

# Marketing

ELIAS H. KASSAB, MD, FACC, FSCAI, FACP, FASA, RPVI, FAHA, FSVM • ANNA LEYSON-FIEL, BSN, RN, CCRC

Patients have more options than ever before. With so much information available online, they no longer feel the need to visit the hospital or practice closest to their location. That is why it is crucial to have a planned marketing strategy to reach out to new and returning patients to your practice and endovascular center. To be successful in your healthcare business, it must have a strong identity. Branding is the process which builds this identity and differentiates your practice from others.<sup>1</sup>

Branding and marketing are the same thing—this is untrue!

Marketing is the act of promoting a product to earn revenue. Marketers push out a message, usually telling the consumer why their product is better than a competitor's product. Branding is completely different. Branding should occur before a marketing strategy ever begins. Branding is not the act of pushing out a message. On the contrary, it is the pulling in of a message. It is listening to the consumer and using that information to build a brand strategy.<sup>2</sup>

According to the *Harvard Business Review*, the benefit of consciously shaping a leading brand is that it allows the physician to focus. When the physician knows with the utmost clarity what he/she wants to be known for, it is easier to let go of the tasks and projects that do not focus on delivering on the brand, and on concentrating on activities that do.<sup>13</sup>

Decide what you wish to be known for, develop a list of characteristics to help define identity and your brand. Characteristics should include putting patients first, unsurpassed service, superior patient outcomes, patient-friendly environment, accepts widest range of insurance, compassionate, advanced technology and research, knowledgeable and friendly staff, easy to schedule appointments etc.<sup>3</sup>

Combine the list of characteristics to form the desired identity:

- "Putting patients first by combining leading technology with superior outcomes."

- "Patient-friendly environment accepting all types of insurance with easy to schedule appointment."
- "Compassionate, knowledgeable, and friendly staff focused on superior patient outcomes based on science."

Branding is a service based on trust, time, deliverability, and relationships. It takes 12 positive experiences to make up one unresolved negative experience.<sup>4</sup> According to Warren Buffett, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 min to ruin it." It is easier to deliver this service in an office-based endovascular center (OEC) than in a hospital setting. Your brand is more than your logo, name, or slogan—it is the entire experience your prospects and customers have with your company, product, or service. Your brand strategy defines what you stand for, a promise you make, and the personality you convey.<sup>5</sup>

Successful healthcare marketing is complicated and sometimes confusing. These six fundamental elements, (1) Professional Referral Marketing, (2) Internet Marketing, (3) Branding, (4) Internal Marketing, (5) External Marketing, (6) Public Relations and the SCALE method (Satisfaction, Collaboration, Adaptation, Location, Education), demystify the healthcare market.

## PROFESSIONAL REFERRAL MARKETING

A reliable and continuing stream of patient referrals from other medical or other professional sources is the lifeblood of many specialty providers, including your endovascular practice.

Doctor referrals do not happen by magic or simply because you are a good doctor.

Success requires a written plan and an unflinching system to preserve and grow the flow of professional referrals.<sup>5</sup>

These are the essential elements for success in Professional Referral Marketing:<sup>6</sup>

### Confidence

Other professionals will refer patients to you if they like and trust you. “Like” is vital, but “trust” is paramount. It is a matter of *confidence* in you that the referral will be appropriate and beneficial to the patient’s care. “Confidence” never happens without a stable *relationship*. Of course, there is an assumption of professional competence, but that alone is not sufficient to distinguish and differentiate between physicians. Professionals will refer with confidence when there is a reliable and robust relationship in place.

### Credibility

First of all, proper credentials are a must—your education, training, experience form a foundation for *credibility*. Credentials and a professional CV are essential, but a deep sense of credibility is about the experience. Delivering what the referral sources value most in caring for their patients and making their life more comfortable. Credibility grows when a referral source truly appreciates you as a valuable resource or extension of their work. (It is that *relationship* thing again.)<sup>3</sup>

### Consistent Communications

“Failure to communicate” regularly with the sources of referrals can cause lasting damage.

Consumer satisfaction translates into current business, repeat business, and referral business. People enjoy doing business with people they like. Conversely, dissatisfied customers head over to the competition.<sup>7</sup>

Constant communication with the source of referrals results in satisfaction. The referral source is also your customer and needs to be satisfied.

