

Marketing Your Podiatry Practice

Have you ever given much thought how or why patients end up in your office? Is it by luck, serendipity or coincidence?



Marketing is usually an afterthought and one of the most neglected aspects of many podiatric practices. During formal education, podiatrists typically do not receive training on marketing themselves or their businesses. And yes, your practice is a business.

- ***What sets you and your practice apart from the competition?***

How do you develop a practice that sets you apart? Are you using the most up-to-date equipment and employing the latest techniques? Are you offering services that other doctors in your area are not? What are your specialties and the unique aspects of your practice? Doctors in well-heeled enclaves such as New York City, Greenwich Connecticut or Beverly Hills, for example, may want to focus on BOTOX[®], foot facials[®] spider vein erasure, and scar amelioration. As a rule, you should try provide at least one positive service, whether it's offering evening hours a couple of days a week or specializing in new technology.

Have you created materials that provide the public and your referring doctors with reminders of what you do and what makes your practice stand out? These materials should include:

- a. A brochure that you leave at physicians' offices, day spas, boutiques, upscale department stores (think of all the expensive shoes they sell) health clubs and hair salons that details your practice. Customize any and all brochures with an imprint of your name, address and phone number at the back of each brochure. Place these brochures in your waiting room, give them to patients on check-in to inform them about the new procedures and products or use them as envelope stuffers.
- b. Business cards that you take with you everywhere. At your earliest convenience, you or an assistant should walk these cards over to the ritziest stores, health clubs and spas in your area.

- c. A pull-off referral pad containing your name, list of services, phone number, address and a map to your office location, for referring physicians, health clubs, spas and stores to give to patients.
- d. A prepared treatment package and/or individual treatment pricing list should be in place and readily available for current and potential patients. You may want to consider grouping some or all treatments into packages, which you can then offer at a slight discount. Packaging treatments helps create a long-term relationship with your patient – a key in the medical aesthetic business. You could combine Sculptra with a sterile pedicure, for example.

- **How Well Do You Communicate Your Message?**

George Bernard Shaw once said, “The problem with communication ... is the *illusion* that it has been accomplished.” Knowing your message is one thing. Getting it across to the right audience is another matter altogether. Giving talks, lectures and holding regular seminars can be a key element in your practice's marketing campaign. Public speaking in many ways is also an integral part of your practice.

Depending on where you live and where your practice is located there are a lot of venues on which to capitalize. Health conscious, aesthetically minded people, such as those you find at day spas, yoga studios, health clubs and beauty salons are often interested in listening to experts in their field speak. Health clubs, in particular, offer seminars to their members where doctors come in and give educational/informational talks. These talks are an unprecedented opportunity to generate new business. Each person who attends your talk/seminar is a potential patient and/or referral source.

- If you think public speaking might be your thing, remember a few simple facts.
 - a. Dress the part. Your appearance is critical, particularly if you're speaking in front of people at a health club or day spa. Remember, your marketing yourself as an aesthetic podiatrist. Beauty is your business and a messy, unkempt appearance is an instant turnoff.
 - b. Prepare. Some people can wing it front of an audience. Most will fall flat on their face. Plan out your talk in advance. If you lose your train of thought you'll surely lose your audience.
 - c. Keep it brief. No matter how brilliant your lecture or how engaging your speaking style, if your talk goes too long your audience will fall off the wagon. If you can't say it all in 20 minutes maybe you need to rethink your message. If the audience members start fidgeting or staring out the window, they're gone and they'll be hard to retrieve.

- d. Keep it relevant and interesting. Anecdotes and little jokes are great icebreakers, especially in front of a demanding audience. However, there's no room for style over substance, especially when speaking to other doctors. A timely, interesting and relevant topic can help bring home your message.

- ***What's the state of your office?***

You can be the world's most technically adept surgeon and offer all the latest treatments and products but nothing turns patients off more than a pedestrian office replete with worn out, dusty old furniture, cheap looking fixtures and walls full of peeling paint. The doctor down the road may lack your surgical acumen and not possess your product line but he has a sleek new office staffed with Victoria's Secret models. Who do you think is getting more patients? If you really want to make it in the aesthetic podiatry business then appearance is *almost* everything.

It's also important to take care of your staff. Make sure that all of your staff members understand and can talk about the procedures, treatments and products you offer. An educated, enthusiastic and courteous staff helps assure that every patient interaction strengthens the relationship with your practice. Staff must be able to confidently handle patient questions. Also, give your staff regular sample treatments. Your staff is the first thing most patients see and they're potentially your best advertising, especially if they're wearing sandals.

- ***Build a website***

If you don't have a website, you're losing out on a lot of business. A website is a great way of reaching current and potential patients, staying in touch with professional colleagues and selling products. Unlike a magazine or newspaper ad, a web site allows you to constantly update, expand and illustrate what you have to offer. A website is an invaluable resource for existing patients and for potential patients who patients have increasingly begun to leave behind their local Yellow Page directories and turn to search engines like Google and Yahoo to look for healthcare providers. They'll use your site to trawl for information on foot problems and the latest treatment options and to buy products. The Internet is also the number one tool to which patients turn to research healthcare information.

If you're considering a website, you need the best imagery and graphics you can get. You may want to contact a website developer/builder who can provide you with the latest high-resolution digital assets.

- ***You already have a customer base***

Your best new patients/customers are those with whom you already have a relationship. And while these people already adore you, marketing to them is just as important as reaching out to new patients. Send out letters, announcements, cards and reminders to both potential and current patents. Don't forget to communicate effectively with the people already under your roof. They're your best referral source.

- ***Advertising: Good vs. Bad***

Advertising can be a powerful tool to increase your patient and referral base. However, there are a few things you should be aware of. Good advertising features a consistent look and message, grabs the readers/viewers' attention and stands out in a crowd. Don't run laundry lists of all of your services—people will ignore them. Keep your message singular – and focused on what you are going to do for the potential patient/client reading or listening to your ad.

Invest your hard earned dollars in media where you can reach your target audience with the most frequency. The more times they are exposed to your ads, the better results you should get. For example, magazine advertorials are a good idea; whereas, the Yellow Pages are a waste of time (and money). If you run a newspaper ad, remember that frequency and consistency of message are essential. It takes as many as six exposures for most consumers to see and recognize your ads.

Creating and e-mailing regular newsletters allows you to highlight new procedures, products, success stories, and keeps you “present” in the minds of current and prospective patients.

- ***Compile a media kit***

You should have a press kit ready at your disposal, which will make it easier for all interested media to understand your practice. The less legwork a journalist has to do, they more likely she is to write a favorable story. Your media kit should provide all the facts and other information a journalist needs, in one concise package. Your kit should include:

- a. Pitch Letter. This letter should introduce your practice, “sell” your unique personality and explain why you and your business are newsworthy subjects.
- b. Press Release. Press releases are basically a pre-written stories/advertorials containing all the facts and important information you want to convey to the public. Some reporters may only use them as a source of basic information. However, reporters covering the aesthetic business will often publish a press release with only a modicum of editing.
- c. Biographical Fact Sheet. This is basically a brief (one page) resume that gives detail about you and the doctors in your practice. However, it should not read like a resume but rather a biographical sketch.
- d. Product Features/Benefits Sheet. This sheet contains bulleted points of information regarding your product features and their benefits to patients.