



Create a Marketing Plan for Your Practice in 3 Easy Steps



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A marketing plan is as crucial to your business as, well, a business plan. A good strategy ensures that your marketing spend is well-targeted for the maximum possible return on investment.

A strategic plan relies on an analysis of the current marketplace — both customer feedback and competitor research. You can't solve a marketing glitch or capitalize on an opportunity if you don't know it exists, and it will be hard to gain a competitive edge if you don't know what other providers in your specialty and community are offering.

Here are the three steps to building an initial marketing plan:

1

Market and Competitor Research

2

Marketing Strategy Budget and Allocation

3

Marketing Implementation and Management

We'll go over each point in detail, including tactical, actionable steps you can implement today.

Let's start strategizing!

Section One: Market and Competitor Research

In order to create an effective plan, you need to first take survey of your current assets... and shortcomings. In this section, we'll focus on some of the simplest, most effective methods for collecting customer feedback and assessing the marketplace.

1) Find Out What Your Patients Think

Without asking your customers or potential customers what they like and dislike about your practice, you'll be developing your marketing plan in the dark. Even if you believe that your plan is general enough to appeal to all your patients, it will never be as targeted — or useful — as it would be if direct customer feedback is incorporated.

Important things to know include wait times (physicals, sick visits, waiting room), ease of interactions (making appointments, speaking to nurses, communicating with one's own physician), office environment (friendliness, respect, decor, reading material) and follow-up (thoroughness, as promised, additional questions).

If you've been sending post-appointment feedback requests, read through them for trends and also see what people are saying about you on online review sites. Your reviews may reveal common themes in patient satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Do you notice that your one-star reviews center around the front office experience? Do your five-star reviews rave about your online booking feature?

Now that you have feedback from your patients, check out what the competition is doing for theirs...

2) Research Your Competitors

Conducting competitor research is part of your basic "due diligence" in laying the groundwork for your marketing plan. You cannot know how to market



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yourself without getting at least a glimpse of what other providers in your community are doing. Fortunately, it's easy to be an online sleuth.

Your goal is to get answers to questions like these: Who are your closest competitors? What are they doing? How are they positioning themselves? What do their websites look like? What services do they offer? How are they different from you, and are those differences likely to be significant to patients?

Systematically analyze each competitor's website to aggregate data for review. A good way to do this is to list attributes visible on your own website, such as "evening and weekend hours" or "online appointment setting" and continue

through each site to notate the benefits of other practices. You may find that some widely touted attributes are ones you offer too but do not publicly promote — a clue that your website may need to be updated as part of your marketing plan.

Another part of this assessment is to review your competitors' evaluations on review sites like Yelp and healthgrades.com to see how your own rating measure up. If you find that you are lacking in number of reviews or “meaty” content, there are ways to encourage patient reviews, such as sending multiple feedback reminders following every appointment with ways for patients to easily post to major review sites.

3) Focus Groups

There's nothing like a good old-fashioned focus group to provide the type of honest, in-depth dialog that is simply not attainable through online or even telephone surveys. Your best bet in arranging a focus group is to hire an outside facilitator; although they do cost money, the benefit in having someone unbiased and unfamiliar to the group (ie, won't take offense to negative feedback) leading the session may be cost-effective for large practices.

The person you hire as facilitator should, preferably, have some background in conducting research for healthcare clients and the major issues you face as a healthcare provider. They should also spend some good quality time with you both before the focus group and in delivering analysis of the session, if that is part of your contract.

According to John Mitchell, President and Managing Principal of Applied Marketing Science, a Boston-based market research firm that has worked often with healthcare clients, there is also a low-cost alternative that may better suit small- and mid-size practices. “Between the cost of the meeting room, the moderator, and compensation of 6-10 participants, a formal focus group can run well into the thousands of dollars,” he says. “Small companies may wish to investigate online focus group options, which are effective but, obviously, far less costly.”

Regardless of which approach you choose, rest assured that some research is

better than no research at all, so figure out what makes sense for your practice and make it happen! Your research is key to setting your plan in place and really believing in it too.

Now let's figure out the funding to make it all happen!

Section Two: A Marketing Budget

Where to Allocate Your Resources

A large component of your plan is your marketing budget; the size of your budget will determine the type of programs you create and which ones can be funded. Every healthcare practice needs to commit to a formal marketing budget that allocates spending to the most productive programs. After conducting your research to see what competitors in your specialty are doing, and what is most important to your own patients, it's time to create a marketing budget to guide you through at least the next two quarters.

