



Developing a One-Page Marketing Plan: Part 3

Here’s how to create raving fans who will promote your practice to others.

BY ALLAN DIB AND NEIL BAUM, MD

Copyright © 2022 by American Association for Physician Leadership*.

Editor’s Note: This is the third installment of a three-part article.

Tribe is defined as a group of people connected to one another by a leader who serves as the connector. Outstanding practices lead tribes of loyal fans, not just patients. If your practice has such fans, you have special patients who are promoters and cheerleaders for your practice. They will enhance your marketing message and escalate your reputation beyond what you might be able to do alone.

To create such an enthusiastic fan base, it is necessary to continually impress your patients about your stellar services. Practices with devoted fans make an effort to foster a lifetime relationship with their patients. These practices make it very easy for their fans to interact

with the doctors and the practice. These practices have a system in place that allows them to frequently and consistently create a stellar experience.

It is necessary to have a strategy for building a following and make every effort to take very good care

Delivering a World Class Experience for the Patient

There’s an advantage to being small and flexible and having the ability to make decisions quickly. Large practices and large groups are stymied by their bloated bureaucracy, which has layers and a hierarchy

Each patient doesn’t just add revenue on their first visit, but brings in repeated revenue, because he or she serves as a magnifier for creating new business for your practice.

of those followers. You have to consider that each devoted fan leads to exponential results—each patient doesn’t just add revenue on the first visit, but brings in repeated revenue, because he or she serves as a magnifier for creating new business for your practice.

of people that need to sign off on any decision that needs to be made. Smaller practices have the advantage of being agile and can respond to patients’ needs and make decisions quickly and much faster than large organizations. More important-

Continued on page 130

Marketing Plan: Part 3 (from page 129)

ly, small practices can micromanage the doctor-patient relationship. As a result, the patient doesn't find him- or herself adrift in a sea of other patients, and the practice has an opportunity to offer a personal and customized interaction that is conducive to inspiring loyalty.

The first step in creating a fan of your practice is to find out what your patient wants. It is imperative to think about not only what the patient wants but also what the patient needs. It is necessary to understand both needs and wants. They may overlap, but often they are completely separate. Our challenge is to motivate patients to do what they need to do to achieve the results they want and need.

The take-home message is that we want our patients to achieve the results that both they and their doctors want. The benefit of reaching this goal is that patients who achieve their goals will recommend you enthusiastically to others, who are then likely to become patients in your practice. The

Receptionists should be able to quickly quote the cost of each service the patient is likely to encounter. These prices should also be posted on the website. The take-home message is that the purpose of any new technology that is implemented into your practice is to eliminate friction.

Increasing Patient Lifetime Value

It is important to understand the lifetime value of a patient to your

to extreme poverty, as well as the loss of his family. The new owner of his farm discovered a mother lode of diamonds on the farm that he had purchased from the original owner. The moral of this story is to dig first on your own property when seeking a treasure or, more succinctly, look first at what you already have.

Apply that maxim to your marketing efforts—look at your existing patients and make sure that

More than one-third of adults report they've delayed or forgone healthcare either due to fear of COVID-19 infection or their physician offering limited services during the pandemic.

There should be no secret about the cost of visits and procedures that you offer, and that information should be readily available to patients.

best way to encourage compliance is to divide the process into bite-sized morsels so that the whole endeavor doesn't seem so daunting.

In this age of technology, you have an opportunity to make healthcare frictionless. For example, make it easy for patients to make an online appointment. This is particularly important and attractive to Millennials. Another friction point is for making payments to the practice. When this can be made easy and quick, your practice will be attractive to patients. Another method of reducing friction regarding payment is to provide prices of your services. There should be no secret about the cost of visits and procedures that you offer, and that information should be readily available to patients.

practice. The calculation for lifetime value is the average value of an appointment multiplied by the average appointments per year multiplied by the average number of years a patient is likely to remain in your practice. The calculation of lifetime value = V

$\times N \times Y$, where V = average dollar value of appointment, N = average number of appointments each year, and Y = average number of years the patient visits your practice.

For example, if you are a middle-aged podiatrist and your average patient is seen three times a year and each visit is worth approximately \$150, and that patient stays within your practice for six years, then the average lifetime value of that patient would be $3 \times \$150 \times 6$, or \$2,700.

Conwell's classic story "Acres of Diamonds"¹ is about a farmer living between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers who wanted to find diamonds so badly that he sold his farm, left his family, and went off on a search that took him all over the world. His search was futile and ultimately led

they have a stellar experience before reaching out for new patients. Numerous studies have shown that it is far easier to satisfy an existing patient than to recoup the time, money, and energy required to attract new ones. Those studies indicate that a person is 21 times more likely to buy from a business or practice they've already used than from one they have never visited.² In other words, there can be plenty of productivity from your existing or past patients.

Nearly every practice has dozens—perhaps even hundreds—of patients who have fallen through the cracks and have missed appointments for follow-up examinations. In this pandemic era, large numbers of patients have been fearful of coming to the doctor and have skipped follow-up appointments.

More than one-third of adults report they've delayed or forgone healthcare either due to fear of COVID-19 infection or their physician offering limited services during the pandemic.³ An even larger portion (40.7%) of respondents with one or more chronic conditions reported they've delayed or forgone care, while 56.3% of respondents with both a physical and a mental health condition have failed to follow up with their doctor.⁴

Continued on page 132

Marketing Plan: Part 3 (from page 130)

Black adults were more likely (39.7%) to report foregoing or delaying care than Hispanic (35.5%) or White (34.3%) adults and more likely to report forgoing or delaying multiple types of care: 28.5% compared with 22.3% and 21.1%, respectively.⁴ The most common type of medical care delayed or forgone was visiting their primary care physician or specialist (20.6%) and receiving preventive health screenings or medical tests (15.5%).⁵

Respondents with one or more chronic health conditions, such as hypertension, diabetes, respiratory

illness, heart disease, cancer, kidney disease, and mental health disorders, make up the vast majority (76%) of those who have delayed or forgone healthcare.⁵

noon, evening, or weekend appointments. If you are delivering extra value that your competitors do not provide, your existing patients will remain loyal members of your practice.

