

Angling is an art, an art well worth your knowing

A guide to crafting your patient acquisition strategy

By Kim McCotter



“Long before the internet and social media, marketers relied on transit, outdoor, print, radio and TV advertising, plus letterbox drops and sponsorship....”

Crafting a patient acquisition strategy is like gearing up to go fly-fishing. Start by understanding your target market (the elusive trout), offer something irresistible (a fly) and work out a way to reach them (waders, a rod and line).

Ensure that you have the right ‘gear’ by developing a logo, ensuring your practice presentation is top notch, installing effective signage, printing stationery and organising other marketing material.

In part five of this series (*ADP Nov/Dec 2011*), we introduced touch point management and Figure 1 shows the “pre-purchase” section of a sample touch point blueprint. Referring to this blueprint, your patient acquisition strategy should have a blend of digital, offline and interpersonal elements.

Our experience has shown that from a return on investment point of view, go digital! Create a website, then sign up for information “aggregators” like www.dentist.com.au, YellowPages, WhitePages and True Local. What you specifically want from these sites is the back links to your website. These back links help your rankings within Search Engine Results Pages (SERP); the higher the rank on important keywords, the more visible you are to potential patients.

If you’re feeling more adventurous, start a facebook profile, use Google Adwords and then hire a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) consultant.

It sounds very old school, but the next step would be to consider introducing offline marketing elements. Long before the internet and social media, marketers relied on transit, outdoor,

Touchpoint Blueprint



print, radio, TV advertising, plus letterbox drops and sponsorship. The beauty of these tools is that they can be used individually to obtain certain marketing objectives like generating brand awareness, influencing brand attitudes or stimulating a desired action. However, if they are carefully orchestrated together with your digital elements, the overlap reinforces your brand message and creates additional value.



Transit and outdoor advertising

Transit and outdoor advertising is a diverse medium that allows you to think of creative ways to reach potential patients. Think about bus signage, taxi signage, billboards on buildings, bus shelters, railway station billboards, free standing light boxes in shopping centres, branded trailers or pretty much any public display that can be viewed by potential patients.

Print, radio, TV and cinema ads

Using “mass media” to communicate your message can be effective but as with all marketing expenditure, consider your return on investment (ROI) on the proposed media expenditure. While a short term brand awareness campaign may be justified, you will find that the expenditure necessary to support sustained long-term exposure will be hard to swallow. Despite lower circulation rates in the country, we tend to find that local advertising is more effective in rural centres.

External signage

External signage including shop fronts, light boxes and entry door signs tend to be an after thought. If they are used, they tend to be plastered with a long list of services that are offered inside.

A good graphic designer will be able to create signage that is balanced, aesthetically pleasing and builds your brand. Signage should attract new patients, indicate a quality patient experience and invite you to step inside.

Unaddressed mail

Unaddressed mail is the generic promotional material we receive in our mailboxes at home that we commonly refer to as junk mail (which is where

all that unwanted email gets its name). Unaddressed mail has proven itself to be very effective with the right message but often very large quantities are required - delivering to 20,000 households for instance is a good start.

There are several options for distributing material to letterboxes in your local area:

1. DIY: Co-op your kids, nieces and nephews and any other cheap labour you can find and set them to work!
2. Leaflet distribution companies employ people to walk the streets delivering a range of material to letterboxes and tend to be very well priced.
3. Australia Post offers an unaddressed mail/leaflet distribution service that tends to be on the expensive side (though much less per item than the cost of a stamp). A key advantage of this is that the postman can access every letterbox in your area whereas leaflet distribution companies often cannot access high rise apartment buildings and secure unit blocks.

Unaddressed mail is a conversion game of quantity and quality. Alter your results by changing the vehicle (size, shape, card stock or material), distribution and creative (headline, marketing message, imagery or call to action). It is best practice to continue to change these factors until you find a winning formula. Monitoring your results over time will reveal the effectiveness of your campaign.

Sponsorships

Sponsoring local sports teams and community groups can be a great way to connect with your local community, but my advice is to only do so if you have a personal interest in the team or group. The benefits gained tend to be non-financial in nature and hard to measure.

Staff issues

The receptionist is the first interpersonal touch point between a potential patient and your surgery. It is very important that reception staff are well-trained in building rapport, managing the appointment book, portraying a professional image, vocal usage, tonal control, questioning techniques and conflict resolution.

Your patient acquisition strategy

As long as sufficient results are produced from your patient acquisition strategy, then continued investment in marketing will become second nature. Attracting high potential patients is the first step, but what you really want is patients in your chair with signed treatment plans to boot. The next article in the series focuses on creating a patient conversion strategy to maximise your chances.

About the author

Mr Kim McCotter is Business Development & Marketing Manager at Levitch Design Associates. With a background and passion for business and marketing, Kim comes to LDA with experience in both service and product based industries. Having over five years of professional services experience and five years of marketing experience, he brings a fresh and professional approach to LDA. Kim holds a Bachelor of Business (UTS), Masters of Business in Marketing (UTS), and a Certificate in Digital Marketing (ADMA). He is continually investigating marketing and business techniques to find the next competitive edge. His methodical business development and marketing approach is outcome driven, his initiatives will be beneficial to the future success of our clients. He can be contacted on (02) 9496-5700.