

## The Heart and Soul of Plastic Surgery

Rudi Unterthiner, MD, FICS, on the elusive "spiritual piece of the puzzle"

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# Simple Marketing

**M**arketing isn't complicated; it is actually quite simple. The challenge for most physicians is time—the limited time you have is most profitable when spent with patients, not creating flyers or planning an open house. In addition to the amount of time it takes to generate and implement effective promotions, there isn't one complete source, one absolute answer, or even a clear list of "do's and don'ts" for getting busy.

Until now. Simple marketing is also simple to explain, and over the next several months *PSP* will publish a series of articles that will describe tested concepts that have proven to increase business for practices.

## CREATE A PLAN

Randomly and haphazardly spending money on marketing is a quick way to systematically deplete your funds. In marketing circles, the phrase "shot-gunning" refers to sporadically "shooting" into the masses and hoping to hit your target or a qualified lead.

The more preferred method, known as the "rifle approach," entails taking calculated shots strategically aimed at a specific segment of your audience. Don't shotgun it.

Most physicians don't realize they have an advantage when it comes to marketing. You are trained to listen to your patients. Listening is a magical word in marketing. To effectively promote your services, you have to listen to your market and think from their perspective.

In marketing, every time your patient hears from or about you it is called a "touch." Your goal is to maintain frequent touches with your patients so you stay current in their minds, schedule, and budget. It is a common marketing maxim that it takes at least eight touches before a person will respond to your efforts. Planning only one method of outreach means you are planning to waste your money. You should consider the expense of each effort an investment toward gaining a new patient.

### 1) Go green.

Do you use promotional materials such as brochures, newsletters, or even business cards? Increase the return on your investment by increasing the number of people who see your literature. Simply add a sentence encouraging your recipients to "Help us be green and share this newsletter with a friend before throwing it away." With this one sentence, you can double the amount of people that see your materials without any additional costs and show your patients that you are environmentally conscious.

### 2) Keep them loyal with a reward.

It costs six to seven times more to gain a new patient than to retain one. Keep those patients coming back with an easy-to-use and inexpensive loyalty card. Initial or mark on the card every time a patient spends a certain dollar amount and reward them with a credit, a facial, or some other product or service when the card is filled.



### 3) Make it interactive.

Do you sell Latisse? If so, for less than \$10 you can show patients before-and-afters using an interactive, 3D demo station. Simply purchase a pair of false eye-lashes from a local drug store. Trim the left set of lashes and label it "Before." Leave the right set of lashes as is and label it as "After." Next, set out applicators alongside a used bottle of Latisse that has been refilled with water. Display these lifelike virtual lashes with a sign that invites curious patients to try it for themselves.



This is just one example. Use your imagination and even go as far as create a contest among your staff people to help you come up with similar interactive displays that revolve around other products or services you offer.

### 4) Let patients refer on your behalf.

Many practices regularly mail their patients a birthday or holiday gift card that includes a gift certificate for the practice. This type of a promotion can warrant a strong return, as many patients view the gift card as having cash value. As you are already spending the postage to mail

to these patients, empower this qualified market to refer on your behalf by providing them a secondary gift card clearly labeled as a "Gift for a Friend."

### 5) Sell gift cards? If so, sweeten the deal.

Gift cards for your practice can provide patients a convenient birthday, Valentine's Day, or Mother's Day gift while bringing new patients through your doors. Why not encourage patients to buy their gifts from your office by offering a little something back? Provide a complimentary gift card to the practice or offer, say, skin care services with any gift purchased. Now the patient has an incentive to purchase presents from you as opposed to a local department store.

If you convert just two new filler patients per week, it will mean an additional \$34,000 in annual revenue for your practice.

I thought that would get your attention. Now, go back to the beginning of this article and read it again. This time, take notes and brainstorm some ideas to get people moving through the doors. Good luck! ■

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See also "Preparing for the Recovery" by Tor Valenza in the June 2009 issue of *PSP*.



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