



How to Build and Market a Diabetic Practice

Here are some practical tips from the pros.

BY JEANETTE SMITH

“Marketing a podiatric practice is an essential, absolutely vital function that every podiatrist must do if they want to be successful,” says Rem Jackson of Top Practices. But knowing you need to do something isn’t the same as knowing how to do it, especially if you plan on marketing to a specific population such as diabetic patients.

What Is Marketing?

There is a difference between advertising and marketing, and it’s important to understand this distinction to effectively market your practice. Advertising is a form of communication that sells a product, service, or idea. It is meant to influence a consumer directly into making a decision or purchase.

Content marketing, on the other hand, aims to inform. As Elise Hinchman, Marketing Director and Office Manager for Lexington Podiatry, puts it, “advertising is telling people you’re a rockstar; content marketing is showing them you are.” Effective marketing should focus on setting up your practice as a leading center for diabetic foot and ankle care and yourself as a subject matter expert.

Good marketing educates consumers first and persuades them

as a side effect. Andrew Schneider, DPM, encourages physicians to “give the patient as much information as you’re willing to for free and they’re

you have a laser to help with diabetic neuropathy, write a brochure or blog focusing on the benefits of this therapy, such as pain relief and improved

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Rem Jackson

going to be so impressed that they will come wondering what they’re going to get now that they’re paying for it.”

What Should I Market?

Marketing to a focused patient group, such as diabetics, means identifying and providing the specific information that diabetics are looking for. Diabetic patients want information that leads them toward a healthier lifestyle. They want to be encouraged, not patronized or scolded for their lack of compliance. Patients “want you to make them feel confident that they’ve made the right decision and are seeing the right person. Are you going to save them time? Save them money? Improve their quality of life?” asks Hinchman. Your marketing should speak to these important questions.

Diabetic patients want services and products that support their health goals and keep them active. If

balance. If you offer diabetic footwear and insoles, market the benefits of wearing them, such as greater comfort and fit and reduced risk for injury or amputation.

Effective content marketing persuades patients into action through knowledge. The education you provide should empower diabetic patients and ensure them that peace of mind is attainable and making an appointment with you is the first step toward helping them achieve it.

How Do I Market?

Many podiatrists can be overwhelmed by the hours of work that go into effective marketing, but targeting a specific group, such as diabetic patients, can make things easier. By paring down your marketing demographics, you can better identify and provide accurate information that will make your efforts effective and valuable to those individuals.

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Before you begin your diabetic marketing campaign, you need to develop your practice into a “Diabetic Care Center of Excellence.” Podiatrists play a key role in protecting the overall health of diabetic patients. Dr. Schneider reminds us that “because diabetes is so prevalent, the treatments and therapies for diabetes and the related issues that podiatrists see are constantly evolving, changing, and improving.” Your office needs to provide the latest, state-of-the-art medical care and up-to-date information. Effective marketing needs to provide cutting-edge education, but if your knowledge is months behind the curve, patients will have seen your content before and skip over it.



Dr. Schneider

Subscribe to diabetic-focused magazines to stay current on trends and technology. Use these magazines in your office waiting room as an added value for visiting diabetic patients (but be careful to avoid putting out “for the doctor only” publications that feature unpleasant or gory images). Attend seminars and lectures, both online and in person, to further your knowledge of diabetes. And update your promotional and educational materials frequently.

Marketing to a diabetic population also means making them a priority within your office. Peace of mind is when patients “know that if they have any concerns, they’re getting in to see you the same day,” says Alison DeWaters, DPM. Without this guarantee, and the right policies and procedures in your office to follow through on this promise, your marketing becomes nothing but an empty promise. Each Individual with diabetes should be treated by your entire medical team as a V.I.P. (Very Important Patient).

Don’t forget to plan your strategy and budget. The marketing world can be a complex maze of sources with a constant flow of information. An effective campaign is not just a one-

and-done occurrence. Hiring a marketing director, marketing team, or a remote company to help with the day-to-day tasks is critical to successful marketing. These resources can also help target diabetic populations

and promote your diabetic services. Team members should be encouraging and work to instill a sense of need in your patients—the need to take care of themselves, the need for further education about their feet and dia-

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online, in your area, and within your existing practice to help focus your marketing for maximum impact.

Practical Tips

Community

In-person marketing is the “hallmark of marketing,” says Dr. DeWaters. “As much as you can have a fancy website, I get so many more referrals from word-of-mouth.” Gaining traction with the local diabetic community means finding the places these patients go and the resources they turn to for help.

Start with the local diabetes association in your community. Whether it’s an article for their website, a table with free screenings at their next event, or a monetary donation to keep them running, it’s important to support these organizations. Check with local hospitals to find diabetes support groups and offer to speak at their meetings. These people are actively seeking out information and will take your marketing to heart.

