



The Changing Game of Podiatry Practice Marketing



“When you’re finished changing, you’re finished.”
—Benjamin Franklin

BY REM JACKSON

This article is written exclusively for PM and appears courtesy of the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management. The AAPP has a forty-plus year history of providing its member DPM’s with practice management education and resources.

pact on virtually every aspect of our lives including marketing your practice. Before we discuss these changes in marketing, it is important to note that there are some key fundamentals that do not change (the importance

- Your own database (Internal)
- The Community (External)

You can then organize these four pillars of marketing. The biggest changes are found on the Internet

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You might be thinking that the coming changes in compensation models are going to hurt you, or, you might be thinking that you will not only survive them, you will even thrive in the future. Either way, you are probably right. What will make the difference for you are your attitude, your mindset, your practice management, and, the subject of this article, your practice marketing.

Just as it seems almost everything is changing for you, marketing is no different. Technology and the Internet are having a profound im-

of relationships for instance), and not all marketing involves technology or the Internet.

There are Four Pillars in Marketing—Patients can only come to you from one of four sources:

- The Internet
- Referral Sources that surround your office

and “changing with the times” is essential for all podiatrists.

Online Marketing truly has changed everything. There are now more ways to reach more people than there have ever been. Ten years ago, websites were static “folders” that no one could find or use. Social

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media was in its infancy. Val-Pak, newspaper advertising, and the *Yellow Pages* ruled our marketing world. In the blink of an eye, marketing online has become the indispensable tool, not only for podiatry practices but also every professional practice or business.

The following is a list of some of the most important marketing strategies you must have in place to maximize your online marketing.

1) Your Website—Every marketing message, every marketing strategy needs to be designed to direct patients or potential patients to your website so that they can take an action such as:

- Call the office for an appointment.
- Make an appointment from the Website.
- Request high quality educational information from the practice such as a small book on heel pain or diabetes, for example.
- Read more information about a condition.
- Watch videos about conditions.
- Chat online with staff members.
- Download important documents.

Your website must be extremely well-designed to make it very easy

Far more people come to your website from smartphones now than from any other device, and if it is difficult to navigate because it hasn't changed to suit these devices, those people will leave. They will unfairly make a decision about the quality of the care you provide by how well

in time and money to get these corrected. In addition, you must optimize them by adding your own personal information to each listing. This has become complicated and is constantly changing as the search engines try to improve their results for their users. Think of this as the front porch for

You should not attempt to utilize any online advertising programs until you have your website and your patient conversion tools in place.

you present yourself online. Unreasonable? Yes! True? Yes! Your website must exceed expectations if it is going to be a true engine of patient growth for your practice. Fail to do this well, and everything else you do for marketing will suffer.

2) Your Local Search Engine Optimization (SEO)—If you have a physical address and a phone number, you are already online. It's remarkable really. Your practice already is listed on Google, all the search engines, and the many directories that are online. Think about that! You used to have to pay the *Yellow Pages* a significant amount of money to print your name in a book

your practice website. If the porch is a mess no one will come into the house.

3) Your Online Review Profile—This is actually a component of your Local SEO (above), but it is so important that it is listed separately here. If you have excellent (five star) reviews for your practice and your doctors, and you have many of them (100 is ideal, but over 20 is better than most), you will see your reception room begin to fill with patients. Think about your own behavior when you are evaluating services, professionals, restaurants, and products. You check the reviews and are highly influenced by what you read. Can you think of any other circumstance where the advice of total strangers (who could be writing from prison, for all we know) has this much influence on your decisions? You must work with your staff to encourage a steady stream of reviews on your Local SEO. Very few strategies can produce so many positive results, and it doesn't cost anything.

4) Video—We have all become heavy users of videos, whether we realize it or not. We see videos on websites, embedded in emails, and on social media. We have become very accustomed to non-professional smartphone videos and consider them to be of acceptable quality. You must be using video to market your practice effectively. Every practice should have several (or more) professionally produced "green screen" videos, but you can have dozens of

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for people to take any of these actions, and more. It must be engaging, interesting, and constantly changing because you are adding new content. Your website must be responsive, which means that it can detect exactly what kind of device is being used to access it and format the website to fit that device whether it is a desktop computer, a phone, a tablet, or something else.

so that people would be able to find you; now there are dozens of directories. And those listings are free! No wonder the *Yellow Pages* is finally finished. There is a catch, though.

Those listings can be woefully inaccurate. They can list your address from the last decade (or worse). They can have incorrect phone numbers (or your ex-partners' phone number). It is essential to make the investment

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short (one minute is perfect) videos on a wide variety of subjects that interest current and prospective patients. All this takes is time and a phone. Those simple videos can have a little post-production work, and you can use them everywhere.