1. Patient Acquisition Cost

There are two important metrics to consider when planning out your marketing spending. The first is your patient acquisition cost — how much in marketing dollars does it take to recruit each new patient? This number will vary based on the density of competitors around you (often requiring greater spending on search engine optimization and search engine marketing to rise to the top of Google results), as well as the uniqueness of your specialty and the frequency of referrals you receive from other physicians.

You won't, therefore, always know exactly how much it costs you to recruit each patient — perhaps one responded to a fairly expensive newspaper ad while the second was referred by a friend — but it's a versatile metric that can be extremely valuable when allocating your budget.

Ask each patient how they heard about your practice, regardless of whether your

intake is done online or over the phone. This information is critical to helping you understand the effectiveness of your various marketing programs. If you're a PatientPop customer, you can look at your call tracking and online appointment sources to assess where you're getting the most new and returning patients.

2) Return on Investment

The second consideration is the return on your marketing investment. To the extent possible, every dollar you spend on your marketing activities should track directly to new business, measurable by "sourcing" each patient, as described above. There are exclusions to this rule, of course — your healthgrades.com and other professional listings, along with customer reviews, have a huge impact on your reputation for both existing and potential patients, and those are generally free.

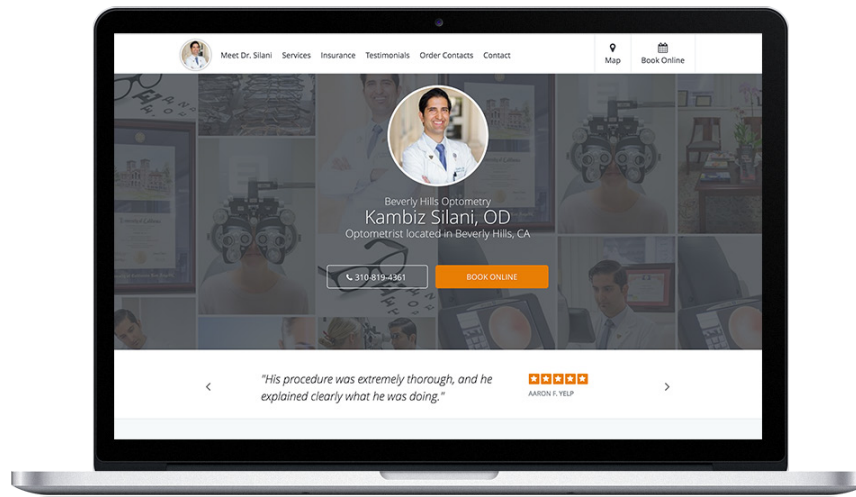
So let's take a closer look at a sample budget and how it might be spent throughout the year. For a simple example, let's say that your small practice grosses \$1 million per year and you have decided to spend eight percent of that total on your marketing budget — translating into \$80,000 per year.

You can examine the elements of your marketing plan and figure out whether it is achievable based on your allocated budget. You may need to play around with your two documents some to get them in sync; you want to make sure you can fund the most important parts of your plan while leaving other initiatives for the future.

Establishing your digital profile should be first on your agenda. It probably doesn't surprise you that over 80% of patients use the Internet as a first-line tool to research new doctors before making their first appointment. Of that traffic, nearly half of it is generated through a mobile device.

Do you have an attractive, effective mobile-friendly website that is optimized for search, intuitive to use, and offers online booking? If not, this is not only the highest-ROI place to start, but you are also being penalized by Google if you don't (Google penalizes sites which aren't mobile-responsive and bases rank partly on a website's user experience.)

The cost of a website varies greatly, so get multiple quotes. Ideally, your vendor will have experience in the medical sector and be comfortable designing mobile sites as well as full websites. A website should offer online booking for easy conversion, and integrate with your front office calendar for an optimal workflow.



Optimizing your web content for local search has the highest ROI of any marketing tactic — garnering the most clicks and the highest quality leads. Work hand-in-hand with a digital marketing expert that's familiar with search engine optimization, or learn about it yourself online, and incorporate it into your strategy. SEO consultants range in price, so again, get multiple quotes and ensure you see results as you move forward.

