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# Chicago Hospital News<sup>®</sup> and HEALTHCARE REPORT

THE REGION'S MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS & PHYSICIANS

## Getting The Most From Healthcare Marketing

by Georgia Casciato

Growing patient volume in competitive healthcare markets is not without challenges. Stakes are high as competition vies for patients. The sophistication of traditional healthcare marketing has grown significantly in recent years--fronted with market research and supported by database marketing, interactive call centers, ecommerce, direct response campaigns and public relations. If done well, marketing can yield positive results. Planned poorly -numerous silos are created that inhibit marketing's ability to effectively attract and convert prospects.

There is much healthcare marketing can learn from other industries about its role in customer acquisition & referral development. The backbone of successful consumer marketing is simple: understand customers including buying preferences & decision-making processes; differentiate services with value and make it easy to do business.

Here is a checklist to help your organization get the most out of this important function:

### Know Your Marketplace

Take an "outside in" assessment of your organization. Build on market data. Include intelligence about competitors & the managed care landscape. Assess opportunities. Be reasonable about what you consider your marketplace to be and where your short-term as well as long-

term opportunities lie. If goals are too lofty or the geography unrealistic, valuable marketing resources are spread too thin to be effective.

### Know What Constitutes Value For Your Customer

Constantly learn from the relationships you already have as well as patient satisfaction data and verbatim. Customer advisory teams can be a rich source of qualitative feedback. Isolate customer expectations & know first-hand what it will take to earn trust & loyalty. Understand under what conditions the customer will buy and more importantly under what condition they'll buy from you. Establish a baseline derived from quantitative statistical data integrated with qualitative feedback from key customer groups. Use this as a foundation to improve your satisfaction.

### Roadmap Your Organization's Customer Acquisition Processes

Map out and test the processes your prospective customers navigate to get "into" your system. "Mystery shopping" your own key services can yield important new insights to improving customer acquisition and satisfaction. Mystery shopping assessments often find that a significant amount of marketing energy and cost goes into generating leads, but that downstream processes to "close" the sale are underperforming, i.e., uninformed call centers or physician

referral services; static websites, or substandard phone capabilities in depts. where calls are directed.

The starting point for building better customer relationships is creating a blueprint detailing your organization's entry points, department interdependencies & processes.

Track your efforts and know what it takes to get a new patient into the system.

More importantly what it takes to keep them as a satisfied customer and referral source for new customers. This makes it easier to see what's working, what isn't and where corrective plans are needed.

### Create Value for The Marketing Role

Create value for the role and the role will create value for you. Marketing is most valued in organizations where it has true revenue-generating responsibility. Develop a solid team with the right competencies to support organizational goals. The department should be exceptionally customer focused, both externally as well as internally. Good collaborative working relationships between internal customers are important -but the real value is when departments collaborate on building relationships with external customers.

### Success Through Interdependence

Marketing goals should directly support the goals of the organization they

serve. They should be measurable, specific and trackable, with action plans detailing key steps, milestones, deadlines and accountable parties. The focus rightfully belongs on success derived through interdependence ---- after all, no patient care is delivered in a marketing department. No single function or department can attain success, especially when it comes to satisfied customers.

Marketing needs to articulate a promise that the organization can deliver.

Building solid relationships means "making good on promises made." Done well, the result is a satisfied customer who statistically will tell 1-2 other people. Done poorly, a dissatisfied customer statistically tells 6 people of their poor experience.

Think of the patient acquisition process as the total sum of all key components of an interdisciplinary process that shapes preferences for prospects and customers instead of stand alone functions.

Everything counts when done together behind a common goal. Integrated efforts behind aligned goals accelerate results. Communicating and recognizing progress feeds enthusiasm and motivates teams to do better--which is in itself the best competitive advantage a provider can have.

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