Play to your strengths. “Digital marketing, what you do online, is very different and has a different skillset than going out and making visits and doing referral marketing,” warns Jackson. If you’re more comfortable in the digital world, don’t force yourself into face-to-face marketing.

Internal Referrals

Good marketing also takes place with the patients who come into your office. Train your staff to pro-

vide and the need for regular follow-up appointments.

Even the most efficient offices will have patients waiting for several minutes in the waiting room or treatment room. Hang posters, create slide shows, or make videos with important information for your diabetic patients. Have tangible materials these patients can walk out of your office holding, even if that’s only a postcard-sized diabetes fact sheet. Or create a kit for newly-diagnosed patients that includes a retractable mirror to check the soles of their feet nightly and a plastic 5.07 wire to assess their protective sensation.



Dr. DeWaters

Patients don’t need an intricate handout made by a graphic designer. Use the free templates in your word processing software and have them printed at a local office supply store. Just be sure that your information is current and accurate and your text has been edited.

Emails and Newsletters

Emails and newsletters are an effective and direct way to reach consumers with your marketing. Include high-value content that speaks to your targeted population. Highlight the latest diabetes blog from your website or incorporate a diabetic-friendly recipe. Email content should always be positive and engaging. Promote current apps that help with associated health issues like obesity through diet and exercise.

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The best way to get more opens and reads is to provide the right information to the right people. Segmented marketing is vital for this. If you're working from one massive email list, break it down into sub-categories. It's important to know not just the patients who have diabetes, but also who has neuropathy, who has a history of ulcers or amputation, who has vascular or renal disease, etc.

A healthy 30-year-old will immediately delete an email about diabetes and potentially unsubscribe from future mailings. Make sure you have segmented populations so the information you are working so hard to produce is getting in front of the people who actually need it.

it's content you don't need to produce yourself, which saves you time and energy.

Your Website

A quality, well-functioning website is vital to successful marketing. Dr. Schneider says that everything he does "funnels people back to my website. It's the online representation of what I want my practice to be seen as. That to me is key. You need to have a well-developed website with

a quick search for "diabetes" on Pinterest turns up a never-ending page of infographics, recipes, and tips. Be sure to categorize and tag your content appropriately so the right people are finding your information.

Not sure how to effectively market on these platforms? Free seminars and online tutorials are readily available to teach you. Overall, consumers are looking for engaging and entertaining content. "Patients are getting a barrage of information and you have

Create a separate page or section of your website that contains all your diabetic information and services.

excellent content that's constantly being renewed."

One blog on diabetes or a small mention on your neuropathy page isn't enough to attract this sub-population. Create a separate page or section of your website that contains all your diabetic information and services. All of your online marketing should send individuals back to these pages. With the rate that health information is changing, there will always be something new to post.

Create resources that patients can download and save. Concentrate on simple and practical items such as print-outs to hang on the fridge. One great way to provide high-value with little cost is to create a PDF eBook. Update the information in your previously written blogs and web content and compile it into a book. If you don't have the time or resources to create it yourself, hire an independent writer or editor.

Social Media

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by social media. Not only are there a multitude of platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, Snapchat, etc.), but the algorithms and policies for marketing are constantly changing. The good thing is, these systems are designed specifically to target sub-populations.

The hashtag #diabetes has over 2.6 million posts on Instagram and

to cut through the clutter, otherwise nothing is going to stick. You have one chance to get them, one chance to make an impression on them," Hinchman tells us. She adds:

Keep your marketing messages positive and contribute on a regular basis. Trying to get a message to diabetic patients during Diabetes Awareness Month will be much harder than during the rest of the year. Patients don't need or expect perfectly produced content. A short video filmed with your cell phone can be more effective and will have a larger ROI than spending money on professionally created content.

When it comes to marketing, there is no easy answer or magic formula. Narrowing your focus to a specific sub-group such as diabetic patients can help hone your message and make your marketing campaign more effective. Diabetic patients want to know the latest information that will lead to their increased health. Remember to be succinct, be persistent, be original, and be positive. **PM**



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Online Reviews

Online reviews are a vitally important aspect of marketing and shouldn't be left to chance. You should already be encouraging and asking directly for reviews. Now, focus on your diabetic patients and use your segmented email lists to send targeted requests. Don't feel shy in asking them to mention their diabetes and how your services have helped them achieve better health. The more relevant keywords customers see in your reviews, the more convinced they will be that you can help them.

Make sure you are covering all the major review sites including Google, Facebook, Yelp, Healthgrades, and similar. You should "have a plan in place so you can generate good quality, 5-star reviews across these different platforms on a regular basis," says Jackson. Consumers are in a hurry and don't want to scroll far. They don't want to see that you helped a diabetic patient last year, they want to see one from last week.

Once a patient posts a review on any website, contact them and thank them. Then ask if they would take the time to copy and paste the same review on other sites. Provide easy links for them to access these platforms. Not only does this spread your marketing to more people, but