

## 5 Biggest Medical Marketing Blunders and How to Avoid Them

Medical marketing isn't exactly something they teach in medical school, yet a large number of physicians choose to serve as their practice's marketing department. While this approach may suffice for some doctors, a large majority will not be nearly as successful without some guidance. Why? In our experience of working with physicians, there are five major missteps we see time and again.

### 1. Creating a Do-It-Yourself Marketing Strategy

When doctors attempt to create and implement their own marketing strategy, they face two major challenges; a lack of medical marketing training and a lack of time. The problem with inexperienced marketing is that you can easily create a strategy that is expensive yet ineffective. In addition, doctors already have a full-time job taking care of patients. The last thing they need is to add marketing responsibilities to their busy work week. Either the doctor, the patient, or the practice's marketing efforts will suffer for it. It's for this reason that while doctors may believe they are saving money by doing their own marketing, in the long run they may actually spend more.

### 2. Neglecting to Maximize Your Online Presence

When doctors create their own marketing strategy, they too often rely on their own perspective and not enough on the patient's. Because they personally read the newspaper or use the Yellow Pages, they assume patients do as well. Not the case. They end up neglecting major mediums, such as the internet. In fact, more than 80% of internet users look for health information online, 44% of which are specifically looking for a provider. Yet physicians who claim to offer state-of-the-art treatments represent their practices online with websites that either look like they were designed in the early 90's or have lack luster messaging that fails to differentiate their services. Even worse, some practices have incredible websites but no one can find them because they haven't been optimized to rank in the search engines. It's not enough just to have a website, it also needs to convert visitors into patients and be easily found through Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques.

### 3. Failing to Differentiate Your Practice

When it comes to messaging, making claims such as “we offer compassionate care” or “we provide experienced specialists” will not differentiate your practice, especially considering your competitors probably say the same thing. In fact, it will make it difficult for patients to tell you a part from your peers (i.e. you’ll be generic). Start by researching what claims your competitors are making about their care and then decide what sets you apart. For instance, maybe you are the most experienced urologist in the area with 20 years in practice, or perhaps you are the most advanced as the only provider of robotic surgery. Whatever you decide your differentiator will be, make sure it is unique and make sure you keep the messaging consistent on every piece of marketing collateral you produce. Even your staff should be trained to talk with patients about your differentiators. In order to create a powerful brand, your messaging should really infiltrate every part of your practice.

### 4. Forgetting to Market to Current Patients

New patients aren’t the only way to grow your practice’s bottom line. It’s just as important to market to current patients as well since they can be a valuable source of repeat business and patient referrals. If you’ve heard the saying “out of sight, out of mind”, then you know that ongoing communication is vital to building a lasting relationship with your patients. You may only see some of your patients once a year, and I guarantee they don’t think of you the other 11 months out of the year. Some cost-effective ideas to maintain patient communications and stay top of mind include an e-newsletter (simply collect patient emails at check-in or have a sign up box on your website), add a blog to your website where you can contribute short educational articles, or take the leap into the world of social media (it may be intimidating at first, but it is well worth the extra effort).

### 5. Wasting Marketing Dollars on Bad Customer Service

You can spend all the money in the world on marketing, but if your practice faces customer service issues then you are throwing dollars down the drain. Before you even begin to think about investing in marketing, you should first conduct mystery shopping research. This involves asking or hiring a pretend patient to experience your practice from start to finish and report on their findings. You need to know if the phone operator was short or the nurse was unfriendly. These are small issues that can make a big difference when enough patients feel uncomfortable and decide to seek care elsewhere. A medical practice is just like any other small business in the sense that patients expect a certain level of service. If you don’t exceed or at least meet their expectations, then there are plenty of other providers to try out. We live in a society where we are taught to shop our options. Be prepared to deliver on the level of care you are claiming to provide.

While successfully marketing your own practice is certainly not impossible, the five missteps above prove that it can be difficult. Heed these cautions and you will have a much higher chance of reaping the greatest return on your marketing investments.

*For assistance with your practice’s marketing, contact Brandfocal Consulting for medical marketing solutions including medical website design, search engine optimization (SEO), online marketing, social media consulting, print design, and Physician Liaison programs (i.e. referral building).*