

# Practice Management

## Wear Your Brand: Increasing Awareness of Your Urgent Care Center

**Urgent message:** An urgent care entrepreneur is the “product” and must become skilled at promoting him/herself. When you “wear your brand,” you call attention to what you have to offer, generating awareness of an interest in your urgent care center.

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In a recent visit to a popular bakery-café, I noticed a young woman on the sofa working on her laptop. For passersby, there was no question about which candidate would receive her vote in the upcoming November presidential election. She sported a bumper sticker on her laptop, a recyclable water jug, a sweatband, and a lapel button—all bearing the insignia of her presidential choice. She had become a “walking billboard” for her candidate and was effectively “wearing his brand.”

As the proprietor of your urgent care center, you should market your facility with the same degree of boldness and confidence as that young political supporter. You may currently have a paid advertising campaign under way, or even have engaged a public relations professional to raise your center’s profile. But there is no substitute for the impact that you and your staff members have when you make your center’s name and logo visible to your local community.

Raising the visibility of your center’s name, logo, and location is part of the branding process. Simply put, branding is the “footprint” your center leaves in the medical marketplace—your facility’s name recognition

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and service reputation. Brand recognition is what sets you apart from your competitors. And it’s within your control because it occurs largely through your marketing efforts and through the service you provide your patients. Branding is a team effort—effective branding involves you, your entire staff, and even your patients.

When you “wear your brand,” you’re not just making

**Table 1. Basic Items For Promoting Your Urgent Care Brand**

- Polo or oxford-style shirt with your center's name/logo
- T-shirt with facility's insignia or slogan
- Name tags for you and staff members with individual name and center name/logo
- Buttons promoting special services, promotions or slogans (such as, "Ask Me About Urgent Care," or "Need a flu shot?")
- Bumper sticker, decal or wrap for your automobile
- Business cards, to be kept in your car and on your person for distribution
- Flyers, postcards, brochures, magnets and other promotional materials for distribution

your center's name, logo, address, web site and/or slogan visible to the public on a consistent basis. You're messaging that your center is open for business, enthusiastic about fulfilling patients' medical needs, supportive of the community and here to stay. You're also making a concerted effort to develop new relationships with potential patients by subtly speaking with people you encounter during your normal, everyday activities.

### Items Needed to Wear Your Brand

The term "wear your brand" has both metaphorical and literal meaning. Metaphorically, wearing your brand adds a more personal, human touch to your marketing efforts when compared with paid mass advertising. It connotes an air of assurance and pride in your facility, your staff, and the services you offer.

Taken literally, wearing your brand means that your center's identity is conspicuous, both inside and outside the office. It signals that you don't mind letting the world know who you are, where you work, and what you do. It spurs their curiosity and motivates them to approach you and ask questions.

This literal interpretation can be accomplished with the use of apparel, promotional items or printed materials. Table 1 lists some of the items you will need.

If your center's budget cannot initially accommodate all of the things listed in Table 1, then any combination of three or four is a good start. The important thing is to begin the process of wearing your brand.

### Wearing Your Brand at Community Activities

Although "wearing your brand" within your center's walls will reinforce your image with existing patients,

driving new business entails educating the public about the nature and benefits of urgent care and raising the public profile of your specific facility.

There are dozens of community groups and organizations that include people who share your interests and whose members could become your future patients. Chambers of Commerce, religious organizations, PTAs, athletic boosters, fraternal or veterans organizations, sororities, service organizations, and homeowners associations all represent fertile ground in which to sow your branding seed. Organizations are often looking for speakers—ask to make a presentation about urgent care. If they respond positively, have a PowerPoint presentation that can be geared to the specific needs and activities of the prospective audience.

First, your presentations at community meetings should focus on informing them about exactly what the term "urgent care" means. Let them know about the extended hours, the convenience of walk-in visits, short waits, and capabilities to treat patients of all ages. In addition, make the attendees aware of the benefits of urgent care as a less expensive, less time-consuming, and more convenient alternative to emergency rooms. One of the slides in your presentation could read: "Why wait hours in an emergency room when you and your family members can receive the same treatment in only a few minutes at an urgent care center?" Itemize some of the conditions your center treats in language the audience will understand, such as:

- Sprains, strains and fractures
- Cuts, scrapes, bruises and rashes
- Allergies, sinus infections, sore throats, cold/flu, fever
- Examinations for prescription refills for chronic illnesses, such as hypertension or diabetes
- School immunizations
- Athletic physical examinations

Next, you should provide information about your specific facility—such as its location, operating hours, clinical capabilities, certifications, and provider experience and personalities. Although "retail" in orientation, urgent care differs from other retail businesses in that urgent care medical needs arise somewhat infrequently. A patient may be aware of an urgent care facility and retain that information for future reference, but several months may pass before the patient has an actual medical need. But when that need arises, you want them to think of your facility as their first place to go.

