

The “Marketing Sweet Spot”

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PUBLIC RELATIONS
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As you think through how to market your medical practice – or your restaurant or your widgets - you might want to find what I call the “marketing sweet spot.” Going through this process is enormously helpful, whether you are opening shiny new doors, adding additional services, or revving up a business that is moving too slowly.

I omit, for the purposes of this article, essentials like writing your mission, creating your brand, studying your competition, assuring you will deliver excellent products and services, designing your collaterals and creating your web site. I will also totally ignore the business procedural to-do list for a new business.

What I address here is the marketing sweet spot. It arises from the answers to some basic questions that you should consider carefully and answer in writing. Including the owners, management team and other key personnel in the process will make it even more effective.

- Who will be your clients/patients/customers? These are the people whose use of your services or products is essential to your success. If there are several groups, prioritize them. Do not forget to include this group: your employees.
- What goods or services do you provide to each group? Specifically.
- What makes you different and/or better than others who provide similar services? Honestly.

Based on the answers to these questions, brainstorm what you want each specific group to know about you. As an example, here’s a partial list of assets a fictional internal medicine practice wants to share with one group - potential patients. Your list may be very different.

- Electronic medical records with patient access via secure web site.
- Two of the three physicians are women.
- Really nice staff who care about our patients.
- Downtown location.
- Conduct on-site clinical trials.
- Partnership with lab in same building.
- Accepts all major insurance.

The next step is more difficult: create a separate list of what is important to each target group. Put yourself in the shoes of a Jane and John Doe in each group. What is her life like? What is his schedule? What are their needs? The better you can visualize and empathize with John and Jane, the more accurate your conclusions will be.

How do you know what they want and need?

- If you are opening a new office, there are demographic data available through your city and county as well as through local business organizations, real estate agents, and on blogs and sites.
- You and your team may have been in business long enough that you can generate a useful list on your own.

One of the best ways to find out what someone wants is to ask him. An existing business can simply call or email some of its customers/patients/clients. You can create a customer satisfaction survey and, with the help of your staff, encourage input from all who visit. There are also nifty online sites, like Survey Monkey, where even the computer challenged can email questionnaires and compile the results.

Another effective strategy is to hold focus groups. The advantage of focus groups is that the participants are encouraged to think of their own answers rather than respond to a yes/no and short answer questionnaire. The risk is that, if not facilitated skillfully, one participant can monopolize the discussion or in some way discourage others from being open. If you don't have a staff person with the expertise to manage this, there are many firms you can call.

Through these measures, our fictional internal medicine practice discovered exactly what enquiring new patients wanted to know:

- How long do I have to wait to get an appointment?
- If I call my doctor with a question, how long will it take to hear back?
- Are you on the bus line?
- Do you have free parking?
- Do you run on time?
- Do you have non-office hour appointments?
- Do you take Medicare patients?

Sometimes companies are totally surprised by what they learn from their research; some of your services that did not even make it to your list can turn out to be important to Jane and John. Things you were going to push may turn out to be irrelevant to this group. Other times, your research reinforces what you suspected was true. The most important thing is to take what you have learned and move to the next step.

Where your important services and messages overlap with what your customers want is the *marketing sweet spot*. It is these elements of your practice that deserve the focus of your marketing attention.

When the sweet spot becomes clear, the primary marketing messages practically write themselves. The web site, new patient brochures, welcome letters and reception area publications should provide a lot more information, but hitting the messages revealed in the sweet spot - we have what you want - is a logical way to get this working, urban audience to call.

Then your caring physicians and staff will win them over. The professional qualifications and standards of the practice will gain their confidence. They'll love the convenience of the EMR and web portal. And they'll send their friends and associates to this fabulous doctors' office that takes terrific care of them.

You do not have to abandon marketing a feature that did not make the cut. It's just not the best bet for general marketing. Your female physicians will be in the sweet spot if you want to market to women through their professional associations, publications, sports teams and networking groups. Prioritize the groups who will use your services and focus on the best bets.

How do you move forward?

It is true that disseminating information is more complex today than it was even five years ago. Social media, blogs and the Internet have added many more potential marketing vehicles to those we have employed for decades. I always urge my clients to strategically select their media, collaterals and venues rather than try everything that occurs to them. Use a rifle, not a shotgun, if you will. Still, the more you know when you pull the marketing trigger, the more accurate will be your shot. Aim for the sweet spot.