

PRACTICE BRANDING FROM THE GROUND UP

A conscious, coordinated approach to internal and external communications can help boost your bottom line.

BY STEPHANIE KLOOS DONOGHUE

Building brand identity is not just for sellers of cars and cat food. Podiatrists can use a well-curated collection of branding elements—from logos and websites to signage and more—to connect with patients and prospective patients, promote services and products, and recruit and retain staff.

“For medical professionals, the brand becomes a point of pride and an indicator of a level of quality and professionalism,” according to “How Branded Healthcare Environments Can Build Trust and Community” from the Gensler Research Institute (GRI). “For patients, it’s about confidence in the level of care based on the associative reputation of the brand.” In addition, GRI notes that “brand consistency is important as a unifier, and brand identity becomes a visual cue that you are making the

right choice in a healthcare provider and is a promise you make to everyone who engages with you.”¹

Podiatrists face competition not only from DPM colleagues but from

ically, doctors think about these at three points in their careers: when they start a practice, buy a practice, or want the practice to spotlight a significant new look, new location,

Podiatrists can use a well-curated collection of branding elements to connect with patients and prospective patients, promote services and products, and recruit and retain staff.

other medical specialists and retail outlets. Here is how several doctors have built their brands and ways they put them to use in their practices.

Practice Name and Logo

A practice name and logo design are critical branding elements. Typ-

merger, or other change. The latter might include the introduction of a specialty, partner, or affiliation.

When Benjamin Marble, DPM, purchased his practice in Pueblo, Colorado, in 2007, it had been named after the previous owner. “We decid-

Continued on page 68

Branding (from page 67)

ed to rebrand completely, and I knew that eventually I would likely be expanding to one or two other doctors," he says. He wanted to "take a more financially responsible route," naming the practice Pueblo Ankle & Foot Care, a name that could remain with the practice as it grew.

Dr. Marble chose to rebrand using a predominantly blue design.

While he has kept the overall look for more than 15 years, he has tweaked the shades slightly over that time. The color blue seems to be a popular choice among physicians—and perhaps for good reason. Researchers from the University of Missouri-Columbia found that "specific colors used in a company's logo have a significant impact on how that logo, and the brand as a whole, is viewed by consumers." For example, their research showed that "blue logos invoked feelings of confidence, success, and reliability."²

Timothy Dailey, DPM, inherited the

practice branding when he purchased Freeland Foot and Ankle Clinic in Freeland, Michigan, eight years ago. "There was an evolution with how we branded and the colors that we used," he says. "We use blue because it seems more calming and looks nice on a white background. Then we threw in a little bit of orange for contrast and to help



Dr. Marble



Dr. Dailey

Dr. Dailey added some orange to the logo for contrast and to help the logo stand out.



Use a Tagline to Reinforce the Brand

At Freeland Foot and Ankle Clinic, Dr. Timothy Dailey uses the website tagline "where patients are treated like family" to help distinguish his practice as a caring place. "This is exactly how I treat my mother" he tells patients. "Coming to a doctor's office can be very nerve-wracking, and I want patients to feel comfortable." When given a treatment choice, he is often asked what he would do. "If you were my mother," he might respond, "this is what I would offer her." PM



[the logo] stand out a bit more."

James Dolan, DPM, faced a unique challenge—he had two successful brands, a medical spa and podiatry practice—that "were kind of competing with each other," says Dr. Dolan. Located in Stratham, New Hampshire, Barefoot Medical Spa was well established when the clinical side of the business, "From The Ground Up Podiatry", opened. Having the two businesses side by side "was a confusing concept to the general public," he says. "We knew that it was critical for the public to understand the differences in services, providers, and pricing between the two, as well as the unique value and synergy provided by the sister companies." The challenge, says Dr. Dolan, was to communicate all of this succinctly and combine the branding in a logical way. Building a shared website and marketing strategy was the key to accomplishing this.

Craig Foster, DPM, of Gilbert, Ari-

zona, says that a lot of thought went into the name and logo design for Traction Podiatry Group, which he opened in 2024. He was coming into a very competitive area with well-established practices, so he wanted to be sure to get noticed.

