

Marketing Your Medical Practice

A Quick Reference Guide





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We've all got to start somewhere.

Keep that in mind as you're going through this book.

Just because you're not a medical marketing expert now doesn't mean you can't pick up a few tips, trends and tricks over the next 53 pages to help you attract and retain more patients.

Our recommendation is to take your time reading each chapter to digest what you're reading. Stop and ask yourself a few questions. Relate the examples to your practice. Take notes and try to bite off a little piece of strategy here and there. Make small changes in order to create **big** differences.

Plus, you'll look super smart when you know all the answers to those pesky marketing questions your docs keep asking about.

Ready to save time, save money and save stress?

Let's get started.



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Chapter 1: Brave New World of Marketing

Marketing your medical practice doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, a majority of it is common sense, which ideally, you have a lot of. Still, things change fast and you better be ready for it. If you haven't marketed your practice before, welcome to the club. If you are just looking for a quick refresher, you've come to the right place, too. Either way, it's a brave new world and the best thing to do is dive right in.

Let's say one of your goals is to increase your bottom line (good idea, by the way). A great place to start may be shifting your marketing efforts, but how will you ever know what to do and what's coming around the bend? Keep reading to find out, obviously.

Every year seems to bring about predictions, changes and trends in marketing. This year is no different. Next year won't be different either, so be prepared for a never-ending journey. Sit back, put on your thinking cap and take a look at what my medical marketing crystal ball predicts for the immediate future.

General Practice Marketing Becoming a Relic

For a long time, general physicians and dentists were afraid to promote their practice thinking they wouldn't attract enough patients – if that was you, that used to be okay. Used to. Then maybe you started to market a little, but you kept it general to avoid turning off any sector of the population that wouldn't be interested in your specialty.

In today's always-on-the-go-give-me-information-now-digital-social-age (try saying that ten times fast), patients are more educated than ever. A whopping 70 percent of patients go online and make their choices about healthcare completely on their own. They visit WebMD, Wikipedia, doctor review sites (more on those in a bit) and then your website.

Patients begin to think the only way to get the treatment they need is by going to a doctor recognized to treat their condition specifically – meaning



the generalist is a thing of the past. Patients want to see two or three conditions a doctor specializes in right off the top. That's all they have time for. This trend will continue to explode now and in the future, as information becomes necessary by the second to patients.

Social Media and Doctor Review Sites Rule the Land

For better or worse, social media is here to stay. It's not a passing fad that you can afford to miss. If you're stuck in your old ways, consider this a helping hand to pull you out of the sand.

Social media allows everyone to share their opinion – and people are listening. Patients will go to Facebook and Twitter and tell their network about you – good or bad. They will go to doctor review sites such as HealthGrades.com or Wellness.com and share their feelings about you. They'll rate your office, your effectiveness, your compassion and more for the world to see. In fact, if you've been listening to the radio lately, you've probably heard that some offices are even beginning to tout their ratings and reviews found on sites such as HealthGrades.

In other words: they're talking to each other before they're talking to the brand (you). This trend will increase as users become more comfortable with their power to get the true story on products from complete strangers.

So what can you do about it? Aside from making sure that you and your staff are on your best behavior, try to get ahead of the curve. Develop your own social media strategy, devote time to go onto these sites and create a real impression. Give yourself a voice to the thousands of people looking for a caring, dedicated physician (they are all looking for you on the internet, just so you know).

With that said, content will become even more important on these types of sites as well. Even if you gain Facebook Fans and Twitter Followers, you have to give them relevant content they find important or you'll be skipped as they skim their newsfeed and updates. Content matters, and this year, it will matter even more.



Engage Me!

This builds off of the social media aspect a bit, but another trend that is quickly gaining momentum, and another that's here to stay, is consumer engagement. If you do not engage your patients as human beings, and not people who you think want to be sold when marketing, it won't matter what you do. You'll be on the outside looking in.

Start by actually talking to some of your patients. Ask them to define one thing they wish you did better. That's it. You'll be amazed at the answers you get.

Branding Beliefs

Every office says they offer the highest level of service in a relaxed environment where patient care is priority one. That's exactly why patients look to other places before visiting your websites or reading your pamphlets. What are you doing, what do you believe in, that really sets your office apart from the others?

As competition becomes fiercer and the market becomes even more saturated, expect to see that differentiation can really pull an office into the stratosphere. How can you become different? Choose some things that you really believe in and make them true. If you say every patient is greeted with a smile, make that happen. If you say you don't keep patients waiting, make sure they don't wait.

Now What?

The important thing to remember is that you have to put in work to get results. Everyone wants more business, but no one wants to work harder to get it. That is what has to set you apart. Does a good plan and some savvy marketing help? Of course. But more than anything, you've got to be willing and ready to stay on top of your game and be better than the next doctor down the street.



Chapter 2: Getting Ready to Prepare Your Marketing Plan

You wouldn't go into battle without a battle plan, so don't go into the market without a marketing plan. Every good plan needs a budget. Far too many times, I've had clients that want me to sit down and discuss how to grow their business. We usually meet at the local Starbucks. After they spend \$10 on coffee to "pick my brain," I ask them how much money they've allocated to marketing their practice. So many times I will get the answer, "Oh, I hadn't thought about that." Now is the time to think about it! You can't grow your business without putting a little money into it.

When preparing your annual (or quarterly, if that's easier to swallow) marketing budget, the goal is to analyze every marketing activity you participated in this year and determine if it's worth your dollars and your time to participate in these events and/or programs next year. You want to objectively review what worked and what didn't. Rely on numbers here, not relationships. Below are a few areas you should consider when deciding where to cut and where to expand your marketing efforts.

Referral Sources

Who are your largest referral sources and what are you doing to get those numbers? If it's relationships with other doctors then that's great, keep those up and be sure to send them a gift basket to show your appreciation (I'll take one, too!). If you collect a few referrals from certain doctors and want to establish stronger relationships with them, this is a great place to allocate some of your time and effort, as the payoff could be huge for relatively little cost.

If it's any kind of above the line advertising such as magazine, radio or television ads, then obviously you'll want to stick with what's working. But if those Yellow Page ads are only generating a few calls a year, you may want to consider shifting your dollars to one of the other mediums that has been working for you. Don't know if your ads there (or anywhere for that matter) are even working? Consider adding a "dummy number"



unique to each publication or station you're placing an ad with so that when someone calls you'll know that your advertisement worked. way you can justify investing in that account. There are dozens of services that offer a number forwarding and tracking mechanisms, and a quick Google search will help you identify which is right for you.

Web Traffic

How is your website performing? How many unique users are visiting your site daily? Once they get there, are they clicking around to learn more or to contact you? It can be tough to devote time to log in and check your stats on a daily basis, but most web companies offer software that offers you all kinds of analytics and stats that help you determine what areas of your site are strong and which ones may need some further attention and tweaking. Have your office manager run a bi-weekly or monthly report so you can keep track of your efforts and make changes as needed. This is another way to increase patient count for relatively little cost.

What about your online advertising and search engine optimization (SEO)? When someone searches for your specialty, where are you ranked? Coming up with a quality online ad campaign and SEO-focused plan may be costly, but the benefits typically outweigh the cost as a handful of new patients will pay for the programs themselves. If you've never done this before, contact a pro who will help you hit the ground running. If you're currently in the middle of a campaign, be sure to review the numbers and make changes if they aren't working. What have you got to lose?

Email Database

You've been collecting email addresses from patients for years, right? Well if you haven't, you should start. Hopefully you've been putting the email addresses to good use and have created some type of a patient newsletter that you send out to patients several times a year. Take a look at the stats from your email provider and check your open and click through rates. If these numbers are low, change your content up a bit and try different subject lines. If they remain low, maybe an email database isn't for your practice.



Depending on your practice, you may also want to think about adding a coupon in your emails with a firm expiration date. Ideally this will motivate patients to come through the doors. It's also a good way to measure how many folks are actually opening and reading through your messages. An example might be to offer a 'priority appointment' with mention of this email.

