



In-Practice Retailing

by Vicki Nuber

Do it right and retailing products in your practice can be a surefire way to improve clinical results, expand your community influence, and increase income. But is there anything else a proper retail presence can do for you? Perhaps something less tangible than profit, but just as elemental to growing your practice? For many doctors the answer should be a strong “yes” and here’s why.

A successful retail center requires expertise in something other than chiropractic care, or at the very least, a perception of expertise. Retail centers allow your experience and proficiency to open doors with conversations that you might not have otherwise. As with most chiropractors, your patients have probably repeatedly asked you about nutritional supplements, diet plans, ergonomic chairs, orthotics, pillows and mattresses, and other such health support aids.

And you’ve probably been asked your opinion of all of these products outside your practice as well, most likely during networking events with your local chamber, at a church barbeque, or the neighborhood block party. Unfortunately, only those with chronic or acute pain are likely to engage you directly about chiropractic for their problems; everyone else wants your expert opinion on how they can get better value from these health-enhancing products. Astute doctors can turn this experience into an opportunity.

Positioned properly, the retail side of your practice can be a form of leverage — leverage that can help you stop discounting your care, leverage that can help strengthen your brand, and leverage that can

help you influence your community.

Retail As Loss Leader

You may not know the term “loss leader” but chances are you’ve used this marketing approach. A loss leader is a pricing strategy where a product is sold at a price below its market cost to attract customers and stimulate sales of more profitable goods. If you’ve ever gone into the grocery store to get a product for a special price of pennies-on-the-dollar, you have been attracted by a loss leader. If you’ve found yourself buying more than that product or becoming a regular customer because of that first purchase, then the loss-leader strategy has worked on you.

If you have ever advertised your chiropractic exam, x-rays or first adjustment at low- or no-cost, then you’ve used the loss-leader strategy. This would include offering a discount at a health screening. The idea is simply to get people in the door in order to establish a relationship with them. This kind of marketing is the main strategy of companies such as Groupon and LivingSocial, and even the local “Deal” section of your city’s newspaper. Some doctors go as far as making their exam a permanent loss leader, with internal referral coupons and even signs in the window offering a free spine exam.

How can retail help you leverage a loss-leader marketing strategy? By doing what all good loss leaders do, and that is appealing to a broad range of people who probably qualify for more than just that one product or service. A “Free Spine Exam” will appeal to some but perhaps not to as many as a “Free Weight Loss Evaluation.” Massage therapy and nutritional consults are among the most obvious of loss-leader services with a broad appeal. But what about an offer for a free orthotic evaluation or a free in-office trial of the ergonomic office products you recommend? Or even a coupon offering a great discount on these or other goods?

Once you have a broad-appeal product or ancillary service as a loss leader, you can use it to help qualify potential patients. The inherent crossover between your care and the products you recommend goes both ways. It makes sense for your chiropractic patients to see value in the products you recommend; likewise it makes sense that any responder to your loss-leader product or service will see the value in a chiropractic evaluation...especially if you make it a condition of receiving the deal. In other words, if they’re coming in for the discounted orthotic evaluation or the massage session, they have to be screened by the doctor first. And essentially, with a retail practice, you can discount in order to market without actually discounting your chiropractic care.

Building Your Brand

There are conflicting opinions about what makes a clinic brand strong. Some say that marketing any product or

service outside of the chiropractic adjustment will weaken your brand by confusing the public. Others say that offering discounted chiropractic services, including exams as a loss leader, weakens your brand by cheapening its value. Still others say that both are just fine, as long as they are helping you grow. Ultimately, you have to decide what helps you communicate the reasons behind why you do what you do.

If you are like many chiropractors, your practice is a direct extension of you, and the “why” behind your retail is a great place to build your personal brand. Here are a few examples:

- The doctor who dropped six pant sizes through exercise and proper nutritional balancing can build his brand by integrating in-office nutrition and supplementation.
- The chiropractor who found chiropractic after a running injury in college can build her brand by discussing athletic footwear, running mechanics, and offering custom foot orthotics.
- The personal injury expert who lectures on whiplash can undoubtedly build his brand by recommending at-home devices for neck trauma and the improvement of cervical curves.
- The pediatric chiropractor can easily offer ergonomic children’s backpacks and back-saving products for mothers, thereby building her brand.

When they are a direct extension of your own personal history, lifestyle and clinical interests, retail products can help you build your brand. Why you offer what you offer can be just as important to your patients as the technique that you use to adjust their spine. For those people not yet in your practice, retail offers a source of potential influence in an area in which they already want help.

Leveraging Influence

The reason that retail products can make good loss leaders is the same reason why they can be a tool of community influence. The kinds of products that fit in the chiropractic practice are often essential to work, play, and even sleep for nearly everyone. Patients may not want to know about their spines but they do want to get good value from the products and services they buy; they are already seeking help with these purchases, and you may be the expert who gains their attention.

What kind of influence can you leverage when it comes to retail? The sky’s the limit. Just consider the following questions:

- I got these orthotics years ago? Do you think I need new ones?

- What kind of vitamins do you think I should be taking? Do you take nutritional supplements?
- Do you know anyone who has tried this diet?
- Do inversion tables really help with back pain?
- Do you think the way my computer is set up could be hurting my eyes and giving me headaches?
- Do you think my neck pain could be because of my pillow? What would you recommend for a side sleeper?

These are probably some of the typical questions you’ve been asked by your patients or by the information-seeking public. And the list is not complete. Depending on the region where you practice, you might have an altogether different list of patient interests, involving a range of activities from horseback riding to golf to cycling...or even mixed martial arts.

In this era of consumer choice, gone are the days when one or two brands or models are the only options that consumers have. In addition to multiple competing brands, now the public has to consider a plethora of options: Organic versus non-organic. Foreign versus domestic. Gluten-free or dairy-free. Version 4 now versus version 5 later. Sustainable source versus non-sustainable source. Mobile versus desktop. Water soluble or oil based. Recyclable or non-recyclable. Online or in-store. Pick-up versus delivery.

No longer does anyone turn to the department store clerk for the final word on which product is best. Instead, people ask their friends, whether in person or online. They read reviews from a variety of Internet retailers, and they turn to social media to find out what the experts have to say about it. The question is: Are you an expert with something to say? Can you leverage your expertise in your chiropractic lifestyle to expand your community influence?

Reaching The Consumer

Retail can be about more than profit, results, or value. It can also be very beneficial for marketing, branding, and influencing. Retail can help you start a conversation about something other than chiropractic care in a way that ties directly back into your experience and expertise as a chiropractor. Or it can be a loss leader for your care that does not mar the value of your chiropractic services. Because your practice is an extension of you, retail gives you leverage for building your brand in a way that appeals to a larger audience — those who are not exactly looking for a chiropractor but who could use a doctor’s opinion.

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