During your presentation, ask for a commitment to visit the center, to take a tour, to receive a flu shot or obtain a sports physical, because people who commit are more likely to follow through. People have a lot of questions about health care in general so include a question-and-answer period to engage the audience, provide feedback, and generate interest and enthusiasm.

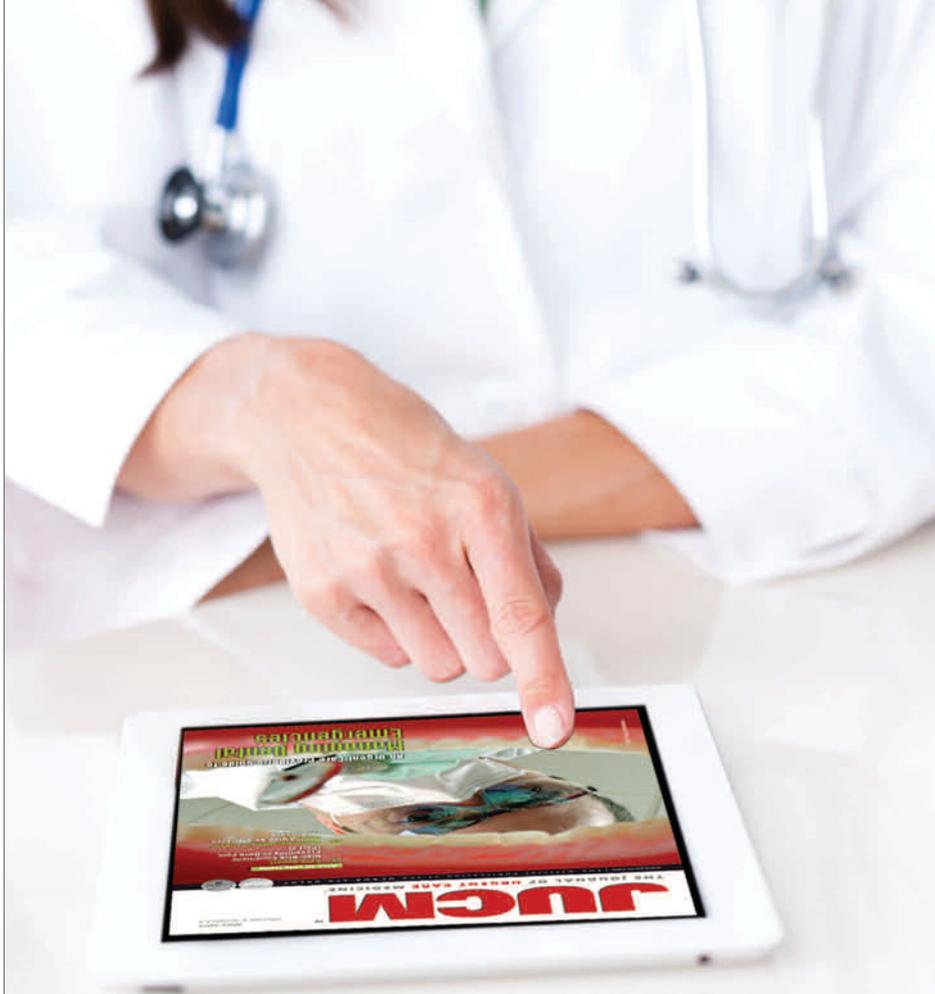
Last, have your staff members prepare small, individual gift bags to hand out to attendees. The gift bags may include marketing literature; candy or a healthy snack; branded items, such as pens, magnets, golf balls/tees, note pads, or water bottles. Handing out these bags at the end of the presentation will not only make the experience memorable, it will further disseminate your “brand.”