Social Media

Spending a lot of time trying to build your Facebook Page but not sure what the payoff is? Facebook offers deep statistics that show you not only how many people are looking and interacting with your content, but also what their age ranges are, how often they check your page and much more. If you aren't looking at your metrics here, you're really missing out on a great, free resource that can really show you what you're doing right and what you're missing out on. When you're editing your page, click on the "Insights" tab to see how your page is doing.

Next, it's time to really start the planning process.



Chapter 3: Developing a Marketing Plan

At the end of the day, when you're driving home, what do you want to know in your heart? To feel in your soul?

As a doctor, a part of you will say, "I feel that I delivered the best quality care today that I possibly could have." As a business owner, a part of you will say, "I want to know that I did everything I could to increase my profits and grow my practice today." As a person, you'll want to know, "What's for dinner?" But, I digress.

The point is that, at the end of the day, you want to know that you have helped current patients, increased office profits, attracted new patients and positively impacted your reputation. The first step in achieving these goals starts with developing a clear, concise and, most importantly, measurable marketing plan.

Healthcare marketing is not a decision that should be taken lightly – after all, this is your business, and thus your reputation, on the line. And that is exactly why you should be putting serious effort and thought into a well-planned marketing strategy for the short and long-term. Jotting down some ideas or putting together a few advertisements simply isn't enough.

Current market saturation and experience, as well as several other factors, will determine how much of your revenue should be spent on marketing efforts. Typically, established practices spend between 3-5 percent of revenue while new practices may spend around 10-20 percent for the first few years.

No matter what stage of business you're in, here are a few components you'll want to include in your marketing plan.

Target Market

This is exactly what it sounds like and it answers the one question that will guide all of your future activity: who are you trying to reach? Your answer



– or answers – will shape your plan. Obviously, if you want to reach a broad patient base, you’re going to focus more on advertising your practice around town, public relations/community outreach efforts and a strong website. If you’re looking to reach referral partners, you will be looking for direct contact with other offices, industry specific publications and even trade shows and lunch-n-learns. All of your efforts from here will be determined by the next component.

Budget

Once you’ve identified exactly who you are trying to reach, determine how much you are willing to spend to reach them. If you would like to avoid paying for services above the line (advertisements, art production costs, etc.), consider a public relations heavy plan focused on positioning you as the expert of your field, gaining credibility and increasing awareness by being featured throughout various news and information outlets.

Goal

Think about this aspect of the plan for a good while. Of course, the overall goal is to increase revenue and grow your practice, but take some time and apply realistic gains here. Write down the numbers you’d like to achieve. Take a good look at how many patients are currently coming through your doors and what each potential patient means to your bottom line. How many surgeries have you performed over the last six months and are they the type of surgeries you want to perform or is it time to focus on attracting a different type of patient? If you’re really brave, include a deadline you’d like to see the increases by. This will help you evaluate your plan and keep you on track. Plus, with the numbers written down you won’t be able to forget or run from them.

Brand Image

This is a broad category, but an important one nonetheless. Your brand image includes (but is not limited to) your logo, slogan, color palette, website, marketing/handout material, nametags and even office art and design. Outline all aspects here and then identify how you and your staff will



execute and maintain your image standards in everything they do. You want to set yourself apart from the competition; this is how you do it.

Competitor Analysis

Speaking of setting yourself apart from your competitors, now is a good time to really take a look at what they're doing to gain, lose or maintain market share. Take a moment to see what they're doing right, and more importantly, what they're doing wrong. This way, you don't have to make the mistakes they've already made but you can analyze what trends and strategies work. Be sure to check competitors that are in similar regions as well, don't limit yourself to just the surrounding area.

Measuring Results

Once you have your plan outlined, you're going to need a way to measure how well you've done and ensure you maximize return on investment. Consider instituting a system to categorize patient count and how they found out about you. The easiest is to simply add a question on your initial new patient paperwork that asks how they found about your office and give them a few options to choose from. It's effective and it will save you a lot of money, not to mention a headache or two, when reviewing your marketing plan.

Baby Steps

Now, it's important to note that these are just a few tips on how to develop your marketing plan. Take time to be as detailed as possible, because you will have questions as you move forward. You should be able to look back and find the answers in this plan.

Throughout the chapters, we'll take a look at various strategies to consider using when reaching out to your target market. Until then, remember that your plan is not static – it's a living, breathing document. You should evaluate and update your plan on an annual basis, at least, to determine what is working and what areas could use improvement. Otherwise, you'll have no idea what to feel on your way home, except confused.



Chapter 4: Reaching Your Target

After you've developed your marketing plan, it's time to determine which vehicles will take you and your practice to where you want to go.

Depending on your individual goals, you'll want to use a mix of the below elements to achieve the best results from your efforts. Remember: **track everything you do** and be sure you're receiving a positive return on your investment – if not, change your mix of tactics or consult with a medical marketing guru because, odds are, they know what they're doing more than you when it comes to this stuff (no offense).

Without further ado, here are some of the most commonly used tactics to increase patient count and brand identity for medical practices just like yours.

Grassroots Marketing

One of the best ways to establish yourself in your community is to participate in said community. This would include outreach efforts such as supporting local youth or adult sports teams/leagues, participating in community health-themed events and even donating time to help your favorite local nonprofit organization.

Grassroots efforts employ low-cost tactics and don't always focus on selling your mission, instead they focus on building strong relationships and foundations in the trade area.

These efforts will not only help create a positive, warm and fuzzy feeling between patients and your practice, but they will put you (and your staff) in direct contact with hundreds of the people you are trying to win over in just a few short hours.

There is not much better bang for the buck. Plus, if you play your cards right and document what your folks are doing at all these community events (like take photos), then you'll have some great content for your social media efforts.



Print

Imagine your potential client or referring partner picks up a local magazine. They skim through and an ad catches their eye. Will it be yours? Your printed materials are what will set you apart from your competitors and establish you as a leader in your field while, if done correctly, providing you with targeted and measurable results.

That goes for everything you print from ads in magazines to brochures, rack cards and direct mail pieces. Your printed materials should be professionally designed, include between three and five key points and some sort of call to action or special offer. This will not only entice people to call you soon, but it will also tell you if the print job did what it was supposed to depending on the number of offers you receive back.

Direct Mail

Yes, this is print material as well, but it deserves its own section because of how effective it can be. Direct mail *can be* expensive – but it works. Your mailing list will make or break a direct mail piece, so make sure that you have a quality list to mail to first. Direct mail works for current patients, potentials and referral partners and generally the success rate is when you receive a return of 2 percent. I know that doesn't sound like much, but if 40 people out of the 2,000 you mailed to call and are converted into patients the price will more than pay for itself.

Website Development

Your website is often the first impression many patients and referring partners will experience, so you want to make sure you're putting your best foot forward. Include pertinent information such as your biography, maps, hours, insurance carriers you accept, directions and even forms for first-time patients to fill out to speed up the check-in process. If you want to get fancy, you may want to include a patient education section, bill pay, prescription refill and portals to versions of your site in another language. About 70 percent of all people go to the Internet to research YOU before they call to make an appointment.



Search Engine Optimization

This is often referred to as SEO and if your site was created professionally, you shouldn't have to worry as much about keeping up with maintenance moving forward. That being said, is a never-ending process as well. Seems like there's a lot of those doesn't it? This is the component of your site that will improve your office's organic ranking and page location on search result pages like Google and Yahoo. The higher you are, the more views you'll get and, odds are, the more inbound phone calls and patients you'll see. This can be very confusing, but it's essential to complement your new state-of-the-art website.

Referral Development

Working to develop strong referral relationships will go a long way in getting patients into your specialty practice. Like any relationship, the more one participant trusts the other, the happier you'll both be. It's important to come up with a system to reach out, develop and cultivate relationships to area referral partners and that can be done in a number of ways, the most effective being actually sending someone to their office. You can also run contests, host events and use direct mail to help. Bottom line: the more you build this relationship, the better off your practice will be.

Is that all? No, of course not. There are literally dozens more tactics that can be used to reach your target market, all of which can be modified to include your internal communications with current patients as well.

Your next step is to determine which tactics will work best for your practice and how you can use them effectively to grow your brand.

By now you should be well on your way to creating a new marketing identity for yourself. If you've found that you just have a headache instead, take two aspirin and call me in the morning (I've always wanted to say that).