He says the name Dr. Foster appeals to the area population of young families and 55-plus active adult communities. "The name means trying to push to get people back on their feet, and the practice's tagline—'Every step starts with traction'—promotes active wellness," he says. "The idea is to get people out of foot pain and back on their feet, doing whatever activities they enjoy." (See the sidebar, "Use a Tagline to Reinforce the Brand.")

Continued on page 70



Dr. Foster says the name means trying to push to get people back on their feet and promotes active wellness.

Branding (from page 68)

When Dawn Dryden, DPM, bought out and expanded the practice where she had worked as an associate, she retained some aspects of the previous practice while adding some of her own, new branding elements. As she moved from the existing 1,200-square-foot location to a 4,000-square-foot office—Batavia Foot Care Center in Batavia, New York—it was a new location with the same practice name,” she says. “But I really wanted to change things up. I worked with a graph-



Dr. Dryden

Dr. Dryden also finds that patients love reusable canvas bags, which promote the Batavia Foot Care brand when carried throughout the community.

ic designer to come up with a new color scheme and a logo that is now on everything. It's more aesthetically pleasing.”

Dr. Dryden adds that she makes sure to brand everything. “Anything that leaves our office includes our information,” she says. “We use a sticker that has Batavia Foot Care Center and our address, phone number, and website on it.”

Continued on page 71



Dr. Dryden says that anything that leaves her office includes the practice information.

Slow-motion video on Dr. Marble's website provides visual interest.

Branding (from page 70)

Nicole Freels, DPM, CPed, of Lexington Podiatry and Modern Podiatrist in Lexington, Kentucky, says it took a year and a half to come up with the practice logo more than 15 years ago. Search engine optimization (SEO)

was a top priority, even then. "We were intentional, working backwards: what language would work best on Google and its algorithms?" she says.

Incorporating a foot in the logo was key, adds Dr. Freels, as she found that many people did not know what a podiatrist was. She also chose to put Lexington in the logo so that the practice would rise to the top of local Google searches.



Dr. Freels

Practice Website: Critical Touchpoint

The initial touchpoint for many patients is the practice website. Creating a distinctive design that coordinates all branding elements and

went into the website. We wanted to make sure that our website was really optimized for SEO—getting people's eyes on it and getting clicks."

Dr. Foster also learned that due diligence is a critical first step

Dr. Freels chose to put Lexington in the logo so that the practice would rise to the top of local Google searches.

colors while incorporating critical elements such as the practice mission, services offered, insurances accepted, and location is key.

Choosing a Website Design Firm

Dr. Marble's first website "was just bare bones. But we got what we paid for," he says. "Over time, I realized that I needed to have a dedicated marketing budget, and part of that

in choosing a website designer. He recommends that DPMs review prospective website designers' portfolios before committing to use the firm. Initially, he didn't do that and struggled to get the look he envisioned. "I never liked [our first website]—and I tried hard to like it. There was something 'off' with it. It looked like a 10-year-old website."

Continued on page 72

Branding (from page 71)

When Dr. Foster switched to a design firm that had experience in podiatry—and had sample websites that better matched what he wanted—it was an entirely different experience. “[The website designers] knew how to create a website based off little direction from me,” he

Photos on the website help build connections before patients even arrive for their first appointment, says Dr. Dailey.

says. That was a completely different experience from the previous firm, when he was emailing changes daily “to try to get them to catch the vision.”

Selecting Photography/Videos

Professional photography can enhance a practice’s desired image, be it a relaxing atmosphere, interesting architecture, the high-tech equipment, or a combination of elements. In Dr. Freels’ practice, using professional photos reflects the professionalism of the practice—and further enhances the brand. “When [prospective patients] see a high-quality picture of you, they connect with you instantly,” she says, adding that the use of professional photography can mean the difference between “I trust this person or I don’t.”

Photographers also know the techniques that will translate well on the website. For example, outdoor shots should be taken in optimal lighting that highlights the signage and accessibility, according to Dr. Freels’ experience. Inside the office, the photographer can suggest best sight lines and perspectives. This can be particularly useful for DPMs with small offices, narrow hallways, and/or poorly lit spaces.

Continued on page 73



Dr. Dolan aims for approachability with his photography.

PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Branding (from page 72)

Approachability is the focus of the photos on Dr. Dolan's shared practice and spa website, where there are no white coats or uniforms. Instead, he stands outside of the office dressed in a golf shirt and khakis with his arms crossed against a wooden wall background. "We're very approachable people, and I hope that that comes through in those photos," he says.

Photography also helps build connections before patients even arrive for their first appointment, says Dr. Dailey. "As much as we are physicians treating patients, patients go to the website to get to know you and understand you," he says. "They may feel like they can trust

"We wanted to make sure that our website was really optimized for SEO—getting people's eyes on it and getting clicks."—Marble

this person because they put pictures of their kids or find out you have kids or grandkids." Again, he emphasizes that these photos "are all about making [people] feel more comfortable."

Highlighting different treatments and technologies visually can elevate the expertise of the doctors as well. "We want patients to know that we have multiple options for them," says Rich DiFilippo, Dr. Dryden's practice manager. They feature Shockwave and Swift Microwave therapy equipment photos on the website, for example, to showcase alternatives to more traditional treatments. The wording above the photos urges patients to inquire: "Ask us about our in-office, cutting-edge technologies."

The website coloring and photography for Traction Podiatry Group reflect the area landscape. "The site is designed to feel like it is outdoors," says Dr. Foster. Nearby Sonoran Desert and mountains are pictured both on the website and in the office, with hiking featured prominently. "We have photos of mountains that I've hiked and other places I've been with the family—outdoor adventures and memories. That doesn't fall exactly in line with looking at people's feet, but your feet are how you interact with the ground. In my mind, there is a direct correlation."

Video clips provide another brand-strengthening opportunity. On Dr. Dolan's shared practice and spa website, video clips focus not only on services provided but are aspirational. "Feet are foundational to our wellness, and I think that our video captures that: someone walking and feet in motion," says Dr. Dolan. "And we are based in the New Hampshire seacoast, so [a video of walking on the beach] resonates as well."



Rich DiFilippo

Continued on page 74

Branding (from page 73)

Navigation Strategy and Updates

As he was entering a competitive area outside of Phoenix, Dr. Foster focused on website features and navigation. "We wanted a nice, updated website with a modern feel that functions well, where you can do everything on it if you want." This included texting capabilities, he says, "which perhaps some of the older practices hadn't implemented yet."

Elevating the brand via the web-

site has helped Dr. Marble in his recruiting efforts for podiatrists looking

sociates to the City of Pueblo Colorado website. There, those interested in

Elevating the brand via the website has helped Dr. Marble in his recruiting efforts for podiatrists looking to relocate to Colorado.

to relocate to Colorado. An "About Our Community" link on his practice Careers page connects prospective as-

the active, outdoors-focused lifestyle can get information on local trails,

Continued on page 76

A Clear Brand: Your Secret to Attracting the Right Patients

By Rem Jackson

Does your practice attract the patients you prefer to see most? If not, the problem isn't your skills; it's likely your message. Many practices have a generic brand that speaks to everyone and, as a result, resonates with no one. A focused brand, however, is a powerful tool for attracting your ideal patient and building a thriving practice.

Think of it this way: your brand isn't about you; it's about the patient. It's the story they're living, and you're the guide who helps them succeed. This concept, championed by marketing guru Donald Miller in his book *Building a StoryBrand 2.0*, simplifies branding into a clear, actionable framework.

Here is a checklist to get you started.

1) Identify Your Ideal Patient (the "Hero")

Your patient is the hero of their own story. What are their specific foot-related "pain points"? Is it a runner with chronic heel pain, a diabetic patient concerned about foot health, or an older adult with mobility issues? Understand their struggles and, more importantly, what "success" looks like for them. Do this for the top conditions you prefer to see.

2) Position Yourself as the Guide

Now, position your practice as the trusted guide. Don't be the hero; be the one who knows how to solve the hero's problem. Use empathetic language that shows you understand their pain. Then, establish your authority by highlighting your expertise. Let them know you have a plan that will help them get out of the pain they are currently experiencing. Make it clear that you are uniquely qualified to help them.

