Promoting Your Practice in Challenging Economic Times

By Melanie Duldulao

Today’s economic climate presents unique challenges when marketing an audiology practice. Resources may be limited for marketing endeavors; however, marketing remains vital to maintain a sustainable practice. How do we promote ourselves on a fixed budget? Below are some strategies and tips to set your practice apart from others.

Physician Marketing

Even in economic downturns, patients continue to seek medical advice from their primary-care providers. Patients generally trust their physicians and will more likely pursue amplification when recommended by them (Lee and Lin, 2008; Tu and Lauer, 2008). Referrals occur in higher volume when there is a mutual relationship between audiologists and physicians. Individuals who are referred by their primary-care providers are more likely to seek assistance and address the concern.

Identify physicians in your surrounding area, and organize a meeting to introduce yourself to discuss the services you can offer and methods in which you can provide support. If you are unable to meet with the referring physician, meet with the staff as an initial step toward building a relationship. Make the referral process as seamless as possible by providing physician offices with brochures and business cards from your office. Always follow up promptly with reports and phone calls to discuss any concerns you may have regarding abnormal results.

Rekindle your relationship with existing referral sources and maintain regular contact. Provide clinical updates through newsletters as an efficient way to keep in touch. Take time to thank referral sources for their continued support. Occasionally hold “lunch and learns” for the office, which will allow face-to-face time with the physician(s) and staff. This is also a great opportunity to provide an in-service to discuss any changes or new services you are offering.

Maintain an Ongoing Relationship with Your Patients

Each and every form of contact with your patients is considered a touch point. Touch points are important because patients will form perceptions of your practice based on their cumulative experiences. Deliver a consistent message through each phone call, office visit, newsletter, and advertisement, and your Web site. The experience and emotion that a person feels will leave a lasting impression. Build rapport with
Know-How

Develop a Patient Referral Program

This can be a very low-cost option to market. Word-of-mouth referrals can be very powerful, and individuals are more inclined to seek services at a location recommended by someone they know (Johnson Brown and Reingen, 1987). Provide both existing and new patients with a great experience, use those touch points, and make a lasting impression. Ask your patients who are satisfied with their level of care to reach out and contact their friends and family. Provide them with referral cards and incentives. If they refer a new patient to your practice, give them a supply of batteries or credit to use toward another purchase.

Participate in Community Events

This is an opportunity to market your practice to a large group of people at the same time. Volunteer at an open house or local community/charity event. Sponsor a table at a community health fair or wellness event and provide handouts, information, and giveaways. This will allow prospective clients to meet you in person and ask questions.

Provide an in-service presentation. Many senior centers appreciate speakers who are willing to provide information on topics related to age such as hearing loss. This is another great opportunity to provide education about hearing loss and hearing aids while reaching out to a large group. This can also be an opportunity to discuss the advantages of a customized hearing aid fitting by audiologists compared to online delivery service models.

May is Better Hearing Month. Use this month to promote audiology as well as your practice. Place an article in local flyers, your local paper, and senior newsletters, and offer free hearing screenings. The Academy has a number of free promotional resources on their Web site for May and October—National Audiology Awareness Month.

Provide Educational Seminars

Show patients and individuals in your community that you have a genuine interest in providing updated information about hearing aids and diagnostic services. Offer educational seminars on specific topics of interest (i.e., aging factors, hearing loss, balance). This would be a great opportunity to share your philosophy and approach to managing hearing loss. Provide technology updates and invite current hearing aid users to learn about new options and advances. If your clinic has a family-centered approach, provide free classes that emphasize communication strategies for patients and their friends and family.

Though marketing can be challenging in today’s economy, effective and low-cost options are available. Capitalizing on the power of relationships can increase referrals for your business. Providing opportunities to educate existing patients and the community can also increase business.

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Illustration by Johanna van der Sterre.

References