Chapter 5: Importance of a Friendly Staff

When was the last time you called your office and tried to set up an appointment? When did you last sit in the waiting room simply to observe what the experience is like from a patient's perspective? If you're like a lot of doctors, you probably haven't done that anytime within the past, oh, ever. That's fine, I'm not here to judge, I'm just here to tell you that you should be doing that every now and then. The look and actions of your office staff are often the first thing patients will experience when it comes to your practice – and that's why an organized, friendly staff is key to your overall success.

Now that's a pretty obvious statement, sure. But when was the last time you actually examined what your staff is like and what they do to help your office? After you've developed your marketing plan and you've got your prospective patients calling in, what happens then? Your receptionist or someone at the front-office answers the phone and deals with patients. That makes them the most important assets to you retaining patients and gaining referrals, aside from your actions, of course. Trust me when I say you will be judged by that first interaction – which is why you should do everything within your power to ensure it's a good one.

They say you've only got one chance to make a first impression and you should always put your best foot forward. They're absolutely right. Your staff needs to be friendly, courteous and just plain nice when they interact with patients – no matter what. Here are a few more tips that can help put your office over the top:

Always Smile (Even on the Phone)

When someone calls or walks in to anywhere, for any reason, they want to be treated with respect. They want to see a friendly face that's ready to help; and the same goes for when they call your office to set up that initial appointment. One simple way to make patients feel immediately more comfortable is to walk them through the process step-by-step – whether that's setting up an appointment, asking questions in a friendly and non-intrusive tone or giving directions. It all goes back to wanting to feel welcomed, and it's up to your staff to give off that warm feeling.



Addressing Patients

When a patient first walks into your office, the first thing a staff or front-office person should do is acknowledge them. A warm smile and a simple “Good Morning” is more than enough to make someone feel a little less anxious. Like I said before, these first interactions are of grave importance – we all want to feel like we matter. I’m sure you wouldn’t want to be ignored for 3 minutes and then spoken to rudely. I know I wouldn’t. I’ve seen it happen numerous times, and each time I can’t help but immediately sympathize with the patient. If you’re lucky they’ll just bad mouth your office to a few people, but if you’re unlucky they’ll post their negative experience all over the internet.

Organization and Efficiency Are Key

Let’s say you go to a new restaurant for a nice evening out. Upon walking in you see a wet floor sign in between tables, servers running around like their heads are cut off and the hostess stand is empty. You’re probably a little uneasy, but you’re already there so you might as well try it. Now, even if the food is incredible, when you talk about that place to your friends and family, what will you most likely include in the review?

Something like this perhaps: “Yeah the food was great, but they were so unorganized. I thought we were in trouble, but it turned out alright.” You’re essentially saying, it’s good but the atmosphere made us uneasy. You’ll want to avoid that at all costs at your office because, well, people won’t like you as much as they like the place that fed them good grub. That’s why organization and efficiency are key to your success.

You want your office to appear tidy – another factor relating to a friendly staff that cares about their work environment. Your waiting room should be organized and clean. In addition to providing a comfortable area for patients to relax, this is also the perfect time to educate patients and cross promote your practice’s services.

Having an organized office also makes you seem more professional. Plus, if you’re organized, that means you’re likely more efficient as well. This will help in the immediate short-term because no one likes to wait, especially at a



doctor's office. Even if their wait times won't decrease due to efficiency, if the appearance is there, it can go a long way into making a patient feel more at ease.

Keep the Gossip Turned Down

One of the larger complaints patients often have in regards to office staff, aside from being treated rudely, stems from when they can blatantly hear the staff talking about personal or private issues. Not only is disrespectful to the patients sitting anxiously on the other side of the glass, but it also is incredibly unprofessional. If they don't care, what's to say you, as the doctor, will? The best advice here is to keep the gossip turned down and the focus turned up.

Correcting the Problem(s)

One of the quickest ways to correct the problem is to go ahead and actually try what I mentioned earlier: call your office and see what that process is like. After that, try sitting in the waiting room, or sending a close confidant in there, to observe. Take notes and be as harsh as possible, cruel as it may sound. Then, consider a staff meeting to correct the issues, or you may consider incentivizing staff with a rating or prize system to motivate them to go above and beyond.

If that doesn't work, it's not like there's a shortage of qualified individuals looking for employment.



Chapter 6: Telling Your Story Through PR

We've all got a story to tell. Every doctor, every nurse, every office has something that sets them apart from every other doctor, nurse and office around the corner. What makes you unique? Why should patients go see you over a competing practice?

Now, hopefully, that's not the first time you've ever asked yourself those questions. Certainly, you have an answer for them, right? To market your practice in the ever-changing, instant gratification society we now live in, odds are you have a multi-pronged approach to marketing whether you know it or not.

You might have some fliers and posters made up, ads in local magazines, a Facebook page or even a few public relations/community outreach efforts – whatever the case may be, there is a good chance you have some type of “marketing mix” at your office. And that's a good thing. A very good thing, actually. But, which method is most effective at drawing patients in the door of your practice?

The answer depends on who you ask. Having a healthy marketing mix is a great thing, allowing you to reach potential patients through a variety of mediums. But for the most value, the most impact you have to have a strong community presence – you have to have a story to tell.

One of the best ways to grow your awareness in the community and establish a positive reputation (as I've said before) is effective, strategic public relations. This can be anything from pitching news stories to attending community events, and even hosting charity drives or sponsoring local school programs. Be sure to choose causes, stories and events that mean something to you – it will not only make the job of actually attending these promotions a lot easier, but it will also give you something to talk about (and thusly build trust) with your new patients.

But what makes effective public relations? The key to taking your efforts from a desperate, cheap media grab to something meaningful that patients can identify with is the story you tell. That's the entire key. If you have a



good story, something people want to hear about – patients will begin to believe in it, and in you, in the end.

Where to Start

The key in creating a good story starts with a strong foundation and builds from there. Take some time to plan out stories/trends you see developing within the next several months that relate to your specialty or your community so you're prepared when they hit. Have you ever noticed that the calendar never stops sneaking up on you?

An effective story is told through pacing and in the case of public relations, pacing is your timeliness. So be ready or the opportunities will pass you by.

Brainstorm about some of the ideas that make you unique. Choose a niche that you want to carve for yourself and concentrate your efforts there – are you a family-friendly small business owner or are you a leading edge, state-of-the-art powerhouse? Sure your office may have elements of both of those things – you can be small and still be paperless or have fancy tech – but, when you're marketing yourself choose one image and stick with that. Too many messages will cloud your story and people won't have anything to remember you by.

If you want to include every aspect of your practice, they should be limited to background text and bullet points.

Many practices make the mistake of trying to be too much – remember, most of the time, patients only hear a few seconds of what you have to say anyway, so make sure you're telling them the right story.

If there is anything unique that sets you apart, now is the time to figure out what it is and own it. Make sure your story is rooted in reality, and it always helps to add a human or personal side. If your story is compelling, patients will be compelled to your office, it's as simple as that.

Let's take a moment to discuss your story. You don't have to have a tragic tale of heart break and redemption – so don't over-think the process. Focus



on what makes you unique and then work toward telling others about it – that is your story.

If you're unsure of what to do, one good tip to start with is keeping in touch with your current patients. Work with them to build trust on a personal level and make time to tell them a few of the stories you were thinking about – see how they react. Use them to help craft your image. This is the perfect captive audience to run beta tests and market research on.

Listen and really apply their feedback – it will go a long way toward setting you in the right direction at no cost. Warning: patients can be brutally honest when you sit down and talk with them for a few minutes, so bring a tissue just in case.

What to Do

Now that you've hopefully got a few good story ideas relating to your practice, it's time to do something with them. Every marketing activity you do should be geared toward building on your image and maintaining the stories you've chosen.

As I mentioned before, become a part of a local charity or fundraising committee. Open your ears for patient feedback and be proud of your extracurricular community involvement. Tell the community at large what you've been doing.

Another great tip to save you and your office manager a headache is to remember that if you're going to send something to media to announce news, hire a company that specializes in medical marketing or public relations to send the story out for you. They can offer tweaks, edit for grammar and they already have all of the local contacts in place so you don't have to worry about getting reporters to talk to you, what you should say and what you have to do. It will save you what hair you have left, trust me.