3) Craft a Simple, Clear Message

If your message is confusing, you'll lose potential patients. Your brand needs a "one-liner" that quickly explains what you do, whom you help, and what the result can be. Something like: "We help active adults overcome foot pain so that they can get back to their favorite sports." This clear statement should be prominent on your website and social media.

4) Make the Next Step Obvious

Your website and marketing materials must have a clear call to action. Don't make people guess what to do next. Use straightforward language and buttons like "Book an Appointment" or "Request a Consultation." When the path is clear, your ideal patients will be more likely to take it.

A well-defined brand isn't just about a logo and colors; it's a strategic tool that clarifies your purpose, attracts the patients you want to serve, and sets you up for long-term success. **PM**

Rem Jackson is the CEO of Top Practices, LLC, and the leader of the Top Practices Master Mind Group. Top Practices is dedicated to helping podiatrists thrive in private practice through its marketing and management programs. He is the author of *Podiatry Prosperity: How to Market, Manage and Love Your Practice*.

Branding (from page 74)

parks, festivals, and more.

To reinforce the call to action on the practice website, Dr. Dryden created prominent yellow "Book An Appointment" and blue "Text Us" buttons on the home page. "We wanted to make it simple for people to contact us," says DiFilippo.

Doctors suggest that DPMs review their websites regularly to ensure that they remain accurate (e.g., current staff photos, lists of services, etc.). Even minor updates keep the sites fresh and timely. Sometimes a structural change can make a difference, as Dr. Dailey discovered. When he found that shorter copy blocks were trending and proved to be more effective, he modified his website copy accordingly. He suggests that DPMs evaluate whether a complete website overhaul is necessary every three to five years. Despite the time

His most effective strategy is inviting the patient to review after the patient encounter—and keeping the process simple. "We let them know that we'll be sending a link to a Google Review. 'It would mean a lot if you could take a few minutes and fill it out,' we tell them. When we do that, we typically get a review," he says.

Uniforms, Signage, and Printed Materials Extend Brand Impact

While teal and white are the predominant colors of the Traction Podiatry Group logo, Dr. Foster says there is some flexibility with color



Dr. Freels sent her logo to a die maker and had nametags made in the shape of a foot. She says that adding the city where the staff member originated from is a conversation starter.

sign was not noticeable. He tried a purple background and now uses orange.

Dr. Freels sent her logo to a die maker and had custom cards and nametags made in the shape of a foot. On the nametags, she added the city where the staff member originated from—something she learned at a Disney Institute course. This spurs conversation, especially when patients and staffers have common hometowns. "Those little details really add up," says Dr. Freels.

"When everything matches, patients feel like the practice is well organized."—Dailey

and effort involved, Dr. Dailey emphasizes that you might just have to "bite the bullet and do it."

Reviews: Let Patients Promote Your Brand

Using positive reviews to build the brand can be very effective, and Dr. Dolan says these have benefitted both businesses. "People are willing to share their experiences and their stories, and people can sometimes relate to those more easily than they can relate to what we're presenting as a menu of options," he says. Dr. Dolan adds that positive reviews also motivate and encourage doctors and staff members. "[Positive reviews] fuel us; they keep us going."

Dr. Foster says the combination of the practice website and reviews is a real draw. He says that patients will tell him, "I came here specifically because I saw on your website that you offer this," or "I came here specifically because I saw a review and you fix this."

depending upon how it is used, such as on clothing. He says he "plays with what would look good," using the fabric or background color to determine the logo color.

In Dr. Dryden's practice, she takes some liberties with the logo elements on scrubs and jackets. For example, she stacks the circle element of the logo above the practice name, which she finds works better on clothing. And she uses white embroidery, which stands out against dark fabrics.

As soon as Dr. Dailey decided on the logo, he made sure that the branding carried through to his professionally printed patient literature and handouts with branded colors, fonts, and layouts. That was a big step up from the black-and-white handouts he used previously. "When everything matches, patients feel like the practice is well organized," he says. He carried through the branding to a new outdoor sign when he discovered that his original white

Strengthen the Bond with External Communications and Community Engagement

Connecting patients through blogs and newsletters strengthens the brand's bond and provides a means of establishing practice doctors as medical experts. "The hits that we get from our newsletters are pretty remarkable," says Dr. Dolan. "The newsletters are in layman's language. Even if they don't know what onychomycosis is, they know that they've got fungal nails."

