

A BEGINNER'S PERSPECTIVE ON BRANDING YOUR PRACTICE



Provide a clear path for your team to follow.

BY MICHAEL MROCHEN, PhD

A marketing plan must always align with the overall strategy of a practice; it must work seamlessly with the practice's strategic positioning and culture and within a specific target market. You should therefore be clear about your strategy before building a marketing plan. Without a clear perspective on how your practice will differentiate itself within its target market, you may invest a lot of effort and money into communications and advertising without achieving sustainable results.



A STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

Depending on the size of your practice, your strategic plan can take the form of either a detailed document or a simple outline. Regardless, your plan should define your practice's vision and mission and provide guidance on core values that align with the overall goals of the organization. It is essential to understand your practice's strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) and to compare those with the opportunities (O) and threats (T) within your target market. This SWOT analysis will form the foundation of your marketing plan.

The goal of a marketing plan is to provide direction—a clear path for your team to follow. The plan should list steps and guidelines to achieve a given objective, such as increasing patient volume or improving the overall patient experience to enhance retention and loyalty.

On a high level, your marketing plan should comprise the results of market research that clearly defines your target

market and the patient groups you aim to service as well as key information on your competition. Define the service offering, including the procedures and costs, that you intend to communicate to your target market, and create an action plan for achieving this goal. This promotional action plan should clearly state the messages you intend to communicate and who or what will be relaying the messages, whether it is the front desk, the call center, or public relations efforts, among others.



MARKETING TACTICS

Decades ago, it might have been possible to get by with only print advertising, but today it is essential to consider all possible channels of promotion to engage with your target market. Your marketing plan should include several outlets such as phone calls, radio and television advertising, and digital marketing efforts such as eblasts and social media. At each of these touchpoints, you can educate potential patients about your offerings and communicate to them what sets your practice apart from competitors.

Once you determine the marketing tactics you will use to share your messaging, you can create a roadmap for these activities and outline a schedule, budget, and human resources.

How much money are you willing to invest in marketing in order to achieve your objectives? For some of your intended tactics, you may need to rely on an external partner such as a marketing agency. Any plan you

develop will not be worth the paper it is printed on without proper implementation, monitoring of progress, and control of the timeline and budget.



LEADERSHIP

Much can be said about the most effective methods for implementing new ideas, technologies, or marketing plans, but they must come from the top. Strong leadership is key. If managers and clinicians do not adhere to the same core values, it will be difficult to implement an effective marketing strategy. Be sure to get your team involved in the effort. The benefits of this are obvious but sometimes forgotten:

- **Practical solutions.** Team members should participate in the planning phase to incorporate their perspectives, ideas, and experiences and to reduce possible barriers to implementation.
- **Improved motivation.** Team members who are involved from an early stage are usually more motivated about and supportive of plans.
- **Better identification with the practice.** Participation typically improves team members' loyalty to the organization.

The leadership and management teams within your practice must formally communicate all elements of the marketing plan in order to avoid discrepancies and misunderstandings among the staff.



BUDGET

Not only will your marketing activities incur external costs such as advertising, hired consultants, patient

events, or printed brochures, but they will also generate internal costs in the form of time required of team members and management. Thus, the budget for a marketing plan should also include an estimated return on investment that considers both external and internal costs.



MEASUREMENT

Periodic monitoring of your marketing activities and budget is an essential part of implementation. Whereas financial metrics are typically a hard measure and somewhat easy to track, it can be difficult or even impossible to track a soft measure like the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities. Digital marketing efforts provide detailed information about your patients' online behavior, but word-of-mouth and traditional efforts

such as questionnaires are challenging to evaluate.

That said, monitoring these activities is relevant only if you actually use this feedback to adjust or correct your efforts. You must also ensure that your efforts are specifically adapted to your target group via a mix of digital and traditional marketing outlets. For example, younger patients may not use the same social media platforms as older patients, so you should advertise your practice on multiple platforms if you wish to reach multiple generations.

CONCLUSION

Establishing a marketing plan that is aligned with your strategy and vision is essential to growing your practice. Such a plan should consist of a market definition and an action

plan with key information, including an estimated return on investment, budget, and timeline. Internal and external communication is important, as are appropriate measures to monitor and control marketing initiatives. Your marketing efforts must incorporate digital marketing channels, but these efforts should be combined with traditional marketing channels depending on the target group you wish to reach. ■

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