

Marketing, PR & A Small Healthcare Practice: A Three Part Prescription for Your Practice

By Rodger Roeser, CEO, The Eisen Agency

If you're a doctor, or you work for a healthcare practitioner you need to read this. Why? Because chances are you're doing something that is jeopardizing your practice and livelihood.

You're doing your own marketing.

Sure, that may sound melodramatic, but in fact, it is a virus running rampant and unchecked in the medical industry. If we had such a thing, I would call it marketing malpractice. If I could give you a quick shot that would cure you, would you consider it? Well, let's take a look at a few things.

Time

For starters, if you're a healthcare professional, chances are your time is literally more valuable than an outsourced marketing professional (unless, of course, we're discussing crisis communication – that's a different article.) So, every second you're spending on doing your own marketing, you're losing money. In addition, particularly in the smaller practices, there's no plan to proactively and purposely do marketing communications activity, so the work tends to be haphazard and disjointed. Putting out fires or responding "when you can get to it," is not a smart use of time. There needs to be purpose and organization, and that is a rare luxury as a practitioner.

In addition, perhaps one of the worst time suckers is dealing with all the myriad of sales representatives seeking to part you with your hard earned dollars because you should "advertise in their magazine," or "do this direct mail." Or sponsor this kids' soccer team. Seriously, not a good use of time, because not only are you investing your time on a possible marketing buy, most likely, you don't know what you're looking at or how to evaluate it. The television outlet (or radio outlet or print outlet) will always tell you they're the best choice. Having an objective, expert marketing advisor can cut right to the chase and make certain your marketing investment is being utilized in the most cost effective manner possible.

Tools

You have a stethoscope. Or a dental drill, or rubber gloves – all rarely used items in the marketing profession. We have cool tools, too, but they don't hurt. These tools enable marketing professionals to painlessly, efficiently and effectively get their jobs done. You wouldn't use a hammer to take out someone's tooth, right? These tools for the most part involve a large investment on the part of the marketing firm to allow them to find and pitch media effectively, plan marketing and media buys, purchase lists, develop direct mail and so on. These are not tools most practices would purchase because of the cost, so what we tend to see is the doctor directing poor suzy receptionist to "fill in marketing activity here." When the "activity" doesn't work particularly well, the response becomes, advertising doesn't work.

Advertising, and her kin in marketing, branding, experiential and public relations, all work very well when done correctly and when using the right tool for the job. Understanding how to use advertising effectively and how to use public relations properly is much the same as knowing when to use a scalpel and when to use an x-ray. It's is very much strategic thinking, effective understanding of what needs accomplished, and employing the right solution based on the diagnoses. Even carpenters and construction workers agree – having the right tool makes all the difference.

Suzy vs. The World

Poor Suzy, she gets a bad rap. She means well, and she's a fantastic administrative assistant. Suzy, however, is not a marketing expert. Suzy is booking appointments, managing your front of house, buying your wife flowers because you forgot, or booked tomorrow's tee time. Suzy is a hard worker, but she doesn't have the time, the tools and third, the expertise. Like you, many marketing professionals (like me) have been doing this marketing thing for a long, long time. We've seen many changes, kept up on new technologies and solutions, and have successfully solved, seen and safely managed any number of campaigns. Little phases us.

A good marketing professional will properly strategize on the best course of treatment, then prescribe the proper medication to achieve a desired results – although results may vary. You can also get a second opinion. But the bottom line is that there are good, solid, expert marketing professionals that specialize in your field that can truly be an advisor on professionally marketing your practice, keeping your brand (reputation) safely guarded and maintained, and help you strive toward your definition of success.

What to Do Instead

1. Take inventory of your current and past marketing activity.
2. From the benchmark numbers you set at the beginning of the year, show growth.
3. You did set benchmark numbers so you could measure growth, right?
4. Survey your customers and understand how they've found you and what they like.

5. Take a look at your marketing materials. Are they as professional in quality as you are?
6. Hire a marketing professional to, at least once a year, do a communications audit.
7. Get a marketing plan that fits your practice and your budget.

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