Dr. Dryden has found that patient polls increase engagement with the practice. One particularly successful voting opportunity was called the Snowman Showdown during the 2024 holiday season. Each staff member had painted a snowman during the holiday party, and patients voted on their favorite. "We had the highest number of clicks on our website from this," says DiFilippo. "We want to continue to do things like that to get more people on our website and on our social media."

Continued on page 78

Branding (from page 78)

Dr. Dryden also finds that patients love calendars and reusable canvas bags, which provide additional opportunities to bring the practice brand into patients' homes. The bags offer a bonus: patients promote the Batavia Foot Care brand when they carry the bags throughout the community.

Dr. Foster's practice has increased exposure to the practice brand organically by bringing new groups into his office space. He recently began a marketing initiative with area running stores after discovering that each store has a running club. "We're trying to arrange a workshop that we could do here on a weekend for them," he says, using some space he has in the front of the office with a treadmill and some physical therapy equipment. "We could demo some foot strengthening and foot mobility movements." He also wants to do the same thing with pickleball clubs due to the large con-

centration of them in his area. "Typically, pickleball may attract older individuals than running clubs," he says. "But both of those attract active people who might have some acute injuries."

Dr. Dailey participates in events

ley suggests using a variety of media to get the most impact. For example, his practice's online presence includes a blog, a monthly feature, and videos, finding that some patients like to read, while others may want to watch. "If you incorporate both,"

For Dr. Dolan, branding has proven to be an important aspect of staff motivation.

outside the office as a practice-building strategy and to bolster his reputation in the community. A shoe sizing event for children each August puts the practice name in front of parents. In addition, while doing the measurements, "we take a look at their feet to see if there are any issues," he says.

While doctors may focus on a few external strategies to strengthen their brand, often it is a combination that is most effective. In fact, Dr. Dailey says, "you are going to catch [the attention of] most people."

Brand Impacts Staff, Too

Staff members in Dr. Dailey's practice use the printed materials to curate personalized folders based upon a patient's specific needs. This allows staff to connect to patients individually. "Whether it's plantar fasciitis, calluses, warts, whatever—the right-hand pocket of the folder has all the information the patient needs," says Dr. Dailey.

One initiative that has set the practice apart while impacting staff in Dr. Dailey's practice is what he calls a "deal of the month"—discounts on products so that people are willing to try them. Branding reinforces this messaging with the "deal" promoted at the top of the website as well as on signage and flyers placed strategically throughout the office. "Ten percent off is not a huge deal," he says. "The bigger impact is really getting the staff involved." And the deals spark queries from patients. "Patients ask questions like 'What is a foot roller?'" he says, giving the staff another opportunity to educate and connect.

For Dr. Dolan, branding has proven to be an important aspect of staff motivation. He recently gave staff members new vests with the logo on it, and he says they love them. "People want to be part of a place that they are proud to represent," says Dr. Dolan. He adds that staff appreciate working for a practice where the branding and presentation are consistent, and where every staff member is valued. The practice branding re-

Continued on page 81

Branding Resources

Podiatry Management's Annual Buyers' Guide features several companies and associations that provide podiatrist-specific branding services, including website design and external communications support, as well as tips and strategies to help your practice grow. Click on the QR code for a complete list and to learn more.



Ahn, Dr TJ

AAPPM

Aspire Health Management

Atlas FAI

Blue Orchid Marketing

Extremity Healthcare

FABI

Foot Helpers

HPMSI

Institute for Podiatric Excellence and Development

Jarall Medical Management Consulting

Manta Group

MD Private Label

Medical Mavin

Officite

Online Podiatry Sites

Podiatry Content Connection

Scheduling Institute

Sole Marketing

Toe-Rific

Top Practices

Weave

Web Power Video

Podiatry Practice Brand and Marketing Self-Audit

By Shaun Zaken

Assess your visibility, consistency, and efficiency to help you identify what's worth improving or offloading.

1) Brand Consistency Across Channels

- Does your website's overall user experience (tone, imagery, and messaging) reflect the patient experience you offer on-site in your clinic, or is it outdated and difficult to navigate?
- Are your logo, colors, and brand voice used consistently across all platforms (website, signage, printed materials, and social media)?

