Internal Marketing: Making the Most Out of Your Patient Database

By Tracey Irene

Marketing is important to position your business ahead of the competition. Many businesses have seen decreased budgets for marketing as a way to keep costs down in the recession. However, marketing should not be forgotten during these times. Marketing efforts during a downturn can be seen as an opportunity to gain market share. There are several low-cost ways to achieve this goal while still being budget conscious.

A patient-focused marketing approach can be an effective way to improve customer service and loyalty and maintain repeat business of your existing patients, while still keeping the cost of marketing down. Tap into a resource that is already in place, your patient database. A wealth of information is available at your fingertips. Here are five ideas on how you can use your database to improve the relationships with the patients you have.

1. **Recall Letters** Consider those patients who have not purchased hearing aids in over five years. Send them a letter and encourage them to come in and hear about what the latest technology has to offer them. The letters can be general or product specific to a new technology that may be appropriate to a certain population.

2. **Newsletters** A newsletter can be a wonderful way to stay in touch with your patients. You can create your own newsletter by using a variety of types of publishing software. You can also research prewritten sources that can be customized with your business information; the downfall may be that they lack flexibility. Patients love to hear about new products, current events in your office, hearing aid tips/advice about use and care, and coping with hearing loss. Use the newsletter to market promotions and specials, as well as open houses to your patient base.

3. **Birthday Cards** Birthday cards can be a simple way to reach out to your patients and let them know you care. Generating birthday lists and labels is simple when you tap into your database. Have each audiologist sign the cards personally. In our practice, patients have reported how nice it is to know that they were thought of on their birthday. Bulk birthday cards can be purchased and customized with your logo.

4. **Warranty/Hearing Test Recall** A warranty recall program is an important aspect of maintaining quality patient care. Each month, a list can be generated of those patients whose warranties are about to expire. Encourage your patients to return to the office for a check. Use this as an opportunity to offer extended warranties and inform patients of new products and accessory devices that might be helpful to
them. In addition to warranty recall, you can use this same concept to generate hearing test recall lists.

5. **Physician Marketing**  Physician marketing can be a very effective way to generate referrals. Consider using your database to generate a mailing list of physicians who currently refer to your office. Stay in touch with your referral sources and develop a good relationship with them. You can connect with your referral sources through a physician-focused newsletter, reports, or even a simple informative tip of the month. Be creative and find a unique way to connect with your referral base as the go-to experts in the field.

   Remember that not only can printed information be a way to communicate to your patient database, but also e-mail marketing can be a cost-effective green alternative to print marketing. According to Gyl Kasewurm, AuD, “while direct mail is good for driving new patients through our doors, e-mail marketing can be an effective vehicle for deepening and strengthening existing patient relationships.”

   Using resources currently available to you can be cost-effective and yield a high return on investment. Remember that it costs less money to retain the customers you already have than it does to obtain a new customer. Make the most of your database and turn it into an avenue to improve customer service and patient loyalty.

Tracey Irene, AuD, is a senior audiologist with Professional Hearing Services, a Division of Moreland Ear, Nose, and Throat Group, LTD, in Milwaukee, WI. She is also a member of the Academy’s BEST Committee.

If you have a practice management success story or article idea, please contact Dave Fabry, content editor (dfabry@audiology.org).

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