

2007 National Health Forum How Do You Know If Your Marketing Works?

Good morning. I'm Joe Fournet, Owner and Creative Director of Ideas & MORE here in Houston, Texas.

Thank you to the National Health Forum for inviting me to speak before you this morning. On behalf of the Houston Chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and my company, Ideas & MORE, it's both an honor and a pleasure.

To those of you here and to those of you viewing this marketing communication session via the Web stream, welcome. This hour will hopefully provide you with information to improve both your marketing efforts as well as learn what's happening in today's changing media world.

Marketing will vary by geographical market. Not every community is blessed with a world-class medical facility like the Texas Medical Center here in Houston. Marketing efforts and circumstances will work somewhat differently in Phoenix compared to Tampa or Green Bay.

Marketing and advertising are usually mysterious to those not involved with them on a daily basis. How do you know what to do, what to say, how to say it and where you should say it? Is what you're doing working? We'll be touching on some areas that if you're not already including them in your marketing efforts, you may want to reconsider. Maybe you just need a few tweaks here and there.

How one goes about marketing one's business will, to a large degree, determine how successful the business will be. A doctor's office or medical practice is no different. You're dealing with the public, your patients and prospective patients. Your image and how you portray your practice to the outside world is very significant.

So how do you know if your marketing works? People are talking about you in a good sense, they're referring to something you've published, they've had a good experience when dealing with your office personnel or remember seeing something that referenced your practice. Hopefully, there will be several different signals.

And, if 60 Minutes shows up on your doorstep, chances are you did something! Whether or not it was planned or would be considered a good thing may be another matter. Properly dealing with the media and learning about the current state of affairs in that crazy world will be discussed in the second half of this hour by my colleague, Dave Scallan with The Ammerman Experience.

Let me be clear on one point: There is no one thing you can do that will guarantee results. Results can best be gauged through a mix of marketing efforts. It also depends on what kind of results you're after. And results can be a mixed bag.

The question of ethics can even come into play and impact your marketing in terms of what you say and how you say it. Is what you're telling the public about your practice truthful and accurate and is it being done in an ethical manner? If questions are being raised, that may be why 60 Minutes has come calling.

In the time we have this morning, I want to discuss a few basic elements that should be present in every marketing plan which will enhance your chances of it working for you. Though you may be able to live on referrals alone to build your practice, the public still expects to know about you and what you offer. How you convey that info is up to you . . . and the marketing guru who is guiding you.

You can't talk about marketing without mentioning creativity. Creativity plays a vital role in marketing and advertising. Creativity can be defined as the ability to see, feel, touch, think and imagine what one has not seen, felt, touched, thought or imagined before; creativity is solving a marketing problem in order to stimulate demand. Creativity is simply “intelligence having fun.” In gauging whether or not your marketing is working, the power of ideas can't be underestimated, and creativity is the spark that can ignite what you say and how you say it.

So, how are you going to “say it,” to speak to your potential and current patients? Here are a few suggestions, some of which, depending on your practice and personality, may be more appropriate than others.

In no particular order . . .

#1. Brochure

How many of you have a brochure about your practice? While some may think the Web has supplanted the role of the brochure, (and anything else for that matter) there are still times when it makes sense to hand out something (trade show) or to include in a mailing with your business card or even a Thank You or personal note of some kind.

A brochure is convenient and useful for the first-time patient needing more information about your services and expertise. Unlike a Web site, the brochure can be displayed and easily picked up for reading and reference. And, you can take it with you. Just make sure it's professionally done.

Proper use of color, white space, paper stock, interesting graphics, informational and interesting – all contribute to making a positive first impression about you and your practice. But remember: Don't try and say everything in the brochure. Think of this as Reader's Digest, NOT War and Peace!

#2. Business Cards

The universal mini-billboard. You don't need to cram every conceivable bit of information onto this little card. Don't be afraid to use graphics or photography. This little device has the potential to speak volumes about you and your practice.

What does your practice offer, why would a patient come see you? Is it illustrated on your card? Are your practice’s specialties clearly listed?

Also, a little suggestion: Don’t forget to leave at least half the backside of the card blank so the recipient can make a note or two. And, if you have a photo on front side and it’s glossy or laminated to enhance the colors, leave a matte (dull) finish on back so you can write on it.

#3. Web Site

Think of this as your global business card and brochure. Your Web site is like the Holy Grail of marketing. This is what the world, not to mention the search engines, sees about your practice. This may be where the bulk of your marketing dollars are spent. While a major player in your marketing scheme, it’s just one tool in your arsenal. A Web site is serious business and can be a reputation and credibility killer if not executed correctly and creatively.

