

Growing Your Practice

A Review Of The State Of Chiropractic Practice Growth

by Vicki Nuber

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Depending on who you talk to, the chiropractic profession is either on its deathbed or on the edge of moving to its greatest era ever. Why this fluctuation exists between those that are struggling and see the glass half empty and those that see the glass half full makes for an interesting review.

In surveying our advertisers as well as our readers regarding "growing your practice," we discovered two primary concepts that seem to be making a huge difference in the outcomes doctors are experiencing.

First, while the basic principles of successful practice management remain the same, the application of those principles has to be looked at with a new perspective. In this vein, we will focus on patient education, referrals, and community involvement and how these mainstays of successful chiropractors have changed and how some chiropractors are properly utilizing these strategies.

Secondly, we will focus on major paradigm shifts we have discovered amongst successful chiropractors and how those shifts have made a

difference for these individuals. Those paradigm shifts include: branding, marketing as an investment, and technology and the Internet.

The More Things Change The More They Stay The Same

Principles are everlasting. They really do not change. But, do not make the mistake of thinking that, because a principle remains a basic truth, the application or implementation of that principle shouldn't change. After all, planting seeds to grow crops is a principle we all understand and accept, but modern day farming has changed dramatically even over the last few years. Those believing in basic farming principles but still implementing those principles in old-fashioned ways cannot survive. Successful farmers, just like successful chiropractors, understand that new applications of proven

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principles is a given when building successful practices.

Patient education is a great example. Talk to highly successful chiropractors and they will tell you that an educated patient is a more loyal patient. They are more likely to follow your recommendations, stay with you, and refer others to you.

But, as you explore what is happening with patient education, you will also find that old-fashioned patient education methods are much harder to implement. For example,

many chiropractors are finding the traditional mandatory health care class very difficult to implement. Given the changes in patient lifestyles, many doctors tell us it has become very difficult to get people to make extra visits to the clinic for educational purposes. Unfortunately, many then end up doing little in the way of education. And, their practice suffers.

On the other hand, many chiropractors are having success by understanding that the principle of education can be implemented in many different ways.

One doctor has recorded his health care class, sends it home with new patients, and even conducts a simple "quiz" when they come back. Another has created a "total educational experience"

and disburses his educational message in small, bite-size portions, making it more patient-friendly and less overwhelming.

Many are finding other unique ways to deliver the message. Some are utilizing ongoing health care discussion groups focused on topics that truly interest and engage participants as a popular vehicle to enhance their patients' understanding of chiropractic principles. Others hold "celebrations" for their new patients and allow other patients to explain what chiropractic is and

how they have benefited, which not only improves education but also acts as a great referral vehicle.

The point is that successful chiropractors recognize that the principles of patient education are still true, but instead of forcing old-fashioned educational delivery on their patients, they get strategic and creative in how they apply this principle successfully.

Likewise with referrals. Most chiropractors we have talked to admit that they want a referral based practice. But they have also seen that an old-fashioned approach whereby the major referral ask in the practice is the chiropractor verbally asking, may not be working quite as well.

By creating referral systems and properly incorporating technology into the system, they have discovered that the principle of referrals is more alive than ever, but also much more effective and less stressful than ever before.

Community involvement is another principle that is easily forgotten. Most successful chiropractors we have talked to admit that a key to their early success was their involvement in their community. They tell of being involved in the chamber, knocking on doors, conducting endless screenings, and even serving in official capacities such as Mayor in order to get their practices off to a rousing success.

Yet too many doctors forget the principles of community involve-





tage of them seem to be growing and maximizing the opportunities in front of them.

Some paradigm shifts force a profession to change, while others are caused by changes within a profession. Either way, chiropractors will choose to ride the wave of these changes or face the threat of being drowned by forces beyond their control.

Paradigm Shift #1: Brands, Branding, And Brand Management

Today’s consumer recognizes and appreciates consistent brand elements more than ever before. And the consumer research indicates that they are more likely to respond positively to brands that provide a congruent message via their colors, images, messaging, and behaviors than ever before.

The days of no logo, cheaply done black and white, and templated one-

ment and, as soon as they are successful, they start eliminating those efforts. They believe the dogma that once they have patients they only have to do internal marketing. And while that may work in some cases, in other situations they find that when new doctors move into their community and bring the energy and involvement they once did, their flow of new patients is reduced. When you leave a void in your community, if someone else fills it with credible relationships, they become the new thought leaders and begin to attract patients away from those who are no longer involved.

Successful chiropractors have come to recognize that, while they may change how they remain involved in their community as they mature, the principles of “out of sight out of mind,” and “doing business with those we’re involved with” are more true than ever.

These chiropractors have learned how to continue their community involvement via social media, blogging, and other proper applications of technology-based marketing efforts. While the “boots on the ground” approach is still a critical aspect of growing your practice, there is now an opportunity to

transition to a more technological community leadership position by properly applying technology and related services now available to chiropractors.

