



Marketing the Practice

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To maintain our portion of the market share and to recruit new patients, our practice has used different marketing methods and tactics to promote our practice and advertise our standard of care. We have spent time and energy investigating the types of customers practices are competing for, including patients, referring physicians, employees, and payers. You cannot know enough about your business or competition. We use many different methods when designing our marketing plan, including tactics to develop physician referrals, tactics to develop new patients and maintain current patient volume, and education of the patients, public, and physicians. We will go into more detail in the following pages. We believe that marketing is not doing any one thing well; it is doing many things well all at once. We continually solicit feedback through surveys and going out into the community, from our patients and referring physicians.

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Medical practices need to be aware of their position in the market place and where they stand in relation to their competitors. A practice has many different types of customers they are competing for, such as patients, referring physicians, employees, and payers. In today's market place, marketing has its place in medicine. Physician marketing must be professional and should not mimic that of other professions.¹ In medicine, image and reputation are everything, and marketing to patients should focus on expertise and compassionate, individualized care. Patients in most cases, except in restricted preferred provider organizations (PPOs) or closed health maintenance organizations (HMOs), have a choice of providers. "Word of mouth" praises or a referral from a patient or colleague is one of your most valuable sources for capturing new patients and maintaining your current volume.²

It is important for a medical practice to know its internal and external environment. You also need to periodically review what all of these groups want from your organization. Who are your referring physicians? Who are your patients and what are their opinions of your practice? Who are your payers and do they know your value to their subscribers? Does the community know who you are and the services you offer? Are you educating the community and meeting their needs? It is important that you know your internal data, but it is just as important to gather information on the environ-

ment in which you operate. Gathering all of this information will insure your success if it is done before putting your marketing plan together.

A marketing plan should be revised yearly, regardless of the size of the practice or competition. A proactive design that considers competitive threats or changes will help with your marketing plan and should be tied to the practice's strategic plan.

Knowledge is power, and you can't know enough about your business or your competition. Some of the items to consider when putting your marketing plan together are as follows:

- Budget
- Tactics to develop physician referral
- Tactics to develop new patients and maintain current patient volume
- Education: patient, public, and physician
- Patient brochures and literature
- Practice website
- Media mix
- Payer strategy
- Measure the results, benchmarks


Patient and referring physician satisfaction is always going to be your best source of marketing. If you give your patients excellent care, they will, through word of mouth, tell everyone they know about your wonderful services. By contrast, if they are unhappy with their care, they will tell everyone how unhappy they are and find another doctor. The same goes for your referring physicians who expect an exchange of information, patient access to your services, and responsiveness. Remember, it costs six times

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Elizabeth Wende Breast Care, LLC in Rochester, New York offers Mammography, Ultrasound, Stereotactic Biopsy, Breast MRI, Dexa Scan, Digital Mammography, and CAD services. We also offer an Online Breast Information Center to answer commonly asked questions about issues related to breast health.



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Figure 1 Web site for EWBC. We work closely with a consultant firm to provide our Web visitors with a simple and informative site to navigate through.

as much money to get a new patient as it does to keep an existing one happy. Keeping your patients and referring base happy means that you are meeting their needs. No marketing plan will increase expansion if you can't deliver outstanding service on your day-to-day operations.

It starts with the ease of scheduling patients, including how promptly and courteously phones are answered. Many medical practices have built systems that work well for their owners, but often not for their customers. You can, and should, have systems that work for both.³ Patient feedback to a referring physician's office regarding wait times, interaction with technologists, and cleanliness of the facility can influence whether additional referrals to the facility continue.

Marketing is as simple as providing excellent care to your patients and letting other physicians, as well as the community, know who you are. Most physicians are very uncomfortable with marketing their practice. It goes against their culture. But

marketing in the true sense of the word can give you an understanding of who your current patients are and what part of the market they come from.⁴ It should also tell you what you need to do to increase patient volume, if that is what the group wants. Marketing can be as simple as thanking physicians who refer patients to you and providing quality care to your patients.

Much of the marketing we do does not require a large budget. We call it soft advertising, or indirect advertising, through education. Any time we can differentiate ourselves and put ourselves in the expert arena, we are marketing ourselves. We do a lot of this through writing papers, presenting abstracts to our specialty societies, giving local and national presentations, submitting press releases on interesting events going on within our organization, and sitting on numerous medical advisory boards for payers and vendors in our local community, as well as nationally.

Some of the things we have done that have worked for us in the past are as follows:

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