

The Most Devastating Practice Management Mistake You Can Make

by Marc Aronson

Failure to Hire a Medical Marketing Strategist When Your Practice Is Slow and Your Payor Mix Could Stand Improvement

When you have an accounting problem, you go to your CPA. When you have a legal problem, you contact your attorney. When your practice slows and the future is uncertain, you should hire a marketing strategist. A sure way to increase your practice's profitability is to raise your volume of patients with decent insurance. To achieve this, you need to increase your market share.

Many doctors think they are expert at marketing, so they handle all the marketing themselves. In more prosperous times when the economy was better and insurance reimbursement was higher, doctors were able to achieve some success without the expertise of a medical marketing strategist. Thanks to the economy and declining insurance reimbursement, however, the financial climate is not so friendly anymore for physicians.

Being a marketing strategy expert requires at least a four year degree in marketing, advertising or a related field, and continually training and studying to enhance one's skills and keep current with trends, especially concerning online media. Having several years experience practicing in this field is also invaluable because the environment today is so challenging and complex. There is just no way for a physician in a full-time practice to maintain sufficient skill in marketing to achieve the level of results a skilled marketing professional can obtain.

What Should Be the Actual Goal of Your Marketing?

Only an expert marketing strategist will aim high enough and get you there. Your marketing goal should be nothing less than *to persuade your potential patients to believe they would be making a huge mistake*

to choose anyone else but you for the type of medical services you provide. Likewise, a marketing strategy expert should convince your potential referrals sources that they would be in error to send patients to anyone but you for the services you offer. This goal holds true for every target market of concern to you, including employers, employees, referral sources, IPAs and insurance companies.

A marketing strategy specialist is more than a graphic or web designer, a publicist or a PR person. The best strategists will innovate your practice so you stand out from your competitors for each public you serve. He or she will use tools such as marketing research, competitive and market analysis, positioning, branding, tactical planning and emotional response surveys. Expert marketing strategists know that the wording of your communications is senior to design and execution. Nevertheless, they will ensure you have an effective design, oversee all creative work, choose the right tactics, and execute your strategy efficiently and flawlessly.

An expert marketing strategist knows that marketing strategy is defined as *determining your target markets and establishing what to say and how to communicate your message so you stand out above your competitors and your practice is seen as the obvious choice.*

That consultant will ensure you have something great to say, communicate it effectively and repeat your message often enough to get your target markets to take action.

What can you expect from an expert marketing strategist?

- improved patient satisfaction
- improved customer service (patient relations)
- effective promotional and patient information material
- an increase in patient referrals
- an improved reputation among your potential

referral sources, within your community and among your patients

- several “new physicians referring regularly to your practice
- better morale among your staff
- increased interest and desire from third-party payors and IPAs to contract with you
- a consistently full waiting room with patients who have decent insurance or are able to pay cash

How to Choose a Marketing Strategist

There are several criteria you should consider when selecting a marketing expert. Here are six of the most important:

Qualifications: Unlike lawyers, accountants and doctors, marketing strategists do not even need a bachelor degree in marketing, let alone a trade license. You will find “marketing strategists” who majored in graphic design, language, and accounting. There are “marketers” who used to be radio DJs, salespersons, office managers of medical or dental practices, journalists and even photographers. A few have never attended college.

The problem is that without at least a bachelor degree in marketing or advertising from an accredited university, the individual lacks the foundation necessary to comprehend all the available tools and on how to use them. He may also lack the ability to critically think well enough to accurately evaluate the content of published works by “experts” on marketing strategy.

Continuing education: Marketing is a dynamic field and requires continuous study. Marketing strategy consultants must ceaselessly study and evaluate the writings by leading marketing authors. Those ideas the consultant find valid should be incorporated into his arsenal of weapons to accomplish more for his clients.

General experience: Studying and applying... this what it takes to excel at marketing. All adept marketing strategists have experienced successes and failures. The more difficult situations they have encountered, the better they become if, and only if, they learn from their mistakes.

Medical practice experience: The greater the medical background the strategist has had, the better. Experience holding a management position for a hospital or medical group is invaluable. This allows

the individual to have experience interacting in team settings and to work cooperatively on identifying problems, and developing and implementing solutions. Probably, there is no better experience than being in charge of medical staff relations for a hospital. In fact, spending several years overseeing a hospital’s marketing department, strategic planning and advising medical staff members on marketing is the best possible training ground for a medical marketing strategist. This individual will experience a physician’s practice from several angles. He or she have participated in medical staff committees, orchestrated joint ventures between hospitals and physicians, dealt with all kinds of political and turf matters, and faced physicians who are furious about the hospital’s relations with their competitors. *He or she will also know how to gain support from a hospital for or her his client.*

Understanding what is wrong with contemporary marketing: If you look through the online yellow pages in any category, including medical, you will notice every ad under each heading says just about the same thing. They generally use what we call *menu style advertising*. These ads just feature what services the practice offers and contain a host of meaningless, unconvincing platitudes, generalities and fluff (*such as, quality, timeliness, warm and friendly, several years experience, thorough, we have trained professionals, we listen to your needs, etc.*). This is all utter nonsense! Effective marketing requires differentiating your services from your competitors in such a way that it makes yours the clear choice over the others. Ads must be convincing. Menu ads stuffed with platitudes, generalities and fluff always fail this test.

Fortune 100s like Coca Cola, General Motors and Microsoft use the advertising formula, *creativity plus repetition equals awareness*. The idea is that if you spend enough money on advertising, people will remember your product and buy from you. The problem is that when a small business, like a medical practice, tries this without the advantage of a huge budget, their ads provide no clue what makes them the right choice. This is why medical and dental ads only achieve marginal results. Doctors live with the justified idea that ads at least get their names out there. Great ads, however, will multiply your response rate and translate into additional dollars.

Strategy versus tactics: The expert marketing strategist must know with certainty the difference between strategy and tactics. If he does not, he is not an expert strategist.

Services you can expect your marketing strategist to perform

Your marketing strategy company should focus on:

- Conducting strategic planning sessions to determine the most effective strategy for each target market.
- Conducting innovation planning sessions to separate your practice from your competitors so your office *can* become the logical choice for patients and referrers.
- Developing your tactical plan for executing all promotional and related actions complete with time lines and assignments of responsibilities.
- Establishing and managing a patient retention and referral program.
- Conducting marketing surveys as needed to ensure promotion is pushing the right emotional hot buttons
- Writing the content for all promotion based on marketing strategies and hot buttons
- Designing all promotion including print ads, practice brochures, promotional brochures, websites, social media and other promotion (*Note: Practices that do not require marketing to the general public rarely need to advertise*)
- Providing staff training in communications, patient relations and telecommunications.
- Managing and executing marketing efforts targeting potential referral sources.
- Marketing to payor and IPAs, as needed.
- Establishing a media relations program, including developing relations with the press, and writing and submitting news stories.
- Establishing systems to ensure ongoing marketing efforts are consistent and timely.

Before hiring a marketing strategist become informed well enough to choose the right one

Our website is designed to enable you to learn, in an unbiased way, what you need to know to ensure you select the right marketing strategist for your practice. We discuss in depth two vital components: *The Laws of Communication* and *The Formula for Market Dominance*. We urge you to study both. Of course, we believe you would be making a huge mistake to select anyone other than Business Builders to handle your marketing strategy. However, we also acknowledge

you may feel a need to look beyond Business Builders before making a decision.



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