

Marketing & Branding for PTs

By Rodger Roeser, CEO, The Eisen Agency

In these competitive times, being an excellent physical therapist is only a piece of the business success puzzle. Evolving technology, techniques and training are combined with the daily rigors of running the practice. So, today's PT leader is part physical therapist, part cheerleader, part accountant, and part HR. But the truly successful practices know there is a critical, yet often misunderstood part – marketing and branding.

And, while you've trained and studied and perfected the fact that you actually do the important work of rehab and PT, these non-core activities like the marketing of your practice can take up a bunch of extra time and cause tremendous confusion – not to mention be costly.

But, proper marketing and branding of your practice can pay off in big dividends for your growth and success – and just like your patients that you are with every step of the way, you don't have to go it alone. Here are three keys to success as you look to properly and professionally market your business: plan, professional and support.

Key #1: Planning

No one is expecting you as a physical therapist to be an expert in all things marketing and branding. Heck, even some of the so called "experts" in marketing and branding are just a bunch of pompous creatives, and no one will ever know your business or have the same passion for its success as you do. So, start with a few simple things – and that first simple thing is developing a marketing plan and budget. Don't let that sound scary, you don't drive without a GPS and (likely) you don't just hop on a plane and go on vacation. Make a plan.

Start with doing a thorough audit of all the marketing "stuff" you're doing – everything from your collateral and business cards, to how you answer the phones and greet customers, to any ads or press or promotions that you do. Does it look professional or does it look like you did it cheaply because that's what you could do? Are you measuring the effectiveness and performance or are you relying on the word of the ad rep that sold it to you? And so forth. Next, take a look at your competition. Google (city name) physical therapy. Is your practice on the first page? If not, you need to fix your website. What is your competition doing that you're not? Where are you better and where are they beating you.

Once you've done a good audit, start looking at the opportunities for growth. Think strategically here, not tactically as the tactics are the easy part (trust me). What services are you able to grow, how much more business can you handle, which areas are underserved? Are there geographic areas (this suburb or that suburb) or demographic areas (men, children) of growth? Decide where you want the practice to go and claim it like a prospector. I.e.: "We specialize in helping athletic men over 40 get back in the game."

And that, my friends, is called your value proposition. Make one. One you have it, now you can plan your tactics. There are no shortages of ad reps that will be glad to part you with your hard earned dollars. They're not bad folks, they have a job to do – but the fact is, their media outlet may not be right for you. Here is where I truly recommend bringing in some tactical support, but we'll get to that in a moment. There are so many ways to market the business – paid ads, online, media relations, events, promotions, direct mail – that here is where you have to stick to your value proposition and your budget. Which, drum roll please, should be about 5.5 percent of your annual gross revenue – that's the average for physical therapy practices across the country. From that number, determine which tactics you wish to take advantage of and set a goal to measure the outcomes – i.e.: new business or business leads. A good mix is almost always encouraged; meaning using direct mail, paid media and others in combination with one another and working together usually performs best, rather than a single outlet. Same strategy as playing the stock market, you want to "diversify."

Key #2: Professional

As you reviewed your materials in your audit, as well as your competition, it can be pretty clear pretty quickly if you're coming off professional or not. Again, a good time to call in a pro (maybe not your mom or spouse) that can be objective and honest. Your "stuff" needs to look professional, your staff needs to greet and speak and present professional. If you're using "Publisher" to make ads or collateral, you are violating this key. If you print your business cards or collateral on your "printer," you are violating this key. There are many more.

The point is, how you are perceived IS what you are. And, for most physical therapy practices, your brand is that of trust – folks need to trust that you will take care of them. Take a moment to check out Carl Yung's 12 Archetypes of Brand. First, it's fascinating and is also the platform my agency uses to determine the brand of business. But, because of the nature of your type of business, you are most likely a Caregiver Brand. Review those traits (it's sort of like a zodiac sign) and see how you stack up. The important part is that you're acting professional and portraying that professional image in your collateral, in your office, in your social media posts and in all that you do as that either positively or negatively impacts your image.

Key #3: Support

Now, when folks are injured or weekend warriors like me decide that 10Ks are just a "grand idea," I then have to turn to your expertise because I can't walk. You support me, literally and figuratively. I didn't go to my mom, didn't turn to my buddy that played football in high school, I didn't do it myself – no, I went to see a professional like you.

Same goes for your marketing. Chances are you have a lawyer, an accountant and perhaps even outsource your HR (that's smart, by the way), but you're missing one of the legs of the stool – the marketing professional. "I can't afford to hire a marketing professional" you say? In this day and age, you can't afford not to. Marketing is not a DIY sport, and it's certainly not something for trial and error. Marketing is a proactive investment in the ongoing success and growth of your business. Having an objective professional that can not only guide you, but also do the hard work necessary and deliver the creativity that you may not have, can be a big boost to the bottom line – not to mention your time.

Don't fear hiring a professional. If you haven't had a consultation with an agency (not an ad rep for your local TV or radio or newspaper, I'm talking an objective agency) for more than 12 months, now is the time to make a call. It's a smart move, will save you time, money and headaches, and that investment should pay off in spades.

These days, there are simply so many options to market your business, that it can seem overwhelming. And, in truth, I can be. It can be costly and time consuming and in some cases, truly a gamble. But you work hard to earn those dollars so any investment made in the marketing and branding of your business should be well thought out, deliberate and integrated in the common goal of success for your business. After all, success is fun.

About the Author

Rodger Roeser is the CEO of the Greater Cleveland and Greater Cincinnati based digital marketing and PR consultancy The Eisen Agency. Recognized as one of the foremost experts on professional services marketing and branding, Roeser works with leading financial, legal, healthcare, real estate, construction, and home services companies to more effectively market their services. Roeser was named 2010 Cincinnati PRSA PR Person of the Year, and served as president of the Cincinnati PRSA Chapter in 2005. He earned of SoMe Social Media Impact Award from Smart Business in 2012, was a Jefferson Award Finalist in 2013 and was named of the Cincinnati's top CEOs in 2014. His agency was named 2013 Cincinnati PRSA Large Agency of the Year and in 2012, cracked the Inc. 5000. He can be reached at RRoeser@TheEisenAgency.com.