

A High-Yield Investment

By Ronald Feise, DC

A common remark I hear from practitioners is: "I know I'm wasting a lot of my marketing dollars.

I just don't know which ones." Based on more than 30 years of experience as a chiropractic marketing consultant, I estimate more than 70 percent of marketing expenditures are wasted. But this doesn't have to be the case. The most common cause of wasteful, ineffective marketing is failure to perform research in the local market.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Potential patients are not all alike. People in New York City are different from those in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Even people living in two nearby rural communities or two cities with similar demographics can be dissimilar, requiring the selection of different messages and media. When a chiropractor uses a generic ad that "worked" in another community, they are likely to experience a poor return on their investment because the message is not crafted for his specific audience. Marketing messages need to be unique and tailored to the market's distinct characteristics and preferences.

Perform Marketing Research

In order to reach the right people with the right message in the right media, you need data from local marketing research. Just as you wouldn't treat a patient without first performing a case history and an examination, you shouldn't spend a penny on marketing until you have performed research to detect the most appropriate message and media for your marketplace.

For optimal returns on your marketing dollar, you should perform a comprehensive nine-step market research process. At a bare minimum, you should do the following:

Measure the public's attitude toward you and your profession. What image do you have in your marketplace? What is the local sentiment regarding chiropractic? What is the "use intention" of your community? My research indicates a wide variation in responses among various locales. Obviously, your marketing strategies should be custom-tailored to the responses.

Measure your patients' satisfaction. What are your strengths and weaknesses? What is the magnitude of patient loyalty? If you have holes in your practice-management system, bringing in new patients will not make you more successful. You must first rectify any shortfalls so your practice systems yield high levels of patient satisfaction. Data from your patients can provide keen insights regarding the selection and avoidance of specific messages and media.

Measure the psychographics of your community. This is the classification of people according to their attitudes and behaviors, etc. This will help you answer questions about your target market such as "What are they like?" "What media do they tend to trust?" and "What is important to them about health?" It is critical that you measure all these factors with reliable and valid survey tools. Using unreliable and invalid survey instruments will produce inaccurate data that could lead to a marketing disaster.

Target Marketing Plan

After you have done your research, you need to analyze the data to determine emerging and disappearing targets and establish your unique market position. Once you have completed these steps, you're ready to formulate a marketing plan, including specific tactics for internal referral marketing, new services marketing, external referral marketing, external paid marketing and community-contribution marketing.

Keep in mind that great marketing doesn't have to be expensive. You simply need to present the right message in the right manner and the right medium. An effectively executed marketing plan based upon accurate research will provide you with the highest return on your marketing investment.



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