The Only Constant In Life Is Change

On the other hand, certain paradigm shifts have changed or are changing how successful chiropractors reach or maintain their desired levels of success. Chiropractors that discover these shifts early on and take advan-

size-fits-all communications may be quickly disappearing. Successful doctors are finding that a unique, professionally developed, and consistent brand message has a major impact on how people see them and react to their messages. In effect, it can increase the credibility and the ability of a doctor to influence their patients and their community.

This shift is a precursor to less cookie-cutter-like marketing efforts and

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Feedback From Our Chiropractic Readership

Success

- 65.4% consider themselves highly successful
- 32.1% moderately successful
- 3.8% not very successful

Practice Management Coaches

- 76.9% have utilized a coach
- 73.0% indicate that their coach has helped them achieve practice growth

Biggest Barriers To Practice Growth [Summary]

- Lack of public understanding
- Too many different shades of chiropractic
- Lack of practice management skills

Three Best Practice Growth Ideas [Summary]

- Educating patients
- Asking for referrals
- Honest, ethical care

The Internet

- 40.3% give their Internet efforts a positive grade in terms of helping them grow their practice.
- Increasing acceptance of social media
- More and more chiropractors are hiring outside services to help them create social networking systems

more chiropractic practice brands designed to specifically meet the needs of their communities.

Paradigm Shift #2: Marketing As An Investment

Many successful chiropractors have also discovered the fact that marketing should be approached as an investment, not a cost of doing business. For example, an old-fashioned

allows doctors to do more with less. In some ways, it can reduce the time and manpower necessary to handle certain tasks. In others, it can greatly enhance the important things they otherwise would find too time consuming.

Successful doctors have discovered that personal emails can greatly increase their ability to stay in touch

efforts or campaigns to specifically communicate with new patients, current patients, or inactive patients. And best of all, the technology allows them to reduce their time and manpower requirements.

The key however, in properly utilizing technology, is to seek, find, and implement technology that fits your needs, as opposed to allowing your needs to be forced to adapt to technology. Remember it matters whether the dog is wagging the tail, or the tail is trying to wag the dog.

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website that doesn't perform is an expense. But an Internet marketing effort that generates results can be considered an investment.

It was not that long ago that chiropractors thought paying \$100 for a website was too expensive. Then some chiropractors discovered that being highly ranked improved their chances of being found, so they were willing to pay more. And then they discovered that even if they were highly ranked, old-fashioned websites did not deliver new patients so they invested in newer Internet technologies. And now many doctors have found that, depending on their market and their competition, paying as much as \$500 or even \$1,000 per month on Internet marketing systems is not a cost as much as it is an investment.

As more and more of these doctors and the systems they use prove to be reliable, more and more doctors will face a choice of whether they want to keep up and increase their marketing investment or fall even further behind.

But buyer beware, not all Internet marketing systems are the same. The bottom line is: "Does it work, and does it bring the expected results?" If not, then your investment becomes an expense, and potentially a wasted expense.

Paradigm Shift #3: Technology And Management

When used properly, technology

and communicate with their patients. One doctor utilizes email to follow up with new patients and finds it more effective than phone calls. But even better, once an email relationship is established, it allows this doctor to improve retention and improve reactivation efforts.

Others have found that the new technology available in auto-responders greatly simplifies their overall communications efforts. They can segment their communication

Putting It All Together

By understanding some of the unchanging principles that lead to chiropractic success, yet recognizing and adapting to changes in the implementation of those principles, chiropractors take greater control over their marketing efforts and increase the likelihood of their success.

About the Author — Vicki Nuber is the Editor-In-Chief of DC Products Review.

Expert Advice From Chiropractic Vendors

The Basic Principles...

- Chiropractors are always looking for the new shiny toy...by actually...polishing and reinforcing the effective, successful actions [it will] directly reflect their income.

Dr. Bobbee Palmer — Chiropractic Business Academy

Patient Education...

- Improved patient education leads to a higher PVA, greater retention, and getting patients to refer.

Dr. Tedd Koren — Koren Publications

Referrals...

- Provide great care with results they can understand, and the referrals will come in droves.

Dr. Anthony Gambale — Spinal Curve Solutions

Community Involvement...

- Community Involvement is far more powerful than most chiropractors recognize. It can be the springboard to thought leadership efforts that bring incredible benefit.

Juan Nodarse — The Marketing Advantage

Branding...

- Commodity positioning through the lack of differentiation or a compelling selling proposition..." was identified as a major problem facing the profession.

Todd Brown — MoreChiroPatients.com

Marketing As An Investment...

- Today the economy is causing people to become more conscious of how they spend.

Frank Mewes — Work SmartWare

Technology And Management...

- It's important for chiropractors to "...understand the importance of cutting edge technology."

Dr. Timothy Gay — UltimatePractice.com