



Developing a Marketing Mindset for Occupational Medicine Services

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From a business perspective, successful operation of an urgent care clinic is predicated on the owner's ability to promote services in an aggressive and meaningful, yet cost effective, manner.

This necessity is even more pronounced when occupational health services are included in the mix because such a "blended clinic" deals with two different prospect universes.

The starting point in promoting an urgent care practice is to develop and commit to a forward-thinking marketing mindset. Six basic principles govern this mindset:

Marketing is all about tomorrow. Marketing initiatives are often uninspired repeats of what has worked for you in the past, or what is working elsewhere. Yet marketing, by definition, involves getting the attention of your prospects, which implies that you need to be fresh, innovative, and different.

Try new approaches. To set your clinic apart from competitors, *force yourself* to introduce at least two new marketing techniques every year. To reduce risk, experiment with marketing initiatives that are neither too expensive nor time consuming.

Embrace technology. Over the past two decades, innovations in communications technology—from cell phones to the Internet—have driven many new marketing ideas. Further advances in technology are anticipated. It behooves the creative marketer to keep an eye on this ball and react quickly when new

communication mechanisms become available and trendy.

Collectively brainstorm. To generate nouveau marketing tactics, sit down for 30 minutes and list every wild and crazy idea you can think of—and ask your colleagues to do the same. Sure, you may throw away 90% of the ideas (and generate some laughter), but the chance of coming up with a genuine winner will increase dramatically.

Recognize linkages. Tie marketing efforts to your business activities. For example, if you are opening a new clinic, don't just send out open house invitations; the one-shot approach may not be the best way to capitalize on your investment.

Instead, build momentum for a grand opening by publicizing the new location through e-mail and voicemail messages, running ads, placing signs in existing facilities and/or sponsoring a contest with prizes donated by local merchants who will receive publicity in return.

The objective is to make prospective clients and patients *think* about your new clinic—an essential first step in getting them to come to your scheduled open house.

Hedge your bets. Think of your package of marketing techniques as a portfolio, similar to your personal investment portfolio. Balance no-risk and moderate-risk tactics with higher-risk activities. Maintain some tried-and-true techniques each year, consistently divest of tired techniques, and add new tactics in an incremental manner.

In summary, it is essential to think ahead and adopt a marketing plan that is not simply reactive to norms of the day. This takes discipline, creativity, and brainstorming. Make the commitment, and you'll discover a bonus: innovation is invariably fun, and having fun seems to be inevitably correlated with effective marketing. ■



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