These companies can also help in the process of creating your image. Consistent efforts are required for attracting new patients. Everyone wants to feel like they have an "inside" track when it comes to healthcare –



everyone wants to know and be connected with a doctor so they feel like they get special treatment. When working with patients, make them feel this way and then tell them your story. You'll be surprised at how fast word of mouth can travel.

What to Avoid

So you've got a story in mind to tell. You've decided on an image for your practice. It's compelling. Real. Newsworthy. Or is it? One of the biggest mistakes you can make is over exaggerating or creating a story when there really isn't one there. Failing to deliver on a claim you've made can be a practice nightmare it's difficult to recover from.

There's a fine line between reaching out to media to share when something newsworthy and timely has happened to you or your practice (say, winning an award or adding another doctor to the team) and when you just feel like you need to get in the paper. If you aren't sure where that line is, a marketing and public relations specialist can tell you. Basically, if you burn bridges with local chambers of commerce and/or the media, the majority of time they can't be rebuilt so be very careful when submitting ideas if you ever want one to get chosen for a story if you're trying to do your own PR.

You also want to be sure that whatever image or story you've chosen to create for your practice is an achievable one. Don't choose an image of community activist if you hate being active in the community. It sounds easy enough, but it happens all the time.

Patients will turn on you and leave your office if your actions don't match with the story or image you've worked so hard to create. Next thing you know you've got negative reviews all over the place and patient traffic will decrease rapidly – so don't lie.

The Bottom Line

The thing to remember is this: PR tells a story. It connects you to your community, and to new and old patients alike. Used correctly, it can be one of the most powerful tools in your marketing materials and can drive your patient count through the roof. Used ineffectively and the only story you'll



have to tell is how you had to close your practice. Everyone's got a story, but no one wants to be the author of that one.

Be clear, be concise, be honest and be ready. Once people hear your story, they'll come knocking. Make sure you're there to get the door.



Chapter 7: PR for Your Practice

Did you just finish reading the previous chapter? Do yourself a favor and take a break for a bit because this one is all about public relations as well. See, PR is tricky and that's why we've devoted an extra chapter to it. Some of what you read in the last chapter will be repeated here. Consider this the PR 201 for your medical marketing career.

You're sitting at home in front of your TV. It's 10:00 p.m. and you've finally carved out some time to catch up on the local news. You kick off those slippers and turn on favorite station. There's a story about a new high-performance sedan going on sale this year – new features, new design, new performance. You've got to have one. The news reporter reviews its safety features and describes the car as a "top pick." Later, you hear a radio commercial for the same car, and although you're still interested, it just doesn't pack the same punch as the news story did. Do you know why?

Credibility. Even the best advertisements in the world have a rough time establishing credibility, which is why it's so important to put an emphasis on public relations for your practice. You see, your patients and referral sources go through the same process that you did when you heard about the car when they hear about your practice. If they see you positioned as an expert for a story on the nightly news, you are an expert. It's that simple. You become the local, go-to doctor for that subject. But, if they only see you in an advertisement, you become just another doctor in a white coat, just like the must-have sedan becomes another car.

The goal of an effective media relations plan is to raise awareness about your medical practice and create buzz about the things you're doing. A good PR plan is vital to continued success as it will establish the ever-important credibility your practice needs and can't get from traditional paid advertising – often at a fraction of the cost of an advertising campaign.

People trust the media because they are a (supposedly) unbiased third party that is reporting on what they hear or experience. The importance of having a successful PR plan in addition to your traditional "above the line" advertising cannot be stressed enough.



By now you're probably thinking, "How can my practice reach out to the media and get the coverage we deserve?" Well, that's a very good question. Below are just a few tips to help you get started on your media relations plan.

What Does the Media Want to Write About or Cover on the Nightly News?

Believe it or not, your practice is newsworthy. Adding new physicians and services, winning an award, utilizing a new technology, going paperless – they all make for desirable stories for news media.

It's also helpful to tie your story into a larger trend that affects your community as a whole, if you can. For example, if you recently went paperless, see if that ties into a new county conservation initiative or a story about how big your local landfill is. The broader the interest is, the easier it is to sell the reporter.

Timing is Everything

Before you even begin to think about submitting a story, do your research and find out the deadlines for each outlet you're interested in. Learn them well because your pitch will have to coincide with these hard deadlines, not the other way around. If you miss them, you're out. Remember to always make sure your announcement is timely, interesting and relevant.

Know Your Audience

Just like the media have to know who is watching, reading or listening to their stories, you have to be familiar with what that audience wants as well.

Reporters love straightforward news, so be careful not to over-spin your story or use too much marketing language. Ask yourself if the audience of that outlet would be interested in the proposed news piece. Think about it for a bit and then ask yourself again. It's also worthwhile to find an outlets' preferred delivery method. Most will want it by e-mail, but it's always good to check. It's a simple thing you can do to improve the chances of your story getting picked up.



Avoid Errors

Yes, avoid is spelled wrong on purpose. It's to prove a point: do whatever you can to avoid typos, sloppy writing or grammatical errors. These mistakes, however small, will ruin your credibility with the media almost instantly. You only have one chance to submit your story so make sure everything is right before you do it. Again, take a few minutes and read over what you spent hours working on. Catching that typo could be the difference in your story getting picked up.

And there you have it. Although establishing an effective media relations plan may seem daunting at first, it is vital to the continued growth and success of your practice. Think of it as the fuel that will keep your practice running. Speaking of which, when you go to buy that new car, do yourself a favor and buy the red one.

Chapter 8: The Best Patient is the One You Already Have



How many things do you do in a day? Really think about it before answering and take your time, I'm not in a hurry. Now, if your answer turned out to be more than "one," keep reading. If it was less than one, then you may want to take a serious look at adjusting your lifestyle.

Anyway, for those of us that handle multiple projects (see: fires) per day, have you ever stopped and realized that once the day at work is over, once you're home, what's one of the first things you do?

Maybe you hug your significant other, take off your shoes, play with the dog – but almost unanimously, at some point, we all do the same thing: we talk about our day. We share what we did, how we did it and why it was important to us and the people/projects we work with.

The point of my longwinded intro, you ask? Aside from the whole "sharing is caring" thing, sharing all the things you do at work shouldn't end with telling your friends and family about them. In fact, it should start with telling your patients.

It's something I like to call cross-branding, and it's something that I don't see near enough of in the medical community, especially private practices. Essentially, cross-branding involves letting all of your patients know about all of the services your practice offers while they're in your office. Sounds like a simple idea, right? Believe it or not, many offices (maybe even yours) still don't take full advantage of the captive audience that is literally knocking on the door looking for help.

If a patient is sitting in your waiting room, odds are something is wrong. Maybe today it's flu like symptoms or a sprained finger – but what about a month from now? A year from now? That patient may have a case of bronchitis or a broken leg – but if they don't know you treat those problems as well, who is to say they don't take their illness, and their dollars, elsewhere? It may seem obvious to you that if you treat one, you treat the other – but you work there. Every day. Assuming a patient knows the inner workings of your office is a mistake, and it's one that's made far too often.



The good news is that the problem is easily rectifiable. The bad news is that as many practices transform their management style to mirror small businesses, some things – like cross-branding – can get lost in the cracks along the way. But, that’s why this chapter is here, and, presumably, why you’re still reading. Here are a few tips to take advantage of the audience in your waiting room and how you can start cross-branding tomorrow:

Use Your Marketing Material

You know those boxes of pamphlets and rack cards you have laying around in your storage closet somewhere you had printed for that event a few months ago? Try digging them out and using them to help promote your business in your business. Just because you’re at your office doesn’t mean you can’t talk about yourself. Place a brochure with every receipt or have a stack in the waiting room. Better yet – have some available in exam rooms for patients to read while they wait for you.

Don’t have any brochures laying around? No problem – get one made, or if you’re feeling creative, make one yourself. No matter what, you’ll want to include a list of services available and plenty of ways to contact the office. A word of caution if you decide to make a flyer/brochure/rack card yourself: make sure you know what you’re doing before sinking in the time and money to write, design and print the pieces. There are marketing specialists for a reason, just as there are doctors for a reason (see what I did there? Clever, no?). But seriously, your marketing materials are what set you – and your brand – apart from other offices. If a potential patient had two flyers on a desk, one from your office and one from a competitor’s, without knowing anything about either of you, they will pick the one that looks better. The moral of the story? Make sure the better looking piece belongs to your practice.

