



Practices Trust in Patient-Centered Team to Endure Adversity and Achieve Lasting Success

By Candace Crowe

Years ago I awoke to a National Public Radio story that immediately piqued my interest. *Morning Edition* host Alex Chadwick was interviewing Mark Burnett, creator of a multi-sport, extreme event called the Eco-Challenge.* The competition involves 48 teams who race nearly 24 hours a day for ten straight days through a 300 mile course with only a compass. The course includes incredible challenges: white water rafting, repelling waterfalls, a trek over the highest mountain in Australia, hiking, riding horses, climbing rocks and more. The teams that entered were formidable, tenacious, courageous, dedicated, outfitted with the finest of gear and immensely experienced, high-performance athletes.

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What caught my attention though was a comment from Mr. Burnett on the attributes of those who win the contest. It was not what I expected. “It’s never the fittest, strongest people who win. It’s really the people who are the most flexible and know how to work as a team and who don’t take every setback as a major disaster,” he shared. “It’s the antithesis of a triathlon where the strongest, fittest people win because after a couple of days everybody’s pretty much on their knees, completely exhausted and stressed. It’s a matter of how they deal with that level of stress, tiredness and fatigue. It is really maturity, compassion and teamwork that win every time.”

That one short interview has inspired me to hours of contemplation on how I approach winning in life. In the U.S., quite often we think it’s the strongest or the smartest; those born with luck and talent that consistently are the winners. Though, as illustrated in the Eco-Challenge, in life, the playing field gets leveled after you’ve been in the race awhile. It became clear to me then that I didn’t have to be the strongest, smartest, richest and most talented to win. Instead if I never quit, helped even the weakest member of my team, listened to direct feedback and worked on building great relationships, I would win. You see, everyday life is not at all like a triathlon, but instead more like this Eco-Challenge.

That interview has also influenced my approach to marketing the aesthetic field. What does it take to win at marketing an aesthetic practice? Do certain marketing methods outperform others? Are certain types more appropriate for the medical field? Is there a basic formula for success? Why can we help some practices so much more than others? Much of the success is determined by a proactive, patient-centered marketing plan and the quality of the team that practitioners assemble to enable them to carry out that plan. Ultimately, I believe, success is directly related to the long-term, mutually beneficial relationships established through marketing.

Historically, marketing has been somewhat of a dirty word to the medical field. Traditional marketing didn’t address medicine’s specific needs and seemed insincere and self-seeking. Practitioners relied on word-of-mouth referrals to generate business for themselves and eschewed advertising.

Times have changed and today’s marketplace requires frequent and genuine communication with patients. There is much more competition. Additionally, aesthetic services are intangible. Patients cannot experience or sample what you have to offer until they have already made the decision to have a procedure.

How do you determine the quality of something you cannot see, touch or feel before you buy it? Take for instance, choosing one airline over another. How do you know if the engines are in good working order and well maintained? How do you know that the pilot is trustworthy and will get you to your destination safely?

Similar to airlines, patients use proxy items to determine the quality of your aesthetic services. Patients judge your practice based on what they

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Jeffrey Segal, M.D., J.D., F.A.C.S.
CEO and Founder
Medical Justice
Greensboro, NC

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Vishal Kapoor, M.D.
Plastic Surgeon
Beverly Hills, CA

can see and how their interactions with your practice make them feel. What serves as a substitute sample for you? What are patient perceptions of your practice? You must build a tangible means to show evidence of quality.

The way my industry refers to communicating this perception is called marketing. Marketing at its most basic is just that — all the methods you use to communicate your message to your desired audience. Marketing presents a public image and lets people know what services you offer, your credentials and your level of experience. As much as people like to think otherwise, it doesn't matter how highly educated, how experienced or how state-of-the-art your facility is if it isn't communicated or perceived as such by your patients. How you do this communicating can make all the difference in the world. Great patient education is the key to effectively communicating your practice's message.

“Today, medicine needs to be more of a strategic partnership, as opposed to the paternalistic model of the past,” said Jeffrey Segal, M.D., J.D., F.A.C.S., CEO and founder of Medical Justice (Greensboro, N.C.), an organization that helps physicians deter frivolous malpractice claims. “Patients need to make informed choices, and when they are properly educated, they have better outcomes and are much less likely to sue their provider. Patients need to understand their responsibility.”

Marketing through patient education is proven to be perceived as genuine, committed, honest and non-pushy. It shows that you care enough to provide objective information that will help patients in their decisions. Patient education addresses the patient's needs, cares, concerns and helps build a relationship of trust and confidence in your skill. It empowers the patient to become involved, increases perceived value, patient retention and satisfaction and reduces patient anxiety and malpractice cases. If a patient feels you care, they are less likely to sue you. Education can turn your patients into powerful advocates and increase your number of referrals. As English philosopher, Herbert Spencer expressed, “The greatest aim of education is not knowledge but action.”

