Highlight specialty services.
- Feel free to drop names like where you went to school and those whom you have worked with. Relationships help establish credibility.
- Include positive statistics to help promote your business, such as the number of procedures or surgeries you have performed or your success rates.

There are many marketing possibilities within advertising and public relations. Beyond the traditional, print advertisements and editorial features, consider networking, public speaking, patient seminars, special events, white papers, mass mailings and email campaigns as alternative methods of reaching your customers.

- Again, identify the people you want to target and consider where they get their healthcare information.
- Use and repeat your key messages to establish recognition within this community.

With these suggestions, you have the basic tools to establish an introductory, marketing plan and then you will soon be on your way to creating recognition, validity, and expert standing among your target audiences. 

MasonPR is a full-service public relations firm headquartered in San Antonio, TX with expertise in healthcare communications. The agency represents small and large companies, non-profit organizations and healthcare associations around the globe. MasonPR can be reached at 210-731-6646 or info@masonpr.com.