Have a Meeting

See, I told you these were simple. Walk into your office tomorrow and have a quick staff meeting before you begin to see patients. Pick a service you offer and want to highlight. Then, tell every member of your staff to mention it to every patient they see throughout the day.



Not only will this give them something extra to speak with patients about – again, improving your brand by having friendly, talkative staff – but it will also provide a personal, one-on-one touch that may come back to pay dividends for you, either through that patient or someone they refer to your office.

This technique also works with any special promotions you may be running or social media services. Social media is a topic for another article, but if you’ve got a Facebook page up and running, having your staff talk about it to patients can put it over the top – especially if you offer free wifi in your building and patients can become your fan or follower right from their phone or computer while they wait.

Redecorate

On your way to the office, buy a few 8.5x11 clear plastic stands. Have someone in your office create a one sided flyer that lists your most popular services and your website (or social media site’s) address. Place a few around the office and pat yourself on the back. This is one of the easiest ways to cross-brand, and after a couple bucks and a few minutes on a computer, you’re done.

In this case, it’s ok to design a flyer in your office, simply because it doesn’t take much design knowhow to create, honestly. A few bullet points, a logo, a nice border and you’re done. It’s not as personal as the other methods listed above, but that doesn’t make it any less effective.

Open Up

I know, I know. You’ve heard this before, but the truth is, in this ever-changing, ever-crowded marketplace being personable and, dare I say, remembering something about a majority of patients goes a long way. But it’s more than just getting to know them, you have to let them get to know you too, and your entire practice for that matter.

Letting patients get to know your practice is the easy part. If they come in for a bunion treatment, there should be signage that you also treat all types of foot/ankle sports injuries and can offer them custom orthotics, too.



A simple poster or pamphlet can do the trick – and suddenly the patient is aware of six other services you offer they never even considered you for before reading that sign. This will help them spread the good word with people they know and keep you top of mind in case they need to come back for a new treatment to a new problem.

The harder part is letting them get to know you. I always suggest having bio cards readily available as well as videos in your lobby or on your website that allow patients to get to know who you are away from the office. It's comforting to know that you're a human being too with a family and not just another stereotypical white coat.

Data is Your Best Friend

When you want to market to your existing customer base, you are only as good as the data you keep. Make sure to get as much detailed information as possible from patients and keep good track of it. Demographics, what they came in for, what they may be interested in, what their family may be interested in – it's all valuable when you need to market a particular segment of your practice. The best mailing list you can have to market a promotion is one of current patients who may be interested in the service.

If you have a good way to pull segmented patient lists in an organized, easily attainable way, start doing that now. Like this instant.

Use Testimonials

You've run into patients who are amazed at the results you helped them achieve. The surgery or treatment or advice you gave has changed their life and they're fans of yours forever. Take this opportunity to grab some written or recorded testimonials from them for use in your advertising materials, on your website and around the office.

This idea goes back to the old saying of perception being reality. If all these people think you're great, well then you must be great.



Thank You Letters

Think of it like this: your car is making a knocking sound so you take it to the mechanic. When you go to pick it up, you have a brief but pleasant talk with the gentleman who fixed your car, the knock is gone and you're happy to tell your friends it's all better. Then, a few days later you get a personalized Thank You letter from the mechanic saying how much he appreciated your business. How much more likely are you to recommend him now? Not only did he do a great job fixing your car, but he went out of his way to show his appreciation for you too.

Now, most likely, you're not only are you going to tell more people about him, but you're probably going to be sure to take your car there every time something goes wrong. See where I'm going here? If you go the extra mile for patients, they will return the favor and your entire practice will be better off for it.

How Will You Know Your Efforts Are Paying Off?

Well, it's pretty simple, especially with option two listed above. If you're having your staff reach out to patients, create a spreadsheet, list the services you're promoting and then how long the promotion will last. If you see an increase over that amount of time, or even a few months out, then it's working. If not, then something is wrong, and you'll have to adjust accordingly.

As for the other methods, it's easy to tackle tracking the same way, you just won't be able to be as procedure/option specific as with individual promotion. The same rules still apply, however – if those services see increases in use, then you're doing something right. If not, then it's back to the drawing board.

Even though we all have a few hundred things to do every day at work, now you'll be able to add one more very important bullet point to your daily list when you say, "I promoted my business today." Go ahead, say it out loud. Be proud of your accomplishment, and the fact you have something new to share with the people you know.

Chapter 9: The Customer is (Still) Always Right



Let's just come right out and say it: customer service is as integral to your practice as your medical degree is. That's right. Before you cry blasphemy, think about your office's most vital assets (hint: you aren't number one). It's your patients – or your clients, customers or whatever you want to call them – that keep your office lights on, pay your salary and, ultimately, make your job possible. So how can you reach them better and keep them happy?

A dissatisfied customer will tell between nine and 15 people about their experience, with about 13 percent of dissatisfied customers telling more than 20 people, according to the White House Office of Consumer Affairs. That means a few unhappy patients can go a long way and do a lot of damage to your practice.

Perhaps even more startling of a statistic: 86 percent of consumers took their business elsewhere following a bad customer experience, up from 59 percent just four years ago according to Harris Interactive, Customer Experience Impact Report.

When developing an office culture for you and your staff, remember that above all else everyone should be paying the most attention to your customers – your patients. They don't have to choose your office, but you have to make them glad they did.

Start at the Top

In this case, that's you. No matter what's going on in your personal or daily life, no matter how overbooked your schedule is – find time to interact and connect with the patients you're seeing. Spend an extra minute or two with them to find out why they're there and maybe even a personal fact or two about them to see if you share a common interest. Write it down in your notes, I won't tell.

This is one of the easiest ways to ensure a positive experience for a patient – they'll tell everyone willing to listen about the great doctor visit they had and how wonderful of a person you are. Take the time to identify customer



needs and listen to what they're saying – not just about what hurts, but about who they are.

But it doesn't stop there. You're just the beginning – step one for you is to set the "patient-first" mentality. Step two is to make sure your office staff is following in line. On average, patients deal with at least two to three people from your staff, and each interaction should be a pleasant one.

There is a trickle-down effect from you to your office manager to your front desk to your nurses and finally to the patients. It's your job to set the tone and promote the energy throughout your office.

One of the biggest initiatives that may help is simply letting employees know that you're putting an emphasis on customer satisfaction. Encourage them to be friendly, listen to patients and go out of their way to make sure patients are happy. One of the most successful strategies here is to lead by example. But remember, employees are a type of customer, too, and they need a regular dose of appreciation as well. Consider planning special promotions or contests that will encourage them to create a friendly atmosphere and reward them for succeeding. Thank them throughout the day and the trend will catch on; if they're treated with respect, chances are they'll have a higher regard for patients.

Putting Patients First

As silly as it may sound, changing just a few of the things you do can create a ripple effect that will positively alter the entire perception of your office. According to Lee Resource Inc., attracting a new customer costs five times as much as keeping an existing one, so wouldn't you like to keep every patient and positive referral you can? I thought so. Here are a few tips at how to immediately improve patient service within your office:

Make patients feel appreciated. The biggest thing here is to treat them as individuals – use their name, connect with them and find ways to compliment them (as long as you're sincere). Patients can tell whether or not you really care about them, so find ways to show that you do, like not rushing them or trying to do three different things while they're speaking with you. It's the small things that matter.



Harness the Power of “Yes.” You and your staff should always be looking for ways to help your patients – from a glass of water to explaining an insurance form – if they look like they need something, ask. When they have a request, make it happen (as long as it’s within reason. I don’t want to hear about any physicians doing dental work on the side because it’s more convenient for patients). Make doing business with you easy – from paperwork to consultations to payment – it should all be stress-free. If you need a better website or a complete office makeover for that to work – make it happen.

