

Marketing Strategies for the ObGyn Practice

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Regardless of whether an ObGyn practice is new or has been in business for decades, marketing is an important part of its operations. Marketing plays a significant role in achieving and maintaining profitability goals, obtaining and retaining patients, developing an effective patient service environment at the practice, and much more.

It comes as no surprise that every practice should consider its marketing strategies on a regular basis. Successful marketing strategies start with an understanding of marketing and its role in a practice. Some health care professionals may inaccurately believe they do not market their practices. Whether you recognize it or not, you *are* marketing daily, to the benefit or detriment of your practice. While some health care professionals view marketing as limited to advertising and public relations, marketing comprises the broadest business discipline, involving everything that your ObGyn practice does to identify and satisfy patient needs. This includes market research, service/product development, fees (pricing), communication techniques (publicity, public relations, promotion and advertising), and distribution channels (patient service).

Marketing strategies involve a “big picture” perspective of what you are seeking to accomplish through your marketing efforts. Action steps are the actual details. All too often, health care professionals make the mistake of initially focusing on action steps without considering the strategies upon which those steps are founded. In turn, strategies need to be based on

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your overall practice goals and objectives (eg, significant growth per year to a multi-office practice).

A key focus from the very beginning must be to identify your “target market”—actual and potential patients—based on certain demographic factors such as age, income, distance from the office, and whether patients have children. For some practices, selecting the target market is simple because it may be one of a few ObGyn practices in a wide geographic area; for others, it may be more complex because the practice must determine how it can effectively compete in a heavily-saturated market. Understanding your target market and its needs is a fundamental factor in determining your marketing strategies and action steps.

MARKETING STRATEGIES RELATED TO SPECIFIC ISSUES

Centered on the needs of your market, what are some potential marketing strategies to consider? Several examples, based on common situations, are presented:

Recognition in the marketplace. Develop a branding and positioning strategy. This is more than a logo—it is a complete process aimed at creating an image or identity in the minds of your target market. For example, a practice could be positioned as *the* practice local women want to visit to address a wide range of female health concerns.

Acceptance in your local community. Become a recognized community benefactor. Depending on your community, some ideas for public relations, publicity, and advertising may include mall advertising, on-screen movie theater advertising, community sports

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facility advertising, sponsorship of charitable events, volunteerism, local newspaper advertising, and community health fairs (often staffed by ancillary services personnel). Additionally, lectures at events centered around mothers, women, or children highlight a focus on appealing to mothers and their personal relationships, so they will develop a positive view of your practice and refer others to it.

Attracting more patients. In addition to the aforementioned methods, try improving (or starting) your practice's Web

site. Also, work with other doctors to increase referrals and ask your patients to refer others. If you believe you have exhausted various methods to market your ObGyn practice, consider attracting new patients to your office by offering ancillary services, such as facials, laser hair removal, and bone mineral density screening.

Increase market share in a growing market. Design, open, and operate a secondary ObGyn office. Take advantage of the opportunity before someone else does.

Develop a committed client base. Perhaps your patient relations are lacking? Consider patient service training for all professionals and staff. Try instilling reminder letters for annual visits

with a menu of ancillary services and a coupon. Also, enhance existing patient relations by adding a section to your Web site that enables patients to electronically complete forms, schedule appointments, refill prescriptions, and pay bills.

Awareness of services. This issue may be identified during an analysis of billings. Consider adding computers that play screen saver slideshows of your services in every room. Place television screens, interspersed with short commercials about services, in the waiting room. Keep posters and flyers in examination rooms, conduct post-visit surveys, and update Web site communications. Finally, hold open houses for patients when a new doctor joins your practice.

CONCLUSION

From a business management perspective, every practice has 4 functional areas: production (services provided to patients), finance/accounting, human resources or personnel management, and marketing. Each functional area may involve numerous subsets, as is the case with marketing. When marketing your practice, be sure to research your target market and take the steps needed to secure and maintain a committed client base. Once an effective patient service environment is attained, a practice can be closer to achieving its overall goals.

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