Once your digital profile is in place, your remaining budget can be allocated based on the goals of your marketing plan. Do you need greater visibility? Perhaps consider online advertising, such as Google Adwords. This type of paid search optimization is “pay-per-click,” so you only are charged if you get results (usually indicated by someone engaging with your URL). Much has been written about pay-per-click advertising, so if you have conducted your research, you can

most likely manage this campaign on your own. If not, a savvy marketer can implement a plan that is both effective and inexpensive.

Perhaps your plan includes, say, marketing for two new physicians joining your practice. A press release or email blast to your patients may be the best way to promote them. Maybe you want to increase your communication and connection with current patients; initiating a monthly e-newsletter and a Facebook group might be the answer — both of which you can do yourself for free.

Your marketing plan serves as a guide to outlining a budget allocation that makes sense — even if you decide to change it mid-way through the year. In fact, your constant review of ROI and cost per patient acquisition should guide your actions throughout the year. If something isn't working, by all means, make a change to something that is. Marketing isn't easy — but it isn't rocket science either. If in doubt, remember to check out your competitors' marketing presence, and read and request your own patient feedback.



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Section Three: Marketing Strategy Implementation and Management

Now that you have conquered the preliminary initiatives required to develop your plan, take stock of the total information you have available to you. As you assemble your plan, put your action items through a reality check by thinking about them separately from the entire plan. Each element should make sense in its own right — achievable, affordable, reasonable, and whatever other adjectives you might add to this list.

Once you've gathered all your data, here's what your inputs list might look like:

- 1) Customer feedback** — Information gathered through a formal survey or focus group, as well as patient review sites like [healthgrades.com](https://www.healthgrades.com).
- 2) Digital profile** — Assessment of your digital profile by yourself and others. You should be easily found by Googling your specialty and geographic location.
- 3) Competitor research** — Competitor information, which will help keep you abreast of changes going on in the marketplace so you can address deficiencies quickly and move on.
- 4) Cost/patient acquisition** — Information that can help you assess what's working in recruiting new patients and what should be a part of your next marketing plan.
- 5) Return on investment (ROI)** — ROI analysis, which will help you assess what you are getting in return for your marketing spending, generally through new patient acquisition.

Once you have gathered and analyzed your inputs, use them to craft a customized marketing plan for your practice. You have all the tools you need in front of you to assess what is working for you and what is lacking in your marketing profile. In assembling your marketing plan, try to be goal-oriented in your thinking and then develop your plan by identifying the strategies and tactics that will help get you there.

To take a simple example, one of your goals may be to attract new patients to your practice. You may have, say, three overarching goals that form the foundation of your plan. Next, you will develop strategies to accomplish these goals, following by the tactical steps you need to take to get you there. Here is how the goal of “attracting new patients” may play out in your marketing plan.

Goal: To attract new patients to my practice.

As you can see from this simple example, some of these strategies and individual tactics are fairly easy and inexpensive to implement; others will take a bit more resources and planning.

Your marketing plan should reflect your core beliefs and priorities as well as those of your current and potential customers. Rest assured that you can evaluate and change your plan often throughout the year, and feel confident that even baby steps forward will make a small difference to many and quite possibly, a huge difference to some.

Goal: To attract new patients to my practice.

STRATEGY 1: Improve my digital presence.

Tactic 1: Add a blog feature to my website and post useful content bi-monthly.

STRATEGY 2: Improve staff/customer phone interactions.

Tactic 1: Create standardized phone greeting.

Tactic 2: Have all employees identify themselves to patients they are dealing with.

Tactic 3: Reduce wait times by having more assistance answering phones during peak periods and enabling online scheduling to absorb some of the volume.

STRATEGY 3: Increase patient convenience.

Tactic 1: Stay open late one night per week.

Tactic 2: Enable online appointment scheduling.

Tactic 3: Offer to reschedule patients if their doctor is delayed by more than one hour.



Our Solution

PatientPop is reinventing the way physicians marketing and grow their practice. Our smart technology provides an automated, all-in-one solution to enhance your online visibility and reputation, patient acquisition and retention, as well as business insights.

Diagnose your practice's online performance today with our free practice scan. This powerful diagnostic tool scours the internet for your practice's online visibility, reputation, and directory profiles to show you how you're performing and where you can improve.

If you're interested in seeing how our platform can transform your marketing and practice growth, request a demo or contact our sales department.

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