Give More than Expected. If the future of your practice lies in keeping your patients happy and gaining referrals – think of ways to elevate yourself above the competition. What makes you different from your competitor down the street? Find those elements and own them. Identify what you offer patients they cannot get elsewhere. Think about what you should do to follow up after a visit – maybe you send out Thank You Cards or even a quick phone call from the front desk to show the office is concerned with their wellbeing? What can you give them that’s totally unexpected? Find that answer and you’ll be well on your way to a unparalleled level of customer service.

No matter what, just remember the old saying: “The customer is always right.” It’s about time you start listening to them.

Chapter 10: The Lost Art of Building Relationships



Let me start by saying I don't think there is just one "tool" that can help you grow your business; instead, it takes a well-stocked "toolbox" to get the job done. But, if I had to choose one tool that can really help to grow your practice quickly with little money and little expertise, it would have to be relationship building.

The truth of the matter is the relationship building skill will come naturally to some of you, and others, not so much. Still, with relationship building more than any other tool available to you, there is nothing more effective when "giving it the old college try." You see, that's where the problem stems – many medical offices do not put the required effort into building relationships for whatever reason. Not with vendors, not with referring physicians and especially not with patients. So, if you want to give your practice a shot in the arm (pun intended) here's what you have to do to rediscover the lost art of relationship building:

Decide Where to Start Building

If you're going to lay down the foundation for your new business building plan, who do you want to reach first? It's my recommendation to choose one group – such as referring physicians – to target instead of spreading yourself too thin trying to reach everyone. Ideally, choosing one group will allow you to focus your efforts and really make an impact.

Next, decide how you're going to go about reaching them. Are you going to increase your referring physician office visits? Maybe you're going to find out something personal from each patient and write it down to talk to them at a later date? Whatever you plan on doing, make sure that you have the capabilities to do it and do it well.

You'll want to find ways to connect with each group or individual you're trying to reach as well. Remember, the point of building these business relationships is form new connections that will, hopefully, lead to more people in the door.



Communicate Frequently

I know, it seems obvious. But really – this is one of the largest keys to successfully building better relationships. Not only do you want to connect to each group, but you want to do it frequently to stay top-of-mind. If there is a reason to remember you, hopefully it will count toward a reason to give you business as well.

For the best results, it's important to communicate often and vary the types of messages you're sending, especially as it relates to patients. They can only accept hearing the same few facts or promotions so many times over and over again before tuning you out entirely.

Don't be afraid to mix up the medium in which you interact with them either – consider combining e-mail, direct mail, social media, phone contact and the dreaded face-to-face communication as well. This will keep the message fresh and help ensure you're reaching as many potential leads as possible.

Host an Event

Consider hosting a few events per year to show your appreciation for whatever group you're trying to meet. A patient-appreciation breakfast goes a long to say thank you to patients and it can provide you with a good event to get to know them better. The same goes for other groups as well, it's important in this category to be creative and have fun.

Any events that allows you and your staff to interact with patients or vendors or whoever is usually a good idea. Best of all, the events require little preparation and they're relatively easy to pull off, especially if it's a small, community-themed outing.

Listen and Reciprocate

As much as all of the wonderful relationship building can help your practice, you need to create a two-way street in terms of communication to really get the most for your efforts. What that means is that listening can be just as important as talking. Be sure to use every opportunity to create



interaction, including simple things such as asking for feedback or having vendors take a survey.

This not only provides valuable information to you, but it also makes the other party feel as though their opinion matters.

Part two to the deal: you must act. If you do a survey and there is a resounding issue, you must address it. Otherwise, any trust or loyalty you've built will be diminished while you sit on your hands.

To add to that, when the relationship building does begin to pay off, be sure to reciprocate. If a referring physician is really putting patients in your lobby, try to find a way to scratch their back as well. It's all about wanting to feel wanted.

The Next Steps

On the road to building a good relationship, the next step involves you finishing this article. After that, you have to get out there, come up with a plan and put an effort in to make something happen. From there, it's time to really start using that toolbox of yours.

Chapter 11: Referral Visits and Promotional Products



Growing your practice can be a pain. We're all friends here, so let's be real. There's a lot of work that goes into it, and most of it just isn't that fun. Your reward, however, is. As you begin crafting your tactics and launching your action plan, one thing you might want to consider to enhance your referral visits or event presence is the use of promotional products.

Whether you're visiting an office trying to increase the amount of referrals you get or you're at a community event and want to be remembered, promotional products can help you create a lasting impression on your potential patients. These leave-behinds work wonderfully for medical practices because they are not invasive and they don't cost the person receiving them anything. Seriously, who doesn't love free stuff?

Using these freebies works well to get your name out there and generate consistent exposure to your target audience. One of the keys to success in the medical field with promotional products – and all giveaways for that matter – is that they shouldn't be the focus of what you're doing. Rather, they should serve as the last piece of the puzzle that really sends you over the edge. When you're making your office visits, be sure to have some type of handout as well – such as a brochure or rack card – that explains what you do. That should be the main component of what you're leaving behind with the promotional product as a "keeper" – something they will remember you by.

Remember, you want these products to set you apart and keep you in the mind of your referral partner and/or your potential patient. How do you do that? Glad you asked – here are a few ways:

Bring Something Unique

What sets your office apart from other doctors in the area? Now, how can you tell me that without using words? Don't worry, it's not a quiz. I'm sure you'd agree, though, that it's tough to answer that question; and most



times, a promotional product won't be able to do that. But, what they can do is serve as a physical representation of an idea. If every office is giving away pens, what sets your office apart?

Take this opportunity to bring something unique to the table. Be memorable – the idea is to give something that people will be excited to use and will pick up often. My advice would be to think outside of the box and give something that you'd like to receive yourself.

Follow the Trends to Success

It's always best to do a little research before spending a decent-sized chunk of change on widgets and giveaways. What's hot right now? What do people want? One of the most popular things for this year will be a focus on safety. Consumers (see: patients) want to know more than ever how products will affect their overall health. Any product that comes with a focus on safety or puts their health first, is a plus.

Another trend to keep in mind is that budgets are shrinking. That's right, frugal is fashionable. For instance, we know that more people are bringing their lunch to work these days than several years ago to cut costs and making their own coffee instead of visiting a chain coffee shop. Consider putting your logo on something practical that puts more money in their wallets. They'll use it more and appreciate the thought on top of that. Think of a quality lunch bag/cooler with your office's logo on it being used at hundreds of local businesses around Central Florida.

Lastly, and this one is perfect for medical marketers, is supporting a cause together. Think of one specialty or disorder that your office focuses on or is known for, and choose something that backs that cause. Collaborate on something that's meaningful for them and for you.

For instance, if you deal with cardiovascular disease, give a heart keychain away at an event with a note explaining to the potential patient that if they visit your office, you'll donate a portion of their bill back to the American Heart Association. It doesn't have to be any large sum, remember, it's the thought that counts.



Design Matters

Your product is no good if no one wants to look at it. Choose colors, textures and designs carefully. You don't want anything too cluttered, disorganized or just plain painful to look at. Usually a logo, phone number and web address are sufficient. Depending on the product, you may be able to squeeze in a marketing tagline or a few of your specialties, but anything else means you're living on the promotional product world edge.

Leave Plenty

If the office manager of your visit really likes what you're giving away, leave plenty. The idea is to give them away and make sure they're used. If you have to give four away when you were expecting to give one, so what? It's all about getting your name out; besides the more you give away, the sooner you'll be able to order new swag.

Leaving something behind can increase the patients that come in. It's as simple as that. After some careful research, planning and plotting, you should be well on your way to a promotional products plan that works and doesn't break the bank. And, if all else fails, you'll have enough drink koozies to last a lifetime.

Chapter 12: Are Lobby Videos Really Worth It?



Waiting around is a large part of the patient experience when they come to your office. I know, I know – you do everything you can to maximize efficiency and minimize wait times for patients – who doesn't? The fact of the matter is they still wind up waiting. Whether it's for 60 seconds or 25 minutes, what are you doing during that time to keep them informed and entertained? Aside from magazines and brochures, many offices have a television in their lobbies. The question then becomes, is it worth it to have custom content created?

The answer is unfortunately not clear cut, depending on several factors we will explore below. In my professional opinion (whatever that's worth) patient waiting time – no matter how long – should be turned into a valuable learning experience. Whether that means posters, brochures and/or a professional video loop is up to you and your staff.

