

# Suggestions for Internal Measures Can Boost Marketing Initiatives

By **Margie Satinsky, M.B.A.**

Marketing your practice makes a difference! In an article that appeared in the October 2014 issue of *The Triangle Physician*, we recommended steps you can take to promote the services you provide and traps to avoid. Those suggestions and cautions had an external focus.

The seven suggestions in this article focus on internal marketing. They deal with first impressions; treating patients as individuals; ensuring that established patients understand the complete scope of services offered; turning negatives into positives; focusing on workforce satisfaction, including the entire workforce on the marketing team; following up after patients leave the office; and regularly taking the pulse of the practice.

Let's return to basics and reiterate the meaning of marketing, be it internally or externally focused. Marketing consultant Peter Drucker calls marketing your "whole firm, taken from the customer's point of view." Taken one step further, marketing means "coordinated efforts to communicate with and persuade customers to purchase, use and repurchase the services that you provide through multiple points of influence.

The American Medical Association describes marketing as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.

## **Concentrate on First Impressions**

Remember the importance of first impressions. When potential new patients contact your practice by phone or by email to inquire about services and appointments, what reception do they get?

We've helped more than 100 practices over the years, and the response that feels most welcoming to us is the voice of the practice owner herself, welcoming the call and providing further instructions depending on the purpose of the call. We also like messages that spare us from the experience of waiting on hold and that offer a call back option.

Our back bristles when employees sound as if they'd rather be anywhere other than the practice. If we need to cheer them up, we take our business somewhere else.

With respect to patient communication through a secure patient portal, the interaction can be positive or negative. It depends on the effort you put into vendor selection and into customization and testing the features of your portal prior to going live with patients.

Many vendors that specialize in electronic health record (EHR) software now offer their own portals but don't provide the same levels of support and expertise as vendors that specialize in portal design and operationalization. That portal is your second voice, so make sure it's robust, not an afterthought to other software.

First impressions in the waiting room count too. Given the physical space and layout of your practice, is check-in and is check out easy and private? Do long patient waiting lines snake out the door or do you add more staff at those times of the day and days of the week when volume is highest? Do workforce members greet patients with a smile or a scowl?

Pay attention to your waiting areas. Do chairs face the check-in area, encouraging

patients who are waiting to listen to confidential discussions at the check-in window? Is worn furniture uncomfortable for sitting?

Do you take advantage of opportunities for patient education about your providers and the services that you provide? Do you use background music or educational TV programs to add to the atmosphere?

## **Treat Patients as Individuals**

One way you can enhance loyalty to your practice is to recognize each patient as an individual.

If you've performed a procedure in your office or at another location, follow up afterwards to ask how the patient is feeling. Remember birthdays, anniversaries and other special occasions.

If one of your patients receives notice in the local newspaper or appears on TV, acknowledge the occasion. Go the extra mile!

## **Ensure Existing Patients Understand the Full Scope of Services**

Many patients seek care or treatment for a specific reason and are unaware that the practice offers other services.

Amanda Kanaan, president and founder of WhiteCoat Designs in Raleigh, reminds her clients to keep patients informed about the full scope of services offered. Two effective ways to spread the word are by making information available in the waiting area and by having staff describe all the services offered.

Be sure to identify and highlight services on your website, too, so patients can learn more when they access the patient portal.

Margie Satinsky, MBA, is President of Satinsky Consulting, LLC, a Durham, NC consulting firm



that specializes in medical practice management. She's provided HIPAA compliance consultation to more than 100 Covered Entities and Business Associates. Margie is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Medical Practice Management in the 21st Century*. For additional information, go to [www.satinskyconsulting.com](http://www.satinskyconsulting.com).

**Turn Negatives into Positives**

Try turning negatives into positives, such as when a patient is kept waiting for an unexpectedly long period of time. An immediate "I'm sorry" to acknowledge the problem and show respect for the patient's time can help lift his or her mood.

**Focus on Workforce Satisfaction**

The workforce, not expensive equipment, is every practice's most valuable asset.

Workforce members who enjoy the work that they do and receive appropriate recognition for their efforts work well as a team and convey their satisfaction to patients.

Keep everybody on the same playing field by developing and communicating a clear practice mission, goals and priorities. Remove the ambiguity from reporting relationships. Make sure that job descriptions accurately spell out job expectations and responsibilities.

Set an example for collaboration and teamwork and reward it when you see it. Thank employees for a job well done – before they remind you that a review or bonus is overdue! Take time out to say thanks with a special social event.

**Make Workforce Members Part of The Marketing Team**

Consider every workforce member a part of the marketing team. Encourage everyone to deliver a consistent message about "your story" or brand. The more frequently a patient hears the same message repeated, the more likely he or she will be to remember it and share it with family and friends.

**Follow Up After Patients Leave the Office**

Most office visits are short, allowing little time to share all the messaging that the practice would like to provide to patients. Furthermore, patients may not remember all they hear.

Amanda Kanaan suggests continuing conversations with patients even after they've left the office. Newsletters and social media, used appropriately, are good communication tools.

**Check the Practice Pulse Regularly**

How do you know your internal marketing efforts are working? Take the pulse of your practice. Seek patient input through satisfaction surveys and focus groups. Use the same approach with referring physicians and their office staff.

Solicit input from your own workforce and encourage your staff to come forward with suggestions for improvement. Here's an example. One of our clients devotes time during each weekly meeting to group discussion of an aspect of operations that needs improvement. Once the problems are out on the table, everybody takes ownership and the group develops its own remedial suggestions.

Finally, try the mystery shopper approach and learn the fine points about your practice. You may be surprised – both positively and negatively!



**Drossman Gastroenterology PLLC**  
 a patient-centered gastroenterology practice focusing on patients with difficult to diagnose and manage functional GI and motility disorders. The office is located within the multidisciplinary health care center, Chapel Hill Doctors. Dr. Douglas Drossman is joined by physician's assistant, Kellie Bunn, PA-C. Appointments are scheduled on Tuesday and Wednesday and most laboratory studies are available.

**Drossman Gastroenterology**  
**55 Vilcom Center Drive**  
**Boyd Hall, Suite 110**  
**Chapel Hill, NC 27514**  
**919.929.7990**

[www.drossmangastroenterology.com](http://www.drossmangastroenterology.com)

