The Changing Game of Podiatry Practice Marketing

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

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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 impact 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 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
• 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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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

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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. 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.

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.

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 in time and money to get these corrected. In addition, you must optimize your 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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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 opposite effect and depress your new patient numbers.

You should aim for “legendary” experiences for your patients and transform them into raving fans of your practice.

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 com-
peting 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 under-
standable. In fact, this is true in your
personal relationships and friend-
ships 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 mem-
ers of their own network. In oth-
ers, 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 cul-
tivating new ones and keeping your
pipeline full.

Employing a full-time or part-
time person with a “ray of sunshine”
personality and attitude, who regu-
larly visits these offices and business-
es and nurtures the relationship, is
essential to protecting your vital re-
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 pro-
duce highly cost-effective results.

Communicating to your list is es-

tential for recalls and referrals. The
biggest mistake any practice or busi-
ness can make is to ignore their list.
And most do. You can communicate
to your list once a week through
e-mail without fatiguing it, if your
messages are educational, inspira-
tional, 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 ex-
ternal 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 sur-
rounding your practice, you will see

You now have more
(and more powerful) ways to market your practice
than ever before.

External Marketing
Just as the Internet has changed
marketing dramatically, technology
has changed advertising in your com-

munity. 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 fo-
cused on women.

Success in advertising or sponsor-
ships, or health fairs (for example)
is directly tied to understanding the
paramount importance of your list.
Coming to these events or advertis-
ing with a strategy to collect contact
information about people with con-
cerns about their lower extremities
by offering them valuable informa-
tion is the KEY to increasing your
return on investment (ROI). By col-
lecting contact information and then

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”, recog-
nize 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 nec-
essarily 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

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