Informed Patients = Increased Appointments

The two biggest benefits to having a lobby video for your practice are that informed patients will generally make more appointments because they know what's available to them, and on top of that, they'll stay loyal because they feel as if they know you. Videos are a great way to splice in entertaining patient education pieces, facts about your practice and all the services you offer your patients never knew about. It's also an easy way to gently repeat a call to action telling them to schedule their next appointment several times in just a few minutes.

You Get What You Pay For

If you choose to do custom videos, you'll obviously want to make sure they'll hold your patient's full attention and contain professionally produced, high quality clips. This is one of the most difficult aspects of choosing to do a custom lobby video because if the patient doesn't pay attention, you wasted your money. You'll want to go with a reputable company that has experience producing these kinds of videos for healthcare offices so that you are all on the same page, trying to reach the same audience with the same message.



The video clips should be tastefully produced, easy to understand, visually interesting and brief. You'll lose interest if your videos are longer than just a few minutes so keep in mind the sheer quantity of clips, tips and health information you'll have to prepare to have a decent video playing if you're doing it all on your own. That said, when your content achieves the goals it set out to do, it can be one of the most important in-house marketing pieces you've ever invested in.

Alternatives to Completely Custom Videos

Although you'll be able to stress your exact message in a completely custom video, they are rather expensive (not to mention the headache of trying to coordinate footage and interviews with multiple doctors in one practice). The alternative to custom video is semi-custom loops, which are already created. There are two options if you're interested in this route: subscription services and DVDs.

Subscription services allow you to pull from a library of "canned" content and splice in your own – either text or video based, depending on your service provider and the plan you have with them. Most of them will even impose your logo on the videos to give it more of an authentic feel; and you have complete control over what clips and facts are displayed to patients. The downside is that the content can be limited and you may not be able to create a message that cross-promotes your other services. These services will also require that your TV(s) of choice be hooked up to a high-speed internet connection.

The other option is to order DVDs that come complete with content. These, like the subscription services, show canned footage and clips with your logo imposed on them. This is the cheapest route to take and thus the least customizable. In other words, to change the DVD content, you'll have to order more. Some services will allow for you to send in information and clips to help cross-promote or show interviews with doctors/patients, but that option comes with a steeper price tag. Some positives are that the DVDs are set to continuously loop and all you'll need to play them on your respective TV(s) is a DVD player.



Things to Consider

If you choose to have a lobby video, make sure it's long enough so people in the waiting room don't see the content more than once. That's when they'll start to get irritated and, no matter the length, suddenly feel as if they've been there forever. You should also consult with your staff—you know, the people who will have to hear the video ten times a day. If they're unhappy or annoyed, the patients will know.

After reading about the pros and cons, ups and downs and lefts and rights of creating a lobby video, hopefully you now have a better idea of what you're going to do. Now the only question you have to answer regarding a lobby video is if it's really worth it to you.

Chapter 13: This Ain't Your Kid's Social Media



Before you even start thinking about this article, close your eyes (after this sentence, please) and decide what “social media” means to you as a business owner.

Well, what did you come up with? Hopefully, your definition included some of these concepts: marketing tool, branding vehicle, free, increased customer satisfaction, etc. The landscape of social media has evolved for the small business owner with technology adoption rates in the U.S. doubling in the past year from 12 to 24 percent, according to the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business. That means more people, just like you, have begun to use the tools as a means to reach out to current and potential clients, or most likely in your case, patients.

Whether you have started to use the technology to bridge the gap between your patients and your office yet or not, it's hard to deny the fact that it works. Face it, everyone knows what Facebook, Twitter and Myspace is – they are pervasive in our everyday lives these days.

In many cases the consumers – your patients – are already using social media to connect and follow brands and your office should be one of them. Roughly 68 percent of Twitter users follow at least one brand on the service and 43 percent of all American internet users are either Fans or followers of at least one brand on Facebook.

It's important to get rid of the old notion that social media is for teens, tweens and 20-somethings only. Adults of all ages are using the service and as a result, they are cultivating stronger relationships and building better brand loyalty with companies, stores and offices they use.

The truth is, social media has replaced billboards and phone book advertisements for much of the population. Not to mention, it's free.

Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to engross yourself in your social media campaign and really create something special. If you can offer clients and referral partners something unique and engaging – your practice will



reap the benefits of a job well done. If you spiral into a spamming, status-update-hungry monster, chances are you'll be rejected.

So what should you do to launch a strong campaign? I'm glad you asked. The first thing you should do is simple: stop thinking of social media as work. Social means interaction – it means fun. It's a novel way to connect and should be used as such.

Now that we've got that out of the way, here are a few things you can do before you blindly sit down and start blasting content. Remember – your audience is not changing, you are simply finding a new way to interact with them.

Listen

It sounds easy, sure, but then why don't you do more of it? The web is essentially a living comment card for your practice – patients often rate experiences, share news about their visit and review their interactions with the doctor. Find a social media or review site where you can find this info and just lurk. See what they think of you.

If you can't find a place to snoop, think about creating one through your website or Facebook accounts.

People have taken the time to fill out how they feel about you, so you should read what they have to say to increase understanding of your brand, your industry and your office. If you do good work, they'll let you know. If not, they'll still let you know – but it might sting a little.

You may even want to take this opportunity – just a few minutes a week – to respond to some of these comments and try to address users that were left satisfied and unsatisfied. Tailor your interactions and show you care (besides, dealing with an unsatisfied customer online is way easier than in person anyhow).

The fact that you made the effort will do wonders for their perception of you (however).



Share Content

Being a medical practice, you might be thinking, “I don’t have any content to share online people will care about.” In fact, it’s just the opposite.

People crave information about their health and new trends – you should give it to them.

Use your social media presence to be more than just another source of spam that lists your services and instead become a resource that users want to tune in to. Talk about new advances, pros and cons, common questions – you can even share general medical news that isn’t specifically related to your practice if it’s about general wellness.

The idea is to provide relevant content. The more relevant your content, the more users will “Like” what you’re saying. When they do that, it will push the update to their Facebook wall and their friends will see it, “Like” it again, and so on and so forth until they eventually visit your website and pick up the phone for an appointment.

If you don’t think you’ll have the time to blog this content – simply post links to stories that other people have done. It’s faster and it helps position you as an expert in the field, making you the “go-to doc” with questions.

But it shouldn’t just stop at content – publish photos of yourself with your family, key office staff, nurses and even special seminars or events you attend. All of this will create a connection with the audience, showing you and your staff as real people instead of “scary doctor’s offices.”

Get Socializing

It’s time to consider your social media strategy. Again, think about your audience and come up with a few interesting ways to interact with them. Put yourself on a manageable schedule where you can spend a few minutes every few days updating your social media account(s) so your content will not become stagnant.

You may have to spend some time fine tweaking your efforts to see what works and finding your audience.



Having a social media presence doesn't mean your business will increase overnight. In order to have a real effect, you have to figure out what works best for you.

So now, what does social media mean to you?

Chapter 14: Online Physician Ranking Websites – Friend or Foe?



Are those pesky online ranking sites a thorn in your practice's side? Or, are they quickly becoming one of your highest referral building boosters? Or, are you completely lost with no clue what I'm talking about?

Let's start from the top. In the world of instant online social communication, a recent trend has taken the web by storm. It can boost business to new heights and it can scare patients away from scheduling appointments in just a few seconds.

This phenomenon, of course, is online consumer rating sites. These sites provide an outlet for patients to share their experience with others. Users post reviews, ratings and comments – and they all have an impact on whether a potential client will choose your office over a neighboring competitor.

Different sites use different jargon to determine rankings, but what you need to be concerned with is what patients are saying about their experience at your office. The more ratings you have, the higher ranked you become. The better the rankings, the more patients will call for an appointment, at least that's how it works in theory. Conversely, negative reviews will help to keep your waiting room empty.

There has been some question as to whether the sites matter as much for physicians as they do to a restaurant, let's say. A recent study released by Tara Lagu, a physician at the Tufts University School of Medicine, says that patients aren't too interested in rating their doctors, especially if the experience was sub-par. The study examined 33 physician rating sites and they found that 88 percent of the reviews were positive, 6 percent were negative and 6 percent were neutral.