Positive patient satisfaction helps retain existing customers. Marketing pros understand the value of current customers, as well as the added expense related to replacing a dissatisfied customer.<sup>7</sup>

Negative patient experience results in a direct deposit to the competition. The loss of a patient typically results in the growth of your competitor’s practice. To make things worse, it is likely that the departing patient was instrumental in the defection of one or more friends or family members.<sup>7</sup>

### Facts about customer experience

- 96% of unhappy customers do not complain; however, 91% of those will leave and never come back—1st Financial Training Services
- A dissatisfied customer will tell 9–15 people about their experience. Around 13% of dissatisfied customers tells more than 20 people.—White House Office of Consumer Affairs

- 70% of buying experiences are based on how the customer feels they are being treated—McKinsey
- 55% of customers would pay extra to guarantee a better service—Defaqto research
- Price is not the main reason for customer churn. It is actually due to the overall poor quality of customer service—Accenture Global Customer Satisfaction Report, 2008
- 94% of customers do not want to be transferred to another representative more than once—Mobius Poll 2002
- 80% of customers prefer to speak with a representative on weekends—Mobius Poll 2002
- 84% of customers are frustrated when a representative does not have immediate access to account information—Mobius Poll 2002
- It takes 12 positive experiences to make up for one unresolved negative experience—“Understanding Customers” by Ruby Newell

### INTERNET MARKETING

From websites and social media tools to patient portals and mobile apps, online marketing is a mainstream channel for marketing, advertising, and public relations. Exactly how you use the muscle of the digital freeway can be highly effective and profitable, or a huge waste of time and money.<sup>8</sup>

US Internet users conduct 5 billion searches every month directly on major search sites. Furthermore, a recent Harris Interactive Poll reported that more than 80% of consumers now research health information online.<sup>9</sup> Imagine how many of those Internet users are prospective patients in your area looking for the services you offer. It is crucial to have a website for the practice and OEC that is pleasant, informative, easy to navigate, and current. There are websites created by practices that were created a few years ago and never updated. In addition to giving the basic information about the practices like location, parking, office hours, etc., the site can be a great source of patient education. The procedures done in the office can be described. Preprocedure and post-procedure instructions can be included. The links can be created to take patients to a reputable source of information. You have an opportunity to educate the patients in the right way. The website is an extension of you and the practice and should be developed and maintained in that spirit.

Use of social media depends on the type of practice and competition. It is essential to market a venous practice in this manner but may not be equally important in marketing a limb preservation practice. There are

experts in the social media marketing space and should be utilized if the practice wants to spend money in this market. Social media is continually evolving, make sure there is no HIPAA violation.

## BRANDING

It is all about standing out from the crowd in a positive way, and it includes virtually everything you do. A powerful, differentiating brand for your healthcare business is part of your reputation. Meaningful and effective branding does not occur without a deliberate effort to shape and express the right message at the right time.<sup>8</sup>

**Seven reasons why you should brand your healthcare organization<sup>10</sup>:**

1. People prefer to buy brands because they reduce perceived risk.
2. People buy brands for status.
3. People refer more often and more passionately to a brand they like and trust.
4. You can build and accelerate your reputation through branding.
5. You can attract more of the cases you want through branding.
6. Branding will give you a competitive advantage.
7. A branded healthcare organization will be worth more than a nonbranded business.

Strong brands are more profitable and increase company value.<sup>11</sup>

## INTERNAL MARKETING

The patients who know you are happy will market your practice to their family members and friends at no cost to you. Loyal patients are a great source of internal marketing. They can be a precious resource of referrals, testimonials, and word of mouth advertising. Usually forgotten, the source of internal marketing is your employees. Employees have friends and family members who may need your services. Happy employees become your brand ambassadors. The hospital employees where you practice have the potential of referring a significant number of patients to you. So, be kind to them.

Keep your name in front of patients and referrals.

It takes five or more encounters with your practice's name for it to be recognized. Your name should appear anywhere potential patients would possibly look.<sup>12</sup> These would include the local phone book (not yellow pages), physician directories, physician-listing services, digital media, etc. Free-standing office signs are one of the most effective marketing investments if the location

allows it. Twice a year, mailings to patients and residents can also be useful.

Every patient should leave your office with a piece of literature at every visit. Do not let them leave empty handed! Quality pamphlets, like those offered by the many vendors, are an inexpensive way of spreading awareness about your unique practice services. Consider your own, practice-specific, brochure with a relevant appointment and procedure/educational information.

## EXTERNAL MARKETING

External marketing uses the media that reach prospective patients who do not know you. Advertising in newspapers, radio, television, billboards, etc. target an audience that needs to know the services you provide to take care of their healthcare need. The margin for error is minimal in an external media budget that is expected to produce a measurable return on investment.

### Audiovisual Marketing

Advertisements on radio and television are expensive and should be used with a specific purpose in mind. Television ads are more expensive than radio ads. Direct to consumer marketing needs to be focused and needs to be a part of the overall marketing strategy.