#### **Wearing Your Brand Through Personal Contact**

Are you an extrovert or an introvert? If you're an extrovert, then branding through personal contact will be relatively easy for you. However, if you're an introvert, you may need to become more comfortable engaging your brand through one-on-one, face-to-face encounters with potential patients.

During the course of your normal activities—such as getting your car washed, going to the grocery store, attending a sports event or getting your hair cut/styled—you may not always be wearing apparel displaying your center's name and logo. But you will have many opportunities to make people with whom you come into casual contact aware of your facility.

If you're seated in the waiting area of one of your regular stops, for example, you can strike up a conversation with the person seated next to you. Listen carefully for clues about their profession, family situation or lifestyle. Establish an affinity by identifying a common interest, such as children, pets or hobbies. As the conversation continues, introduce yourself, and



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hand them one of your business cards.

As you build a rapport, there are a number of ways you can make urgent care relevant to the individual. If he/she mentioned children, you can highlight your back-to-school physicals and immunizations. If a cruise or overseas travel is in his/her future plans, you can mention your travel vaccination evaluations. Or you can let person know that your center is an option if a family member sprains an ankle or experiences flu-like symptoms. Encourage your new contact to stop by the center and ask for you personally.

Wearing your brand through personal contact can also be achieved in other ways. One of the most overlooked resources for potential business includes people who you already know. Have you notified your network of family, friends and acquaintances about your urgent care center? Mailing them a personal note, including a promotional item that can be easily placed in an envelope (such as a refrigerator magnet, pen or keychain) will go a long way toward building your client base.

Leaving your literature at local business establishments is another way to wear your brand. For places you frequent (such as restaurants, coffee shops, dry cleaners), ask the manager or proprietor if you can leave business cards or brochures on their counter or bulletin board. Most of the customers who visit these establishments will reside in the immediate area and are potential patients for your center.

### Getting Others to Wear Your Brand

The concept of wearing your brand can be expanded beyond you and your staff members. Your patients can become some of your best advocates. You may, for example, give away branded T-shirts, caps or other promotions with every flu shot or sports physical. That way, your patients become “walking billboards” and increase your center’s visibility. As they wear your apparel, they’ll spur word-of-mouth for your facility.

You can also offer your patients incentives to win T-shirts and other paraphernalia through social media websites like Facebook. People love to win free items. Conducting a health-related trivia contest once a month on Facebook, in which the prize is a T-shirt from your center, will have the following effects:

- Helps build your Facebook audience through more “fans” or “likes”;
- Attracts new people to your online presence through “shares”;
- Creates online “buzz”; and
- Engages your existing audience, ensuring regular visits to your Facebook and/or Twitter pages.

Becoming a sponsor for local athletic leagues, youth organizations, charitable fitness events, and health-related activities is another way to get others to wear your brand. These sponsorships can be low-cost efforts, but can go a long way toward building brand recognition in your community. For example, you could sponsor T-shirts for a municipal recreation department that include your center’s name, logo, and contact information on the back; you could donate equipment bearing your logo to the high school football team; or you could provide logo-embroidered gym sacks for individual team members. The possibilities are endless and the relationships you develop can be long-term and fruitful.

### Conclusion

The concept of wearing your brand has many facets and can actually be quite enjoyable once you embrace it fully. The positive effects for your facility are numerous and include the following:

- It spurs word of mouth advertising and creates “buzz” about your center.
- It raises your center’s profile in the community.
- It leaves a visual impression for consumers to remember.
- It will, ultimately, increase your client base, revenues and profits.

As you market your urgent care center and “wear your brand,” you should never let an opportunity to inform new contacts about your facility pass you by. Wear your brand boldly, and with confidence. ■

### Call for Articles

*JUCM*, the Official Publication of the Urgent Care Association of America and the Urgent Care College of Physicians, is looking for a few good authors.

Physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners, whether practicing in an urgent care, primary care, hospital, or office environment, are invited to submit a review article or original research for publication in a forthcoming issue.

Submissions on clinical or practice management topics, ranging in length from 2,500 to 3,500 words are welcome. The key requirement is that the article address a topic relevant to the real-world practice of medicine in the urgent care setting.

Please e-mail your idea to *JUCM* Editor-in-Chief Lee Resnick, MD at [editor@jucm.com](mailto:editor@jucm.com). He will be happy to discuss it with you.

