



Marketing Funnel: Visualizing the Patient's Journey

This tool helps you visualize the patient journey.

BY NEIL BAUM, MD

Copyright © 2020
by American Association
for Physician
Leadership*

Marketing Funnel

The marketing funnel (Figure 1) can be used to understand the process of attracting patients to your practice. There are several distinct phases of the patient journey where this funnel is applicable to your medical practices. The funnel is wide at the top and narrow at the bottom because every stage represents the amount of potential patients entering the funnel. Because you are likely to lose some potential patients along the way, the funnel gets narrower toward the bottom. This article reviews each state of the marketing funnel.

Awareness

The marketing funnel starts off with the awareness stage, often called the attention-seeking stage. The goal of this stage is to gain presence and to introduce your practice to potential patients; they need to know that you exist. You can either actively reach potential patients through newsletters, marketing campaigns, or word

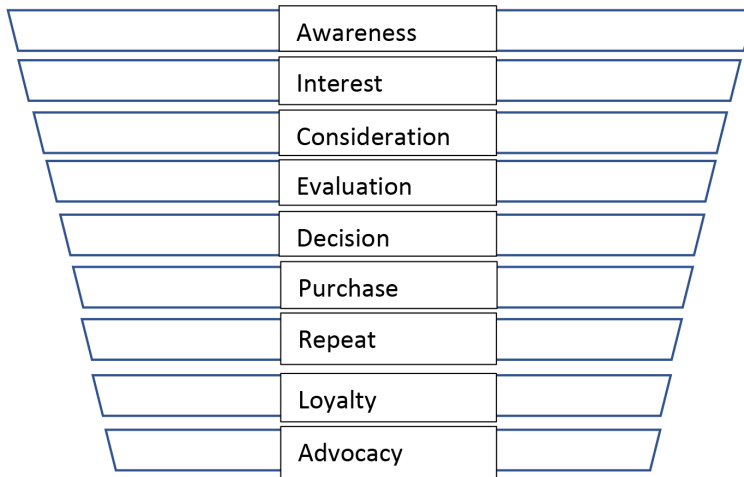


Figure 1: Marketing funnel

of mouth, or help them discover you more easily with their own (online) search. In order for patients to more

interest. The goal of this stage is to show who you are and what your areas of interest or expertise are. You are trying to build a relationship with your potential patients and gain trust. Give patients and potential patients valuable information, but don't focus on selling your practice. Throughout this second stage, potential patients begin to develop attitudes, opinions, and, hopefully, interest in your practice. Providing new, excellent content is required for

In order for patients to more easily find you online, search engine optimization (SEO), both organic and nonorganic (i.e., pay per click), is the best method.

easily find you online, search engine optimization (SEO), both organic and nonorganic (i.e., pay per click), is the best method.

Interest

Now that you have the patients' attention, you want to create some

this stage. Think about using blogs, webinars, free e-books, and newsletters. Keep in mind that patients can also develop negative feelings toward your practice, so be careful with what kind of messages you convey to potential patients.

Continued on page 98



Funnel (from page 97)

Consideration

Once patients' interest in your practice has grown, they might be willing to consider availing themselves of your services and making an appointment in your practice. In order to establish that relationship,

a practice are price, quality, appearance, durability, and what happens after the doctor-patient encounter is over.

Decision

The next stage is when the patient will decide either to accept you as a physician or to seek an-

choice. This could happen because the potential patient is searching online for your practice and has trouble locating the contact information; or the decision-maker may have issues with the insurance plans that cover your services.

Once your potential patients have decided that they want your service, it is the job of your marketing efforts to make it as easy as possible for them to become a patient. For example, if a patient wants to make an appointment online, you want to make the procedure seamless and easy, with only one or two clicks on the mouse needed to secure an appointment. Making it easy for patients will help you to boost the conversion rate from viewer to paying patient.