Develop a reactivation campaign. This consists of going through your patient database and identifying patients who need to return to the practice. You need to give them a strong reason to return to the practice.

When the electronic contact method fails, consider calling the patients and ask them why they haven't returned. Let the patient know you care about them and their health. Tell

reward you by reactivation into the practice. On the other hand, if you don't reach out to them, then they will forget you and their health may deteriorate.

Repetition will lead to repeat visits and loyalty from patients. One contact is not likely to keep your name and the name of your practice for recall when patients may need your services. By sending patients regular reminders, newsletters, and emails, you become a familiar name, and it is more likely they will be calling for an appointment when they need your services. Reaching out to patients in your database can be easily automated with current technology to do the heavy lifting. This technology allows you to easily keep in touch and continue to develop and maintain a relationship through your customer relationship management system. Maintaining that connection can be as simple as a monthly postcard or text message.

Conducting a reactivation campaign begins with looking at your patient database and retrieving names of patients who haven't returned for follow-up.

Orchestrating and Stimulating Referrals

Several decades ago, the concept of marketing and spreading the word about your practice was limited to "word of mouth" or what we call "hopeium," in which the doctor and the practices "hope" that patients who have had a favorable experience will walk out of the practice and tell others about that positive experience. That's a "sit and wait" approach to building and maintaining a practice. That approach may have worked a few decades ago, but it's a passive approach and you may wait a very long time for it to work. Others are taking a more active approach and creating vocal fans who do the marketing and practice promotion on your behalf.

It is possible to initiate the process by simply asking patients for whom you have delivered outstanding care and who have had a favorable result to share that experience with others. However, you need to give them the ammunition necessary to be your publicist.

This process acknowledges them and appeals to their egos, because nearly everyone likes being acknowl-

Continued on page 133

them you want them to return to the practice, and make it convenient for them to re-enter the practice. Ideally, a reactivation campaign should not be necessary. But there are going to be situations such as the pandemic, hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters that do make it difficult for patients to return to the practice. However, a reactivation campaign can be your "acres of diamonds" and significantly increase the lifetime value from your existing patients.

Conducting a reactivation campaign begins with looking at your patient database and retrieving names of patients who haven't returned for follow-up. Next, create a strong offer to entice them to come back. In most healthcare practices, returning is beneficial to their health, and failure to come back may cause deterioration in their health and well-being. Finally, if they do call for a follow-up appointment, send them a thank-you note indicating that you are looking forward to seeing them.

Take-Home Message

Stay connected with your patients who haven't followed up. Let them know that you are concerned about them, that you're available, and you will find that they will handsomely

This would be a perfect time to institute telemedicine for those patients who have missed appointments. A primary care doctor probably has numerous patients who need follow-up cholesterol testing and blood pressure monitoring. How should the practice keep these existing patients in the loop or within the practice? This can be done by sending patients reminders by email, text messaging, or even snail mail. Modern technology makes it possible to send reminders automatically to patients who are likely to need follow-up appointments.

You can make your practice user-friendly by making your practice accessible. Tell existing patients that they can have same-day or next-day appointments. Another convenience is to offer early morning, late after-

Marketing Plan: Part 3 (from page 132)

edged. Rather than appear to be asking for a favor, offer something of value that they can share with their family and friends. This process is far more effective taking an extra dose of hopeium!

Bottom Line

We know we have covered a lot of ideas in our journey to create a one-page marketing plan. This is an effective approach to medical marketing that is well within the reach of every medical practice regardless of size, location, and current level of marketing and practice promotion.

There's a popular Chinese proverb that says: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now." Basically, this means that if you want success and growth tomorrow, the best time to act is now. So, start planting your One-Page Marketing Plan today! **PM**

References

¹ Conwell RH, Shackleton R. *Acres of Diamonds*. Harper and Brothers; 1915. Available at www.google.com/books/edition/Acres_of_Diamonds/O44DAAAAYAAJ

² Gallo A. The value of keeping the right customers. *Harvard Business Review*. October 29, 2014.

³ Czeisler ME, Marynak K, Clarke KEN, et al. Delay or avoidance of medical care because of COVID-19-related concerns—United States, June 2020. *MMWR*. 2020;69:1250-1257. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6936a4>

⁴ Claxton G, Damico A, Rae M, Young G, McDermott D, Whitmore H. health benefits in 2020: premiums in employer-sponsored plans grow 4 percent; employers consider responses to pandemic: the annual Kaiser Family Foundation Employer Health Benefits Survey of the cost and coverage of US employer-sponsored health benefits. *Health Affairs*. 2020;39:2018-2028.

⁵ Gonzalez D, Zuckerman S, Kenney GM, Karpman M. Almost Half of Adults in Families Losing Work during the Pandemic Avoided Health Care Be-

cause of Costs or COVID-19 Concerns. Washington, DC: Urban Institute; July 10, 2020. www.urban.org/research/publication/almost-half-adults-families-losing-work-during-pandemic-avoided-health-care-because-costs-or-covid-19-concerns.



Allan Dib is Founder of Successwise, Miami, Florida; website: <https://successwise.com>.



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