While the provider bears the main responsibility in treatment, optimal results cannot be achieved without the patient being prepared and knowing how to care for themselves after. Thus, patient education is fundamental to medicine.

Patient education is an avenue of communication and relationship building that cannot be established through traditional marketing. This is not to say that marketing isn't essential. Just as being an able-bodied athlete is important to the Eco-Challenge, marketing is an integral part of practice success, but to be great, there must be more.

Vishal Kapoor, M.D., a plastic surgeon in the highly competitive area of Beverly Hills, Calif. utilizes both traditional marketing and interactive patient education with great success. “Traditional marketing is important to establish initial contact with patients and make your practice visible,” stated Dr.

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Kapoor. “The problem is, in a competitive market, how do you distinguish your practice from all the others who employ similar marketing strategies? In our practice, during a consultation, the patient care coordinator interviews the patient and discusses their goals. During their consultation we really focus on spending time educating them about the procedure of interest, what to expect prior to the procedure, how the procedure may be performed and what to expect in the recovery period. I find this is the most important portion of the consultation. It minimizes any surprises they may have, and I think just knowing what to expect makes the experience much better for patients.” Based on his observation, Dr. Kapoor finds that patients tend to do better both psychologically and physically when they are made aware of what they should expect.

Carla Moss, the patient care coordinator and office manager for plastic surgeon Richard Moss, M.D. (Plymouth and Quincy, Mass.), feels their patient education program is key in marketing their services to patients. “Providing a patient with accurate information on the procedure they are interested in, pertinent to their own medical history, is one of the most effective ways to build rapport with a patient and allow them to develop confidence in your practice. A patient that is well prepared for surgery, with realistic expectations and goals that have been carefully discussed with the provider, is bound to be a happier patient than one who finds surprises at every corner post-operatively.”

When planning your marketing and patient education, you need to consider offering more than just the standard brochure-type information. Not every patient learns in the same way and consumers are becoming increasingly accustomed to getting their information from the internet and other interactive media. Some practices use a personalized waiting room video with brief descriptions of all their services and some use interactive educational presentations on CD. This information allows patients to feel more in control of the process and makes them more comfortable with their decision to undergo a cosmetic procedure.

Prospective patients have a strong need to learn about the procedures they hope to have. They can learn some of this through reading patient stories or a more formal patient educational video. Give patients the ability to explore what you do and see real examples of how you have helped other people. Most prospective patients crave real patient interviews, and these stories are a great way to guide and educate your audience. These testimonials and other specific information about your practice can all be incorporated into a larger patient education program.

Dr. Moss’s practice uses a mix of patient education resources. “We have a very informative website that includes substantial information on the cosmetic procedures that Dr. Moss performs,” Ms. Moss shared. “We have beautifully designed brochures and CDs for patients containing information on surgical procedures, Dr. Moss and his practice. Dr. Moss and I have written 100% of the copy so we know it is relevant to what a patient can

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expect in our office. We educate the staff so that when patients call, we can answer many of their questions. We also take time to ask the patients questions that will provide us with important information.”

Patients see things differently than providers do, so be sure to approach the message through the patient’s eyes. Be genuine, listen first and then be sure to communicate your unique skill set and knowledge base. How you communicate is as important as what you communicate. Statistics show that from a conversation only 7% of the meaning someone receives is from the words the speaker chooses, 55% is from body language and 38% is from the tone of the speaker’s voice. Most patients make choices based on both emotion and intellect, and will place the greatest importance on what they remember about their personal experience with you as well as your staff. Think for a moment. How would you educate your sister, brother or parent if they asked you about a procedure or treatment?

As a medical professional, you want to maintain the highest level of respect and ethical standards. A strong patient education and marketing program is not created overnight. Your program becomes stronger by defining your goals, constantly staying aware of how your patients perceive you, trying new strategies and reassessing your plan.

Patient education and traditional marketing really go hand in hand if you have the right mix of both and they are executed correctly. A new practice needs traditional marketing to bring patients in the door and get them on the schedule. However, to keep them and turn them into referring agents, a good patient education plan can’t be overlooked. Patient education offers a great return on your investment and is the foundation for building long-term, strong relationships which will make your practice a winning team. ■



Candace Crowe is the president and creative director of Candace Crowe Design, delivering patients to plastic surgeons throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1999. REVENEZ, their suite of expert marketing tools, leads the way in innovation with educational videos for websites, customizable waiting room loops, patient education CDs for the consult and email campaigns. Candace Crowe Design completes a total brand image with web design, search engine optimization, brochures, advertisements and folders. Visit www.candacecrowe.com to learn more.

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