Four Innovative Ways to Market Physicians

Making it Real – Reciprocation – Take the Disney Approach – Break the Mold

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“Phenomenal” results for physician marketing and relations is the goal of every physician relations and hospital marketing department. Seeing the potential opportunities, CEOs invest valuable resources into building up these programs. However, as it has been found in many organizations, CEOs often become impatient with the progress of the relations and discontinue or severely shrink the size of the program.

The question is, what can liaisons do to justify their existence and produce quicker, more actionable results?

There are four innovative ways to speed up the relationship process and increase physician referrals and retention.

Is it possible to get Ninety Percent of the physicians a liaison visits to increase their referrals with one or two visits? Is there a way to Double or Triple referral revenue?

“Got Milk?” In 1993, this two word campaign became an instant hit and a mind-numbing blueprint for me-too marketers across the country. “Got Beauty?” “Got Questions?” “Got This?” Do these copy-cat campaigns motivate you to act or purchase? So, why do so many marketers, including physician marketing, fall into this chasm of mediocrity?

What does it take to be an effective physician marketer?

“Making good marketing is like making a good movie – most people know ‘good’ when they see it and assume they can do it.” Brad Plothow

Creating a 4-star physician marketing campaign is available to everyone. It does, however, require more than simply copying what the other hospitals are doing. Lessons can be learned from “Got Milk?”. The one-of-a-kind platform it stood on made it stand out from all other marketing campaigns.

So too, physician relations requires innovation and thinking out of the box. The following four principles can guide physician relations directors and liaisons on how they can take their efforts to the next level.

**Make it Real**

John Osborne of State of the Heart Cardiology in State of the Heart, Texas, converts doctor’s hearts into patient referrals. An owner of cardiac CT angiography (CTA) technology, John Osborne has been able to get ninety percent of the physicians he solicits to send their cardiac CT referrals to him.

“We have spread the word to our referring, primary-care physicians and providers by bringing them into our office and showing them the scans and how the technology works,” says John Osborne, MD, PhD.

Dr. Osborne is a firm believer in the “test-drive” principle. Like a car dealer, Dr. Osborne will do everything he can to get potential referring physicians to test-drive his machine. He invites them to not only see the high-quality images his CT produces, but experience the machine for themselves. He does this by giving each physician a picture of their own heart.

By putting physicians in the driver’s seat, Dr. Osborne has been able to make it real for them. They can see firsthand how impressive and noninvasive Dr. Osborne’s cardiac CT technology is and the personalized care he provides. As related to Amy Crane, Dr. Osborne says the results have been “Phenomenal” and it has placed him way out in front of his competition.

Dr. Osborne has converted ninety percent of physicians who have had their heart scanned by him into regular referrers. Physician Liaisons and marketers have a wonderful opportunity to think out of the box and **Make it Real** for the providers they solicit. By putting them in a position to see, feel, and experience for themselves, Liaisons can turn skeptics into believers and hook providers into sending new and consistent patient referrals.

**Reciprocation**

“People tend to return a favor, thus the pervasiveness of free samples in marketing.”


Physician Relations has the ability to offer “free samples”. Of course, not the free samples you immediately think about; but in unsolicited help.

Can physician retention be accomplished through a doctor’s wife?

Yes. For example, Dr. Jones is a favorite Urologist. After years of building a relationship with him, you have been rewarded with a better practice, increased loyalty, and higher admissions. However, over the past few months, Dr. Jones’s wife and kids have spent considerable time visiting family across the country. And pressure has been mounting on Dr. Jones to relocate.
Is this common situation beyond your control?

In Physician Relations, going above and beyond what is asked or expected is better than any free sample a physician could receive. Doing Dr. Jones a favor and taking his wife out to lunch is a perfect “coupon”. His wife may just need a friend in the area. By hooking her kids up with the local sports team and going the extra mile to connect Dr. Jones’s family with another physician and his family could be the tipping point for keeping this valuable physician in the area.

The best marketing is word-of-mouth or buzz marketing not done by you. Physicians who know they are truly cared for and appreciated will Reciprocate. They will be your greatest advocates and allies in the community. They will be the ones who refer other physicians to your facility. It all comes from giving a favor and going the extra mile.

**Take the Disney Approach**

When a physician makes his/her decision on where to refer, how much of it is emotional?

In Steven Covey’s *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, he explains relationships are based off an “emotional bank account.” The status of the account determines the quality of the relationship. Only those who have deposited into an individual’s bank account can influence and motivate the individual.  