5) Social Media—Facebook has become an indispensable tool in marketing podiatry practices. So has Twitter, Pinterest, your blog, Instagram and more. The sheer reach into your local market with these social platforms is staggering. It is possible to target your messages and expand them far beyond your practice's reach. One simple idea is to have your staff share the social media posts of your practice's Facebook Page. They have substantial personal, local networks of their own. You can boost the reach of these posts significantly without cost.

6) Adwords—There is a reason Google earns billions of dollars; it's Adwords, or pay per click. This is an area where a "sherpa" (a trusted company that knows what it is doing

until you have your website and your patient conversion tools in place. Driving people with questions to an inadequate or sub-standard website will not work. In fact, it will have the

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in the medical space) is needed to guide you into utilizing this powerful resource correctly. Just as with Facebook advertising, you can target exactly whomever you want and exactly the practice area you want. It has truly come into its own as an incredibly powerful tool to fill your reception room with exactly the patients you want to see. A word of warning here: you should not attempt to utilize any online advertising programs

opposite effect and depress your new patient numbers.

It's Still About the Fundamentals. Market Your Practice to Medical and Non-Medical Referral Sources

Marketing online to its fullest is still only one fourth of the marketing potential of your practice. Remember, everything in life is about relationships. Your practice is surround-

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ed by medical offices and businesses that would be delighted to refer to you if they just knew they could send patients to you. Every practice has a list of referral sources that they've developed over time. In some cases, these referral sources have been sending patients to you for years or even decades.

These relationships are fragile and at risk. There are dozens of competing practices that would love to break your referral patterns and shift them towards them, just as you are quite happy to cultivate new sources yourself. This is natural and understandable. In fact, this is true in your personal relationships and friendships as well. If you don't nurture a friendship, it begins to fade away and new friends replace old ones. If you don't nurture your professional relationships, they will begin to fade away too. In some cases, they will fade away or abruptly end because they are purchased by a big system that requires them to refer to members of their own network. In others, practitioners sell their practice or even pass away. In these cases, maintaining a referring relationship might not be possible no matter what you do, so you must always be cultivating new ones and keeping your pipeline full.

Employing a full-time or part-time person with a 'ray of sunshine' personality and attitude, who regularly visits these offices and businesses and nurtures the relationship, is essential to protecting your vital referral sources. This ambassador will pay for himself/herself many times over, keeping your referrals robust and abundant.

Internal Marketing

The most important asset in your practice (other than yourself and your well-trained staff) is your list. This is the database of people who know you, like you, and trust you. These programs are often called customer relationship management (CRM) systems. They are often not expensive and when used regularly to communicate to your list can produce highly cost-effective results.

Communicating to your list is essential for recalls and referrals. The biggest mistake any practice or business can make is to ignore their list. And most do. You can communicate to your list once a week through email without fatiguing it, if your messages are educational, inspirational, and helpful. You can teach your list that reading what you send them is worth it.

Successful practices make their office experience enjoyable for their patients. Friendly faces and smiles,

marketing directly to these smaller groups of interested people, you can, over time, bring a percentage of them into your practice and make these external efforts much more profitable. The most powerful strategy you can employ is education. Make offers of booklets that "answer the questions that are keeping them up at night" and collect their contact information so you can share information with prospective patients. As you add the names and addresses of people surrounding your practice, you will see

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newsletters handed out, positive and smart engagement throughout the experience can make a world of difference in patients referring others to you. Satisfactory experiences should be below your minimum standard. You should aim for "legendary" experiences for your patients and transform them into raving fans of your practice.

External Marketing

Just as the Internet has changed marketing dramatically, technology has changed advertising in your community. Newspapers are breathing their last gasps and most (though not all) print advertising is just not responsive. Doctors are still having success in print advertising in small monthly publications such as local community papers (often tossed in your drive-way to distribute them) and other regional publications focused on women.

Success in advertising or sponsorships, or health fairs (for example) is directly tied to understanding the paramount importance of your list. Coming to these events or advertising with a strategy to collect contact information about people with concerns about their lower extremities by offering them valuable information is the KEY to increasing your return on investment (ROI). By collecting contact information and then

your new patient numbers begin to steadily and significantly increase.

The Times They Are a Changing

Change is one of those constants in life and, make no mistake, we are currently in a period of rapidly accelerating change, with no end in sight. Instead of fondly remembering the simpler "good old days", recognize that those who embrace change and are willing to learn and adapt have a significant edge over those who resist it.

While the "good old days" might have been simpler, they weren't necessarily better. In fact, you now have more (and more powerful) ways to market your practice than ever before. In marketing your practice, change is good. **PM**



Rem Jackson is the President and CEO of Top Practices, LLC, and the leader of the Top Practices Master Mind Group. He is a Fellow of the AAPP and an adjunct faculty member at The Kent State University College

of Podiatric Medicine in their practice management program. He is also the recipient of the AAPP President's Award for 2012. Rem can be reached at rem@TopPractices.com. You can find out more about Top Practices at www.TopPractices.com