

You Want to Advertise? You Need a Marketer

Advertising makes a promise that marketing fulfills.

BY MATT JENSEN, MBA

Although, nationwide, refractive surgery volumes are still relatively flat, many practices are finding strategic advertising efforts have a positive impact on their clinical and surgical caseloads. Some ophthalmologists believe that achieving higher volumes should be as simple as calling the cable station and asking for a bundled advertising package. This approach is dangerous, as it may not be a strategy for sustained growth. Why? There is a vital difference between advertising and marketing.

No matter what business you are in, the purpose of an advertisement is to make a logical prospect try your offering ... once. Your team's ability to capitalize on that single opportunity, in my opinion, is what separates those who believe in advertising from those who say it never works. Marketing, on the other hand, should be defined as the work your team does with every patient, every day, to deliver value to patients, build a positive brand identity, and spread the referral net for the practice. Marketing is operational.

Advertising makes a promise. Operational marketing ensures that this promise is kept for every patient, every time. Strong marketing is the foundation of effective advertising.

OPERATIONAL MARKETING

Implementing operational marketing is not easy. Prior to placing any advertisement, the savvy practice will have harmonized and optimized its phone team's skills (see "Premium Practice Today," June 2012 issue, page 60), its communication standards for each patient's visit, its education of patients, financing (including payment options), and the consultation. A practice harmonizes these encounters by planning what is performed at each stage of the process and ensuring that all is in line with what the patient/customer should experience and feel. Optimization entails enhancing each individual staff member's performance at every one of these opportunities throughout the customer's experience. Because every stage of the customer's experience is important to the

"A great advertisement will make a logical prospect try your offering once."

definition of marketing, those who are developing the advertising should understand these components as well.

Advertising is often the responsibility of one person or group, whereas marketing is the responsibility of the entire staff. Every individual in the practice organization must assist in the development of the customer's experience at the point of service. If everyone is acting in harmony, external advertising efforts can be kept to a minimum.

After building a proper operational marketing program, your practice may be prepared to advertise your offering to the external market. You may be targeting a market segment, referring group, a certain area in the community, or simply the people who are already walking through the doors. The kind of advertising you want to implement will determine the type of person you hire to handle the task.

With these strategic notes in mind, here are the key areas you should consider when hiring someone to handle your marketing and advertising.

KEY AREAS TO CONSIDER WHEN HIRING A MARKETER

According to Cindy Haskell, the former administrator, now marketing consultant to Gordon, Weiss, and Schanzlin Vision Institute in La Jolla, California, the following are required of any internal personnel in the role of marketing director/coordinator.

No. 1. Build your brand. The individual is responsible for overseeing the brand and message in all areas of delivery. Your brand is defined as what your customers say about you. To grow your brand, it is crucial to have consistent messaging throughout the organization.

No. 2. Coordinate advertising and marketing. The individual is responsible for coordinating the day-to-day advertising and marketing activities. The marketing director is also directly involved in the development, implementation, and tracking of the strategic marketing plan.

No. 3. Prepare a budget and conduct an analysis. The individual must be able both to plan and place advertising across modern media and to analyze the reach and effectiveness of advertising efforts. It is impossible to change tactics if you do not know what is working ... or not.

No. 4. Perform Research. The individual must be able to gather and analyze data on competitors, the community, and the marketing industry to properly position the practice.

No. 5. Use current patients. The individual will create and maintain a robust database of former and prospective patients, gather video and narrative testimonies, and use these local stories to build the brand of the surgeon and the practice.

No. 6. Run internal campaigns. The individual will use operational marketing principles to create positive internal campaigns targeting specific patient demographics

No. 7. Gain referrals. The individual will develop a strategy to maintain and increase referrals from current patients.

No. 8. Create the website. The individual will manage and update the practice's website to ensure effective and current promotion of the practice and the fulfillment of appointment and information requests. Increasingly for all surgical specialties, the Web will be the most vital portal for information and engagement with prospective patients.

No. 9. Develop patients' education. The individual will design, produce, and distribute educational materials for patients customized for the local practice. Great education for patients delivers on the advertised promise to give them the best possible treatment and experience.

By paying attention to the center's day-to-day operations as an extension of the marketing plan, your center can be sure that your paid external efforts will be maximized. Creating a role internally ensures that what is said in the advertisement actually matches the experience. Collectively, this combined marketing-operations effort will create new leads whose experiences match your promise in your advertisement. ■

Matt Jensen, MBA, is the executive director of Vance Thompson Vision in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and a certified Experience Economy Expert. He is a member of the advisory board of Cataract & Refractive Surgery Today's "Premium Practice Today" section and serves as an adviser to numerous practices and companies. Mr. Jensen may be reached at (605) 328-3903; matt.jensen@sanfordhealth.org.