### Print Media

Gradually, more and more consumers are getting their information from the Internet. It may not be advisable to spend money on advertisements in newspapers. The telephone books are almost dead. Spending money on yellow pages advertising is not desirable.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

Among other things, planning and generating healthcare publicity, "free press" exposure and public relations activities start with the physician. The physician is the best marketer and instrumental in developing positive public relations. Physicians should dress appropriately at all times and be pleasant in interaction with the referring physicians, coworkers, and patients. The physician should have an aura of authority while being compassionate, knowledgeable, accessible, honest, and trustworthy. The office staff should be cooperative, friendly, and easily approachable. It is all "about the patient." The practice exists because of the patients, and the practice should reflect this in its attitude. The office environment should be patient-friendly. A dirty, unkempt office does not build

confidence. The magazines and brochures in the reception area should be updated promptly.

Local media outlets are always looking for reliable medical information to take to their consumers. The practice can make itself available for radio and television interviews, and the physician can write articles for the newspapers. The practice can participate in local, regional, and national health events, like health fairs, PAD screening programs, etc.

### Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction is the key to the success of an OEC. Your brand grows one patient/family at a time. The OEC can accomplish this by providing a patient-friendly environment, consistent/familiar staff, timely service, and same-day patient discharge. The data are clear; OEC makes life safe and convenient for patients. There are fewer complications and hassles. Patients go home the same day, and there is a significant cost reduction. Plenty of patient satisfaction data are now available, showing patients are delighted with their experience at outpatient centers.

The Harvard Business Review suggests asking patients two questions: (1) Were you satisfied with the quality of your experience and (2) would you come to us again. This strategy comes from the work of Andy Taylor, CEO at Enterprise Rent-A-Car. He discovered these two simple questions that helped the company gain its industry-wide advantage among stiff competition, all without elaborate questionnaires and cumbersome survey.

### Collaboration

Working together provides an advantage to all, and in the process makes everyone better. Working with the industry, government, and service partners in healthcare will pay dividends later. The CMS Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Proposed Rule, released on July 8, 2013, articulated CMS's intention to reduce the "nonfacility" reimbursement by up to 50%. This proposed methodology spanned over the gamut of all outpatient services. These were very alarming to the OEC owners and their constituents and sparked the need for physicians to come together (Chapter 37) and educate the CMS. This was marketing at the national payer level. After all as an individual organization CMS is the biggest payer of health services.

The Outpatient Endovascular and Interventional Society (OEIS) was developed after the landmark meeting in Dallas, Texas, by the 15 founding fathers: five

vascular surgeons, five interventional cardiologists, five interventional radiologists. The OEIS rapidly evolved into the voice of OEC owners. Because of the collaborative efforts of outpatient vascular center leadership, other organizations and the OEIS efforts the final CMS ruling published in November 2013 did not include the proposed changes to the methodology for determining payments for procedures performed in the OEC. The potentially cataclysmic proposed 50% reduction in reimbursement was marginally decreased.

### Adaptation

ASCs/OEC can adjust to the fluid healthcare climate without compromising quality and excellent clinical outcomes. It is easier to streamline services and manage costs in an OEC as compared with a broader hospital environment. The physician owners of the OEC must remain current with the regulations affecting their business. The business can be only adept if it stays current with the changes affecting the OEC. As the technological advances come and patients demand the "latest and the greatest" the OEC should be able to adapt to follow the best clinical practice guidelines. As the practice adapts to changing clinical indications and introduces new procedures, the OEC should continue to educate the referring physicians about the new services being provided through the OEC.

### Location

The physical location of the ASC/OEC is essential. It should be near the target patient population, near public transportation and easy access to a highway and close to a hospital. While determining the location, the location of competitors should also be taken into account. If the practice is going to serve a large number of dialysis dependent patients it is prudent to have an OEC close to the dialysis unit. For limb preservation proximity to a wound center is extremely desirable.

### Educate

The OEC must maintain the competitive edge in providing healthcare in the local market by staying current with the advances in endovascular therapy offered and by learning from one another. Ben Franklin wrote, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." Physicians are not trained in branding or marketing but must know when to get the advice of the branding and marketing experts. As novelist and scholar Ralph Ellison wrote: "Education is all a matter of building

bridges.” We must continue to build bridges with our colleagues, with the public, with insurance companies, and with the government.

The success of your practice depends on your marketing efforts. In today’s competitive landscape, you cannot increase the return on investment simply by employing a tailored marketing strategy. There is no “one size fits all” formula to market your medical practice.

Create a unique selling proposition, a strategy that may work for one practice may not work for others. Focus your marketing efforts based on your skills and specialty. Brand your practice using the right marketing tools. The brand will outlast your practicing years and will benefit your current and future partners. Knowing your niche and marketing your medical practice is critical to your success.<sup>14</sup>

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