



What Criteria Do You Begin With When Making Purchasing Decisions?

by Andrew Cheesman

You peruse chiropractic magazines. You attend chiropractic trade shows. You surf the Internet. You receive a bevy of emails. And one of the things on your mind is “what new technology, product or service makes sense for me?” And what does “makes sense” really mean in terms of you, your patients, and your practice.

Making dollars and sense in technology decisions

One of the obvious factors in making new product purchase decisions is “what will this product or service mean to me in ‘return on investment’ (ROI)?” Seems simple enough. However at the end of the day, you need to know what will this product cost, and what new revenue or savings will this purchase mean to you? There is far more to it than mere ROI. Even in the ROI there are layers of factors that need to be considered. For instance, before factoring in what it costs and what the return would likely be, start by asking, “Is this product right for my patients?” And how do you determine if it is a fit for your practice? You certainly can’t determine that by listening to a salesman. He likely won’t even know if it is a good fit for you, but

he will have a sales pitch that will entice you into believing it is a good fit. That is not how you make a wise determination.

Seek advice from your true peers

Whether we are talking about a new laser, decompression table, digital X-ray, nutrition line or what have you, the true indicator of the likely success of a product can be determined by DCs in your similar market – geographically, sociologically, economically, and practice size and type. In other words, if a new fat-reducing or cosmetic machine is going great guns for a doctor in Beverly Hills, CA, that does not mean the same product would work out for you in a small mid-western town. Getting a testimonial from a DC in a dissimilar location and practice type is often meaningless. The number one priority in determining if a new product and service is viable is getting the input from doctors in your general area and similar practice type. A technology that is great guns for an athletic-performance chiropractor does not mean that the same product will work well for your family practice. Make sure you speak to peers that are truly similar to you, in ways other than just being a fellow chiropractor.

Before ROI comes WFP (Wellness For Patient)

I spoke to a highly successful practice management coach who specializes in helping DCs make a transition to multi-disciplinary practices. And he told me that he does not take clients just out of chiropractic school and I asked him why. He said, “Because they don’t think in terms of adding products based on if their patients need it and if it will increase the patients’ wellness, but rather too often think in terms of ‘How much money will this product make me?’ and that is a big mistake. If a doctor starts to make decisions based on how much more income a product or service creates for the practice, they will quickly become not ‘on purpose’ and become ungrounded. We need to never lose sight of the patient’s health and wellness, first and foremost. It is fine if a new technology benefits the doctor’s bottom line, as it should, but that should never be the first priority in making new technology decisions.”

New patients versus supplement income on existing patients

Another error I see doctors making is applying too much weight towards product decisions based on how many new patients a new ser-



vice will produce, without considering what additional income the new technology may draw in from their current patient base, as well aiding in patient retention. Many doctors get all excited about how much a new technology will increase new patients, which is all well and good, but it doesn't place enough consideration on the value of current patients. Let's say a current patient is paying \$50 a visit, but you add a new service that the patient, seeing enough value, is willing to pay an additional \$45 for. You have just increased your case fee from \$50 to \$95. And if the patient realizes a true increase in wellness, pain reduction or weight loss or what have you, you have just increased your patient retention as well, plus you have created an additional "soap box" where your patient is

ing for \$125,000 or more. Decompression is still a much-needed protocol today, but the wave of enthusiasm for expensive tables is gone. You must apply due diligence in making product purchases and ensure the fervor is legitimate and will be long-lasting. And again, the best way to ensure this is by discussing it with true peers in similar practices and locals.

What is the total cost?

Another crucial criterion to consider is the total cost of the technology, in terms of training, learning curve, support, etc. Will the vendor always be there to answer questions, or is that an additional fee? Will they leave you hanging? Is there an additional cost for training? Will

revenues, per se. And, keeping in mind your patients' overall emotional feeling towards your practice is a big deal. How do you think they feel about traditional X-ray, with all those chemicals and film? Are they still using cameras that use film for their family photos? Why not?

Avoid paralysis by analysis

Don't let the hurdles make you shut your mind to all possible purchases on new technologies and services. If you do, you will be missing out on quality additions for your patients' wellness and your practice's success, and on more than one level. For instance, even though decompression went through a "fad" phase, it is still an excellent option for people in a lot of pain. Decompression allows for improvement in their condition and a significant reduction in their pain. If you throw your hands up and say, "Some of these tables don't really work" or "Insurance doesn't cover it, so it's difficult to get patients to pay out of pocket for it" you may be missing out on a great protocol that could make a major improvement in your patients' lives. I am not advocating that decompression is right for every chiropractor; I am merely using it as an example as to how shunning all possible new protocols is often a mistake when keeping in mind your patients' wellness as a top priority.

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likely to bring up the benefits of your new service, providing increased "word-of-mouth" promotion. All these factors need to be considered when evaluating product purchases.

Fad or lasting value?

As we all know, there have been new technologies that have come and gone leaving too many doctors paying monthly charges long after any income is being generated from the purchased equipment. The damage of "fad" products and services are potentially long-lasting. A doctor that was stung by such a purchase may be fearful of buying new technologies in the future, or may not have the cash to do so if he is still paying for his "Doodad 2000." If a vendor is bragging about how this new service has added on an average of "X" new patients for their clients, don't assume it will be a lasting element in the field. Decompression was all the rage a few years back, and tables were sell-

there be updates that will be mandatory and will you be forced to pay for them or else the technology will become useless? Can you make updates easily and at little cost? If your system goes down, will you be able to get someone on the phone, that day to get you up and running again, or will your calls go unanswered or unreturned?

Increased efficiency is part of the picture

Not every purchase is about making money. Some purchases such as a digital X-ray machine are about increased efficiencies in a practice. With the purchase of a digital X-Ray system, you no longer have to deal with chemicals, buying film or a toxic aroma in the air, and you can easily re-shoot an X-ray if the first images have any problems. Plus, it gives the patient a feeling that your practice is modern, i.e. trustworthy. So, some purchases of a new technology make total sense, even if they do not provide an increase in