



Evaluating Your Clinic's Competitive Strengths

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The ability to recognize, understand, evaluate, and articulate your clinic's competitive strengths is central to a superior sales and marketing performance. Yet even the most polished sales efforts tend to fall short in one or more of these areas.

An urgent care clinic is likely to either neglect its competitive strengths or offer a wooden recital of them. Clinics are rarely proactive in:

- assessing their strengths vis-à-vis their competition
- matching competitive strengths with sales prospect values as appropriate
- expressing their competitive strengths in a persuasive manner.

I believe that seven principles are essential if you wish to take advantage of your competitive strengths.

1. Keep "competitive" in your definition of "competitive strength."

A competitive strength is not necessarily an attribute in a pure sense (e.g., 24-hour service, multiple delivery points, certified staff). Rather, a competitive strength is simply something you do better than your competition.

For example, in one market having a board-certified occupational medicine physician on staff may not be a competitive strength because competitors also have board-certified physicians. In another market, a program may use an experienced, but non-certified, physician but still maintain a competitive edge because the competition's medical director is neither certified nor experienced.

We are talking about relative—not absolute—attributes in virtually every instance.



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2. Let your market define what is important.

Assume that you cannot wait to tell your clients and prospects about a new board-certified occupational medicine physician who has joined your team. Think first before you rush out to share the good news. If your market is mired in recession, or the majority of injuries seen in the clinic are minor, some employers may perceive your board-certified occupational medicine physician as too expensive or over-qualified for their needs. Accordingly, it is imperative to match your clinic's distinguishing characteristics with at-the-moment marketplace value *before* anointing the characteristic as a "competitive strength."

"If a clinic doesn't have a genuine competitive strength, it must develop one."

3. Your competitive strength is directly correlated to the difference in perceived value of that advantage between your program and your competitors.

The value of your potential competitive strengths are directly related to the strength of that advantage among your competitors.

Assume that research indicates that employers desire 24-hour access and that you are the only clinic in town with such coverage. This strength is not very strong if a competitor's clinic is open 20 hours per day or the competitor has an arrangement with a prestigious local hospital emergency department for after-hours care.

It is necessary not only to note what competitive strengths your clinic maintains but also to subjectively estimate the gap between that advantage and the status of the next best option.

To genuinely assess the power of your clinic's competitive strength portfolio, you need to answer three questions:

- Are we the best option based on these criteria?
- How much better are we than the next best competitor?
- Just how important is this attribute to our market?

4. Cite your competitive strengths selectively and only when appropriate.

What is important at the collective market level does not necessarily carry over to the individual prospect level. In a market in which employers collectively do not find the availability of a multiple clinic network to be a compelling advantage, many other employers are still likely to find that attribute important.

A sales professional should interview prospects to identify how much value they place on an array of potential competitive strengths. The salesperson can then refer to the clinic’s competitive strengths without mentioning the “competition” directly.

5. Articulate your competitive strengths in simple, concise and persuasive terms.

The impact of your competitive strength is too important to be lost in a quagmire of information and verbiage. Competitive strength messages should be simple and easy to understand. Articulation of a competitive strength must focus on what is important to the prospect.

6. Summarize relevant competitive strengths at the conclusion of sales calls, phone calls, or written proposals.

Each sales call, important telephone call to a prospect, or written proposal should conclude with a strong summary statement. Beyond the obligatory summary of key points and action steps, a custom-crafted competitive strength summary can be quite helpful. **Table 1** presents a prototype competitive strength statement.

7. Develop competitive strengths when none seem to exist.

For every urgent care market leader, there are likely to be several market challengers. Often, market challengers are new or immature programs, or programs hampered by constraints such as poor location, fewer financial resources, or a less respected corporate name. In many instances, market challengers have fewer competitive strengths than the market leader.

If a clinic does not have a genuine competitive strength, it must develop one. This process invariably begins with the marketplace itself by identifying the primary voids that seem to exist among the market’s occupational health providers. Once such voids are identified, steps can be taken to enhance your clinic’s capabilities to fill the gaps. ■

Table 1. Competitive Strength Worksheet

This sample worksheet demonstrates how you can evaluate your clinic’s most powerful competitive strengths. Columns 1 through 4 measure your program against the competition. Columns 5 and 6 factor in the perceived value placed on the attribute by your market. Your clinic’s net score is the product of the net (dis)advantage times the market’s value of that strength (your strength – competitor’s strength x market value = net score).

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------|
| Strength | Your program* | Competitor #1* | Competitor #2* | Net (dis)advantage | Market value† | Net score |
| Physician(s) | 9 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 12 |
| Availability of outcome data | 9 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 6 |
| Program Director | 10 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Reports | 9 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Locations | 9 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Hours of operation | 10 | 6 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Clinical staff | 8 | 8 | 8 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Linkages to rehab services | 7 | 7 | 9 | (2) | 1 | (2) |
| Reputation | 7 | 8 | 4 | (1) | 3 | (3) |
| Fees | 7 | 8 | 9 | (2) | 2 | (4) |

*Your subjective opinion, on a scale of 1 to 10. †Can be based on your subjective opinion or on market research data; 3 indicates the highest score and 1 the lowest.