Your site needn’t cost a ton of money but it must be user friendly, easily navigable and provide appropriate and relevant information that viewers can find quickly. Your patients and visitors not only expect this, they demand it. And, more and more people are accessing the Web for medical research and information.

When it comes to designing and writing your site, hire a professional. If you have an IT department, don’t let them design it. They’ll have their hands full with the programming. Have them work alongside the designer and writer. After all, knowing what you want to convey on the site and actually doing so are two different things.

Your marketing efforts will work a lot better when your Home Page tells what you do in very simple terms and is said near the top center and at the very bottom of each page. This bottom area is the last that search engines read so it will reinforce what you’re about.

Also, repeating this information in a handful of words within your page title helps you with the likes of Google and Yahoo, and other search engines. The Page Title is the area at the very top of your browser window and could say something like “Dr. John L. Smith, Specializing in blah, blah, blah.”

#4. Reputation/Image

What do you think your patients would say about how they’re treated when calling or visiting your office? More significantly, what would first-time callers say after talking with your receptionist or appointment scheduler? If it’s not favorable or they’ve had a poor experience, your marketing will suffer. It’s hard to combat negative word of mouth.

And no beautiful and informational Web site will make that situation any less offensive to that person. As innocent as good, professional phone manners may sound, the relations

established over the phone are still a part of your marketing and branding efforts. It's your image, after all. Protect it.

#5. Speak Out

Speaking engagements and/or any type oral presentation does wonders for your marketing efforts and awareness. Don't limit yourselves to annual medical conferences. Address various organizations and be a part of a speakers bureau. Publicize these events on your Web site as well as in the press releases you send to other Web sites and relevant news outlets. These opportunities are a way to give back to the community, to share, to educate.

#6. Write Articles

Awaken the writer within you – or hire one – and submit articles expressing and delivering value, relevance and substance. I'm speaking of articles in addition to what you might submit to various medical journals. Maybe it's a column in the local community paper. Whatever it is, writing articles serves to broaden your marketing efforts while reinforcing the credibility of you and your practice. Remember, they need to be interesting to the general public – your audience – and not read like a text book or an excerpt from “the latest techniques in triple bypass cardiac surgery.”

Before wrapping up and getting into some Q&A, there's a thinking exercise I want to tell you about. It's idea generation and centers around generating a certain number of ideas in a limited amount of time (say 50 ideas in 5 minutes). The goal is to supply possible answers to a specific question on the way to solving a problem. I call it “Thinking at Warp Speed.” It's a great way to get your staff more involved and discover potential solutions to help your practice. Here's basically what you do:

Divide into teams of about 4-5 and have a stack of post it notes for the group. Each person writes his or her idea on a post it note. That idea is a possible solution to the question you're trying to answer, which may or may not pertain to your marketing agenda. No more than a word or two per note. Because this is a timed exercise, you're thinking as quickly as you can.

Don't over analyze or discuss. You're just generating ideas and as many of them as you can in a small amount of time. Then when time is up, you collect and group the notes to flush out any possible duplicates. What you are left with is a bunch of potential ideas that need to be explored. How you explore them is another exercise.

Summation

If you want to generate interest, you need to be interesting. Figure out what needs to be said, how that might be told and then tell it. In doing so, make sure your marketing conveys your message and image as straightforward and innovative as possible.

Be consistent with your messages. Your Web site, for example, should reinforce what your brochure and advertisements say. Your staff should also echo this same message and attitude so that your patients feel comfortable and secure in that the knowledge they receive from your office is accurate and answers their questions.

Be careful, though. Your marketing message will be diluted and possibly even confusing if the creative is too cute, too complex or just plain dumb when you try to convey your message. That’s why you want to work with a professional, someone who knows the right kind of balance to strike.

Let me offer a comment on mainstream media. Seek out those opportunities that are appropriate for your practice. Buying a spot on the local six o’clock news may be a waste of money and may be deemed by some as not very professional. However, sponsoring a segment of the news program or a special program airing outside of the news hour, like a lifestyle or health-related show, is something different altogether, and may make more sense for your practice and the audience.

A clear, concise, easily understood and consistent message about what you do and how you do it – with just the right amount of creativity in the mix – will go a long way towards having a marketing campaign that works, and works well.

By the way, in addition to what the National Health Forum will be posting on their site, a copy of this presentation will be posted on my Web site for your downloading pleasure.

Questions and more information can be obtained from
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More information on IABC Houston can be obtained from
www.iabchouston.com

Thank you very much for your time.