Studies have shown that people usually consider only two to three different practices before calling one of the practices for an appointment.

you have to help them understand that your practice fulfills a medical need or desire that they might have. Furthermore, you have to explain that your practice is the best option for solving that medical need. This stage is, therefore, all about positioning and showing off your unique aspects that differentiate you and your practice and what extra value you have to offer to patients compared to other practices in the area or region. Studies have shown that people usually consider only two to three different practices before calling one of the practices for an appointment, so you want to make sure your practice is the one selected.

other physician. It is important to note here that the person making the decision to call for an appointment is not always the same person as the one calling for the appointment or becoming part of the practice. For example, a child who needs pediatric care might not be the one calling for the appointment. Another example is a caregiver who may be contacting the practice to make an appointment for a family member or a friend.

Repeat

Many marketing funnels stop after the patient has made an appointment. However, in today's hypercompetitive and dynamic health-care environment, it is key to keep patients in your practice for as long as possible. Retention of patients is just as important as getting the

If a patient wants to make an appointment online, you want to make the procedure seamless and easy, with only one or two clicks on the mouse needed to secure an appointment.

Evaluation

Now that your brand has made it to the consideration stage, patients are likely to evaluate their options based on their own personal criteria. Even though selection criteria may vary from patient to patient, you might be able to detect some general patterns by looking at the criteria that patients most often use to select a medical practice. Continuous patient feedback, which can be obtained through surveys and focus groups, will help you figure out what patients in general find most important about a certain disease or condition. Once you are aware of these attributes, you can guide your marketing efforts in such a way that you highlight these features when showcasing your practice. Attributes that patients commonly use to evaluate

It is crucial to keep in mind when targeting your marketing efforts to certain groups of people that you use material that focuses on those who can make the decision to be patients in your practice.

Purchase

The actual "purchase" phase has been kept separate from the decision-making phase for two reasons:

- There can be a difference between the buyer and the decision-maker.
- Potential patients might ultimately decide to not purchase your product even though they have decided that your product is their first

patient to make his or her initial office visit. Good patient relationship management increases the chance that patients will become repeat customers. One of the best ways of impressing a new patient is to have someone in the practice—ideally the doctor—call the patient after an initial visit to be sure all the questions have been answered during their visit to the office.

Loyalty

In the loyalty stage, patients start to develop a preference for your practice and will tell others about their outstanding care and service. If their

Continued on page 100



Funnel (from page 98)

experience has been outstanding, patients will share their experience by word of mouth with family and friends. Patient loyalty is far more

Advocacy

The final and optimal stage to reach with customers is the advocacy stage. Advocacy happens when your patients become something more than just paying patients: they become fans.

When patients decide to become your practice's ambassadors, you know you are doing something right!

important than return visits. Loyalty means patients are hanging in there even when there may be some problems or negative rumors about your practice. In order to create loyalty, your patients need to believe the relationship between you and them is more than just a transactional relationship, which means connecting with your patients on a personal level is crucial.

Fans usually are so excited about something that they tell their friends and family all about it; they share positive reviews on social media, and they might even try to convince others to become fans as well. In other words, they are now helping you create awareness just like at the beginning of this marketing funnel. When patients decide to become your practice's ambassadors, you know you are doing something right!

Bottom Line

The marketing funnel is a great tool that helps you visualize the patient journey or the path that patients take as they become more familiar with your practice and your services and move from awareness to conversion to (hopefully) the advocacy stage. It allows marketers to use a more structured approach to map out the marketing campaigns that need to be considered. Keep in mind that this is a general version of the marketing funnel and that you might need to adapt it somewhat to fit your practice. **PM**



Dr. Baum is Professor of Clinical Urology at the Tulane Medical School, New Orleans, Louisiana, and author of *The Three Stages of a Physician's Career—Navigating From Training to Beyond Retirement* (Greenbranch Publishing, 2017); e-mail: doctorwhiz@gmail.com.