In a recent survey of hospital marketers, the biggest concern of marketers and liaisons is greater competition from competitor facilities. In today’s competitive healthcare market, physicians have many options on where to send patient referrals. Hospitals find themselves losing physicians who feel they are being ignored or treated unfairly. Regular deposits into their emotional bank account can solve this problem.

Disney is a good example of this process. At the Disney Institute they teach professionals, including healthcare executives, how to improve their organization according to a philosophy developed by Walt Disney. The principles taught are simple but profound. For example, one of the main principles is to make sure everyone feels important and knows they are an asset to the organization.

Walt Disney World has built their whole company culture accordingly. One of the most far reaching initiatives is a simple name change. At Disney World, employees are not employees, but cast members. Customers are not customers, but visitors. Taking the theme of a play, Disney has been able to make direct deposits into their employees’ and their customers’ emotional bank account. Both know they are valued and cared for.

In *Disney Magic*, written by Lee Cockerell, former COO of Walt Disney World, he discusses how at Disney they reach out and listens to every cast member’s suggestions. Understanding ideas are often found in the most unlikely places. Disney has found suggestions from cast members and visitors to be some of the best advice they receive.

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For example, Lee Cockerell shares how Disney was able to help solve one of the most frustrating problems at Disney World – long lines. A problem they heard consistently from visitors to the parks. In 1999, the FASTPASS® was introduced. The FASTPASS® relieves line congestion through a reservation system. Visitors pick up a pass and come back at a later time with the power to go to the front of the line. ⁷

What competitive advantage would a healthcare facility receive if they followed these two Disney principles; making sure providers are appreciated and following their suggestions?

First, physicians and their office staff would immediately remember a hospital whose liaisons no longer referred to them providers, but Friends or Allies. Whose visits were centered on filling their emotional bank account. Whose purpose of visiting was to help, to support, and to give appreciation.

“What can I do to make your life easier?”

“How can we improve our relationship with you?”

“Thank you Dr. ______ for referring ______ last week.”

Second, like the frustration of long lines at Disney World, some of the best feedback a hospital receives comes from their referring physicians. By listening and acting on concerns, processes can improve and improvements can be made. Actively resolving physician issues can benefit all parts of the relationship equation.

Physician Liaisons who Take the Disney Approach will find physician loyalty levels improve and retention issues decline. Opportunities will seep through the cracks and physicians will respond better to referral solicitations and referral growth objectives.

Break from the Mold

Since 2002, Helaine Smith, a Cosmetic Dentist, has tripled her revenue to $1 million annually. Beginning with a simple $2000 yellow page ad, Helaine has been able to break the mold and find true success with starting her own innovative marketing campaign. ⁸

Helaine began her campaign when she realized she was in a tough market. There were many dentists in her Boston area, who each had a loyal patient base. To stand out from the crowd, she published a free 19-page book on how good oral hygiene can improve a person’s personal life. The book received overnight success, boosting internet searches and word-of-mouth referrals.

Since then, she has dropped her $2000 yellow page ad and moved away from other traditional marketing mediums. Adding regular free Podcasts and other materials to her campaign, she has been able to boost her unique position in the market.

The secret to Helaine’s success is simple – a little creativity. Using the knowledge she had, she created

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free materials for potential patients. Once she saw success, she added, developing a satchel of free online, print, and Podcast items.

Breaking from the mold can be intimidating. However, it can be rewarded with large dividends.

For example, usually physicians are quite affluent. So treating them to lunch tends to not be a big deal. However, what they often lack is time with family and friends. How can you convert a lunch meeting into something unique and valuable to the physician? What about a dinner at the ballpark with family and friends?

Helaine-like success is one creative idea away. It is as easy as taking something you are already doing and making it unique and memorable – like a night at a ballpark. There are countless ideas out there. If you are seeking cardio referrals, why not spread your message through delivering heart shaped cookies? If you want to improve emergency medicine, why not a shoe fundraiser for local fire stations?

Whatever you do, by Breaking the Mold hospitals will stand out from their competition and help physicians remember where they should send their referrals. ₉

**What does it take to be an effective physician marketer?**

Hospital CEOs are constantly looking for ways they can reach out to referring providers. Physician relations and marketing that provides real results can make this happen.

Being an effective physician marketer is in reach of everyone. It doesn’t require a PhD or simply copying what the other guy is doing. Using the four innovative principles described above, physician liaisons and marketers can create their own marketing masterpieces. By escaping from the traditional marketing, they will develop a physician relations campaign that has “Phenomenal” results.