

Top Tips to Keep Your Patients Coming Back to Your Practice

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We've seen this issue time after time: doctors come to us telling us they need assistance with their marketing. Their reasoning: they're not seeing enough patients during the course of the day and believe that marketing will solve this issue.

We're not discounting the value of a great marketing campaign. In fact, we see incredible value in a strong campaign that's bringing your practice the patients you so obviously need. However, this article focuses on what you need to do to KEEP your patients coming back to you long after that campaign works its magic... and after your hard-earned marketing dollars are spent.

1. Make sure your staff is properly answering your phones.

We've all had those days in our practices: the phone's ringing off the hook and you have a line of patients at your check-in and check-out desk. You've spilled coffee on your lap on your way into the office, and life just isn't at its finest. We're going to be honest here: none of that matters to the patient on the phone. Each and every patient in front of you and on the phone deserves to have your team's full attention and not given the abbreviated, shortcut treatment. Make sure that your team properly greets each and every patient, gets their first and last name, as well as a phone number to call them back in case the call gets disconnected and doesn't cut them off or put them on hold without asking. This last one should go without saying, so make sure each and every patient gets the smile they deserve from your team... even over the phone. You must be able to HEAR a smile.

2. Remind patients of their upcoming appointments.

It used to be that this was something that needed to be done through a manual phone call. However, most practice management software systems now offer this service through their technology. Look into your software to see how to implement appointment reminders, either through voicemails, text message reminders or email reminders... or all of the above. This both frees up time for your staff to work on other things AND reduces missed appointments in your office. Finally, while we still have practices ask us whether this is a better alternative than a personal call from a member of the team, our answer is simple. We encourage you to look at how many patients are actually

answering the phone when your team calls. In today's digital age, more people than ever before are sending their calls to voicemail. Finally, if your current practice management software doesn't already have this capability, we encourage you to look into a third-party system, such as the Solutionreach, that speaks directly to your practice management system.

3. Wish patients a happy birthday.

Most of the software systems we discussed above also the ability to send out an automated message to your patients on their birthday. Consider a text or email that's customized with your practice's branding, even including a photo of your team. Everyone likes to be remembered on their birthday, and your patients are no different. All of these tiny touches add up.

4. Put their next appointment on the calendar before they leave the office, even if it's an annual exam.

While this may seem like a given for most of you, you'd be surprised how many practices that we come in contact with aren't doing this, especially if you have a more elective specialty where a patient doesn't NEED to return on a certain date. Putting your patient's next appointment on the calendar keeps them coming back to YOU, ensuring them a spot when they need it next.

5. Sell private label products to serve as marketing for your practice.

This works better for varied specialties. However, if you're in a specialty that would benefit from private label skincare products, such as dermatology or plastic surgery (or another specialty that does focus on the cosmetic side of the practice), or a specialty that would benefit from a private label supplement line, we encourage you to consider this as a marketing AND revenue tool. Even private label garments would fit in well with your practice! Consider both from a branding perspective, as well as looking at those opportunities as permanent business cards for your practice.



6. Strengthen your online review process.

When your patients are grateful and appreciative of your services, stretch that appreciation by asking them to leave a review online. Whether it's about your practice's medical assistant with excellent bedside manner or the doctor's incredible knowledge, potential new patients see the practice as a whole team. We encourage practices to have a separate review card to distribute to patients, letting them know how they can review your office on Google Plus, Healthgrades, RealSelf, Facebook, Yelp and more. Have that card ready to hand out to each patient on a moment's notice by any member of your team, and make sure that cards include specific URLs to your review sites.

7. Keep in touch on social media.

Just like we mentioned having a postcard to distribute to patients to give your review sites, have signage in your office encouraging each patient to follow your practice on your social media sites. A member of your team should continue to post relevant content to your practice's social media accounts in an ongoing fashion, not just a "Happy Friday!" message once a month. Post about industry related news that's relevant to patients, celebrate staff milestones and birthdays together and invite patients to come in for a specific check-up or treatment. Always keep in mind that all responses should remain HIPAA compliant!

8. Send out email marketing on a monthly basis (if not twice a month).

We encourage practices to keep patients abreast of the practice's news via social media, and also sending directly to their inboxes. While the content differs depending on your specialty, we know certain seasons are ripe with ideas. August

means "Back to School," October brings the "Fall Season," November brings a list of "What We're Thankful For" and December/January bring the "Holidays and New Year," in addition to the end of the insurance year for those of you taking insurance. Craft your calendar towards what you'll plan to cover months ahead of time to be sure that your content is in place. Be sure you confirm each patient's email address and insurance information (if applicable) with every patient phone call and visit, in case anything has changed.

9. Keep customer service in mind!

Yes, you're a medical practice. But you're also a business. Each business comes with customer service, and your office shouldn't be any different. We find that the number one reason a patient is likely to leave a medical practice, other than insurance changes, is that the details of customer service is ignored. Is your practice constantly running an hour behind? Is your front desk staff rude to your patients? Are they calling prescriptions into the wrong pharmacy when a patient has multiple pharmacies on file? Are your providers making the patients feel rushed during their appointments, with one foot literally out the door before questions are done being asked? All of these things are important when it comes to a patient feeling "the love" for your practice.

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