That's great news right? It could be. The data may prove to be inconclusive however, as only 190 reviews were used for the study. Either way, you'll want to make sure of two things:



Your office is listed. You'll want to be listed and reviewed by, at least, several patients. The sites even give you an opportunity to claim "ownership" of the page if it is your business. Claiming ownership and spending ten minutes to update your profile is incredibly useful, not only for search engine optimization, but it also serves as a free listing for you to put your brand, phone number, location and even photos on the site. Take advantage of the opportunity.

You aren't one of the negatively reviewed doctors. You want every review to be as positive as possible. Stars, thumbs up, numerals – whatever the system the site uses, you want to be at the top.

One of the most common questions physicians are asking right now include: "What are these sites?" and "How can I change my ratings?"

Below you'll find a brief overview of some of the top general and doctor-specific rating sites, how they work and what they do. Following the overview, take a look at some of the most common problems reported and a few tips you can use right now to change a patient's perception of you and your office.

Top Rating Sites:

- Yelp (www.Yelp.com)

Offering ratings on everything from restaurants to library systems, Yelp is used by the common consumer. This is the populist vote. The site allows users to rank your practice based on a 5-star system and share comments, and easily share the review with friends/random readers. It is also one of the top-rated sites on Google when searching for reviews of any kind. It's a good place to be – so be there.

- Yellowpages (www.YP.com)

Taking the book online has done wonders for the Yellowpages business, and it can for you, too. The site allows users to search for, rate and comment on their experience at any type of business that's listed.



Basic profiles are free to set up and they also offer paid services and promotions as well. Depending on your specialty, and the package selected, it can provide a quality, measurable ROI.

- [Health Grades](http://www.HealthGrades.com) (www.HealthGrades.com)

Physician and healthcare provider specific (if you couldn't tell by the name), Health Grades uses a star system to provide rankings and ratings for doctors. Listings can be sorted either by specific locations or specialties. Again, the site lets you to claim ownership of your practice, although the focus here is more on you as an individual rather than your practice. Upon registering, you have the ability to add photos, your state of license, years since graduation, age, gender, insurances accepted and more. There are also tabs to include information about awards and they even provide a background check. Patients can rate you based on several factors using a handy survey tool that includes level of trust, ability to help patients understand their condition and more.

- [Rate MDs](http://www.RateMDs.com) (www.RateMDs.com)

As of this writing, RateMDs has more than 990,000 ratings on their site with 680 new doctors added the previous day. Here, if a user searches by zip code they are provided with a list of the 200 top-ranked physicians in the area. The more reviews you have and the higher the rankings, the closer you are to the top. Experiences are on a 1-5 scale and include categories for staff, punctuality, helpfulness and knowledge. Upon registering, you can again provide additional information about yourself and your practice.

Common Problems Reported

By now you should have a relatively good idea about what these sites do and why people use them. But what are they using them for? A majority of people are rating their physicians positively.

However, many of the reviews aren't as high as they could be with a few minor tweaks to your practice. Some of the most common problems reported are:



Waiting Time Conflicts

Nobody wants to wait, no matter how busy you are. Complaints range from having to fill out paperwork to having a disorganized reception area. Some easy solutions may include making paperwork available online through your website, not booking patients at the same time you arrive in the morning and, if there is a wait, providing a pleasant waiting room that is also kid-friendly.

Billing Errors

This is a big one. Set clearly defined responsibilities in the office and it is an easy mistake to correct, saving you and the patient money in the end. It may also be beneficial to set up an archive system by date per patient or schedule periodic reminders for patients to update their contact information just to be sure the data is correct.

Rude or Impersonal Staff

Most people expect there to be a wait. But when they have to deal with uncaring or impersonal staff, it can really turn the experience sour. Many of the complaints here revolved around front desk staff and nurse practitioners. Consider setting up a review/monitoring process to make sure everyone has a positive attitude toward patients. It's not as easy as it sounds, but it will go a long way in boosting patient perception.

Tips to Stay Ahead of the Game

So you've put in some controls to help the patient experience, now what? Obviously you can't control what the patient will say about you exactly, but you can control his or her experience. You should make sure that every person on your staff is doing everything within their power to make the visit a positive one – no matter what. Making the effort will result in positive reviews online, through word of mouth and in referrals to other physicians.

As for the rating sites, don't wait for a patient to review you. Take the proactive approach – have someone on your staff visit the websites listed above, set up profiles and update the information. Add photos and video if



they'll allow. If you have a full profile set up, odds are, patients will be more likely to use the system.

Also, if you want high marks on the rating sites, don't be afraid to ask for them. Let's be honest – you know who your favorite patients are. You know when a patient has had a good experience. Use them. It's perfectly ok for you, or a friendly member of your staff, to suggest visiting one of the sites and putting their two cents in. There are dozens of creative ways to implement a workable system here that requires zero work on your part – things as simple as a sign at the reception desk work wonders.

Feeling a bit overwhelmed? That's perfectly normal. The truth is, with a little insight, the process can be a breeze, not to mention an effective way to integrate social media into your marketing plan and successfully grow your practice.

Popular Questions and Answers

Now that we're all on the same page (get it?), it's time to answer some of the popular questions I hear about these sites. If I don't answer your question here, don't worry – it's not because I don't like you. That may be the case, but it's not why your question isn't listed.

You talk about "claiming your profile" – what is that exactly and how do I do it?

Let's use HealthGrades.com as an example. Claiming your profile online means that you are registering as the doctor listed. By officially registering an account with HealthGrades.com, you are now given administrative control over your personal listing which allows you to customize options and see several basic statistics about clicks, searches and overall marketing goodness.

To get started and claim your profile, you'll have to search and find your listing or (if one isn't already there) create one for yourself. On HealthGrades.com you'll need a validation item to prove that you are, well, you. Choices include your NPI number or your state medical license number so be sure to have one of the two handy.



I highly recommend claiming your profile and spending a few minutes getting to know the capabilities of the site and customizing your listing using the tools provided to manage your online reputation. Add a photo. Update your location. Tell us your favorite hobby if it gives you the option – anything to set you apart from the other listings is a plus. And remember, it's a completely free way to build your practice. Do it.

I don't have the time to update this thing every day and neither does anyone in my office. Is it still worth it?

Hands down the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" With the review sites, you will not need to update them every day. In fact, after your initial setup, you shouldn't need to update them at all – unless of course there is a major change in your practice.

With that said, you should take a few minutes at least once a week to monitor what patients are saying, if you're getting clicked on and what people are searching for. This will allow you to tweak your content and, if you have the option, respond to comments by patients. These stats are available assuming that you've claimed your profile, of course. The ability to comment depends on which service you are using, but it's a worthwhile avenue to explore – you get to show you care and have time for patients right from the comfort of your desk chair or smartphone. What could be better?

How many of these sites do I really have to be on?

That depends on you. Do you want to be seamlessly connected to multiple sites to manage the flow of information? Do you need to know whenever any patient says anything about you? It's a personal preference because there are about a dozen or so medical specific sites out there. Some, of course, are more popular than others. My suggestion is to get your feet wet with one of them first to see what it's all about and then, when you're ready, expand your efforts into a few of the more popular ones, but don't worry about being on every one just to be there. Unless you need to know everything from every angle, there isn't really a need to be on each and every site.



What should I use for photos?

Again, this depends on you and the site. Your default should certainly be a recent (from the past four or five years) headshot of you. If they allow more images, consider posting some photos of you interacting with a patient or spending time with your family. You want to appear personable, but not be too personal.

If you don't have a good photo of you with a patient, stage one.

I still need more help. What should I do?

It's understandable. The process can be overwhelming. If you or someone in your office doesn't feel comfortable setting up and maintaining the profiles, you shouldn't. Without the proper marketing expertise and familiarity with the sites, you essentially are flying blind. You wouldn't diagnose a patient without going to medical school first, would you? I hope the answer is no, otherwise you deserve some of those negative ratings you've been given.

The bottom line is this: if you don't know what you're doing, you're wasting your time. The point to remember about all of these services, and everything you do to grow your practice is that at the close of business each day, you want the next day to be busier. How you get there is up to you. How you stay there is up to your patients.