Nobody wants a sinus ‘lift,’ and sinus elevations aren’t commodities

Periodically, I’ll see a second opinion consultation where a patient is “shopping” his sinus elevation as if it were an item he would run by Walmart to grab on his way home from dropping the kids at soccer.

How did we arrive at this point where for some doctors a sinus “lift” procedure is a commodity their patient will go to another doctor to price compare?

Having performed my share of successful sinus “lifts,” I can attest that few patients come in asking for one. For those who do present for a second opinion, the procedure was invariably presented in ways that are inconsistent with predictable case acceptance.

The previous doctor usually spent lots of time discussing the virtues of the sinus graft and the sinus “lift,” procedure. If the patient is confused with case presentation and very likely frightened the patient. The type of conversation where the minutiae of consent is discussed at the inappropriate time does nothing to highlight the doctor’s unique skill and methods of treatment. Without just that, the service is easily pushed into the commodity category in the patient’s mind and the price comparison game begins.

Here’s a story regarding commodities: As a part-time clinician, I still attend clinical case presentations and very likely frightened the patient. The type of conversation where the minutiae of consent is discussed at the inappropriate time does nothing to highlight the doctor’s unique skill and methods of treatment. Without just that, the service is easily pushed into the commodity category in the patient’s mind and the price comparison game begins.

One member selling residential HVAC units to homeowners in Southern California says: “I don’t watch the news, I don’t read the papers. The biggest thing I fight is the mentality of my team watching that stuff. Sales is nothing more than a state of mind, and I just finished my best quarter yet.” You can be assured that many of his competitors are blaming the economy, customers, the commoditization of HVAC units and the recession for their problems versus their lack of action and looking for answers. Even those businesses in attendance that are far more commoditized then dentistry report less of a problem with their individual companies over their average peers.

How can all this be? Well, what they all have in common is all have taken specific steps to structure their marketing and sales (case acceptance) process in ways that helps remove them from the pricing game, and we as dentists must mimic this approach if we wish to win against our commodity problem.

Here are some specific commodity-fighting strategies adapted to us as dentists from these other business models:

1) Create a category of one just for your practice. If a practice can’t be compared to another, the commodity aspect goes away.

2) Become more adept at case presentation, problem-solution marketing, and using a patient qualifying system. An effective case acceptance system reduces the patient’s belief that you are a commodity. Qualifying systems determine whether someone gets to take up your valuable time and eliminates most who see you purely as a commodity.

3) Understand that patients crave simplicity, not complexity, in their dealings with you regardless of whether it’s one extraction, crown, sinus “lift” or a mouth full of implants.

If we ignore the need to refine our marketing and case acceptance process to help cure this “all dentists are equal” thinking that many patients have developed and simply hope it goes away on its own, this is irrational behavior on our part and puts the blame for commoditization squarely on our shoulders.

The smartest in the profession are taking action to remove sinus “lifts” and their entire practices from the commoditization game. What are you up to?

About the author

Dr. James McAnally is CEO of Big Case Marketing, a global leader in providing turn-key marketing for the complex case patient and in teaching a trademarked sales system to dentists who treat elective reconstructive and dental implant patients. Big Case Marketing doctors are on three continents and programs are conducted worldwide.

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