2) Website Effectiveness

- Is your website mobile-optimized, fast-loading, and user-friendly?
- Does it clearly explain what sets your podiatry care apart (e.g., technology used, bedside manner, niche specialties)?
- Can visitors easily understand your service offerings and book an appointment within 30-60 seconds?

3) Local Visibility and Competitive Edge

- Have you claimed and optimized your Google Business Profile?
- If someone searches for your name or another DPM in your practice, does their current contact information outrank previous employer information?
 - Are you ranking for "near me" and condition-specific searches (e.g., "heel pain treatment in [City]")?
- Is your online reputation (practice and/or DPM reviews) stronger than your competitors in your ZIP code?

4) Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Automation Readiness

- Are you taking advantage of AI tools, automated email campaigns, and/or patient recalls to help keep your schedule full and ensure you're productive with your time?
- Could AI help you analyze patient trends, schedule content, or automate FAQs and intake responses?

5) Time vs. Value: What Can Be Delegated?

- Are you spending time on tasks like blog writing, local ad setup and management, or website design and updates that could be outsourced? (In other words, might your time be better spent with patients or making strategic decisions?)

6) Content and Communication Strategy

- Are you educating patients through original content (articles, videos, newsletters, emails)?
- Is your messaging built around patient concerns (e.g., "Why do I keep getting ingrown toenails?") vs. clinical jargon?

7) Retention and Follow-up

- Do you have systems in place for patient recall letters/emails/texts, post-visit satisfaction surveys, and treatment reminders?
- Are these communications personalized and timely, or do they rely on manual follow-up?

8) Social Proof and Patient Stories

- Do you regularly collect and promote patient testimonials?
- Have you showcased before/after stories when appropriate, or shared your practice culture online?

9) Practice Differentiation

- Does your practice have a unique value proposition? If so, have you clearly defined what makes you and your practice stand out amongst your competition?
- Do patients know why they should choose you vs. another podiatrist?

10) Quarterly Self-Check Ritual

- Do you review your results (analytics, online reviews, marketing performance, and competitive standing) at least every three to six months?
- If you work with a marketing partner, are they sharing monthly or quarterly reports that help you understand whether the services you're investing in are working? **PM**

Shaun Zaken is the President and owner of Blue Orchid Marketing, Inc., a leader in podiatry marketing services for over 20 years. Blue Orchid Marketing specializes in providing top marketing solutions that help your practice grow.

Branding (from page 78)

fects “a collaborative, respectful, and healing environment. And we place a lot of emphasis on how important

“I feel that the name and branding of my practice set it apart because it’s a very simple name and color scheme, it is recognizable, and it’s easy to remember.”

if you’ve had the same thing for 25 years, you’ll still get your same patients. By making a change, you’ll catch someone new.” PM

Simplicity and uniqueness in branding are key to word-of-mouth referrals, according to Dr. Foster.

[staff members] are. Improved retention is a natural result.”

Brand Focus as a Key to Growth

Simplicity and uniqueness in branding are key to word-of-mouth referrals, according to Dr. Foster. He says Traction Podiatry Group is a first choice in the area for sports enthusiasts due to branding. “Many practices here have very similar names but are just slightly different,” he explains.

Dr. Dailey says that periodically tweaking the branding will help attract new patients. He uses the exterior signage as an example. “If people drive by your building every day, they drive by the sign every day and don’t see a difference. If you change something, they may notice,” he says. “Signs are not the thing that’s going to bring patients in, but if they notice it, they’ll go to the website to look me up. But

References

¹ <https://www.gensler.com/blog/branded-healthcare-environments-build-trust-community?q=branded>

² “Logo color affects consumer emotion toward brands, study finds,” Science Daily, 4/8/14.



Stephanie Kloos
Donoghue of Ardsley, New York, writes and lectures on management, marketing, and economic trends for doctors and small business owners. She is president of S. Kloos Communications Inc., where she is a creative director, writer/editor, and business consultant. At Pace University's Lubin School of Business, she serves as an adjunct assistant professor teaching business management and entrepreneurship. Learn more at skloos.com.