No more spaghetti marketing

By Angela Weber, OrthoSynetics

Spaghetti marketing refers to advertising with no clear plan — simply throwing ideas against the wall to see what sticks. A recent AAO survey reported that 50 percent of orthodontists are launching new marketing initiatives such as direct mail, print or Web advertising programs. The question is: Are they prepared to enter the business of marketing?

As a new marketer with a limited budget, you cannot afford a spaghetti marketing plan. With more than 10 years marketing experience in the orthodontic industry, I would like to touch on some key points that will give your marketing program a much higher success rate.

Deciding what to do

Direct mail, print campaigns, pay-per-click, search engine optimization — Oh my! With so many advertising options available, what is a practitioner to do?

My answer: A little bit of everything will go a long way.

The worst thing you can do is put all of your eggs in one basket. While orthodontists have typically relied on referrals, many are realizing they cannot afford to have the fate of their practice lie in the hands of the referring dentist or patient, especially when dentists are keeping more of the business in-house and not referring out to orthodontists.

The goal is to cover all of your bases in a few key areas: community, referrals, Internet, direct marketing and internal marketing. When you have a consistent and integrated plan that covers each of these key areas, you can sit back and watch your marketing plan produce like a well-planted garden.

A strategic plan that complements each marketing tactic will elevate your practice to a power position in the marketplace.

Out with the old and in with the new?

Well, not necessarily.

I am a firm believer that traditional “tried and true methods” in marketing still have a place in your marketing plan. Television, direct mailer, print and other traditional advertising all have their strengths and weaknesses. An understanding of which to do and when will serve you well when trying to achieve maximum response.

That said, now is also the time to get on board with more current marketing practices such as an online marketing campaign. With so many people receiving their news and current events on the Web in place of more traditional venues, it only makes sense to include Web marketing in your toolbox.

Once you have determined what advertising you are going to do, you may think you are all set.

Not yet.

Advertising is the most expensive form of attracting a new patient. Avoid these classic mistakes that can cost you money.

No. 1: It’s not as easy as it looks

Now that you have decided to implement a marketing campaign, who will develop and implement that campaign? Your marketing campaign will be a big investment for your practice, and you need to make sure you have an experienced marketer with proven success running it. Don’t leave it to chance — make sure you have the right person doing the job.

No. 2: Make sure your team is prepared

Trust that advertising does work but know there is a cost associated with each call generated. Ask yourself if your team is prepared to sell your services and convert those calls into new patient appointments.

Typically, a referral call from a general dentist is a smoother sell, while a call derived from an advertising campaign initiative needs more convincing. While your conversion rate is much lower on direct marketing, as an average, that does not have to be the case if you know in advance what you are trying to achieve.

Make sure your entire team understands the differences between these two call types and adjusts accordingly. You have to be prepared to close all of your leads.

No. 3: Are you talking to me?

Make sure you know the demographics of your audience or target market.

Not sure how to define your target market? Take a good look around your office. How old are your patients? How old are their parents? Do they both work or do they have a stay-at-home parent? Scan your parking lot to see what types of cars they drive.

Your target market data exists right before your eyes. Once you know who you are talking to, consider where and how you can reach them.

Advertising that is too general and speaks to no one in particular does not carry the same impact as a targeted, audience-specific message.

No. 4: Tell them what you want

When developing your advertising campaign, make sure you have a specific call-to-action that motivates your potential patients and has an easy follow-up. You need to tell your future patients what benefits they will receive by starting treatment at your practice.

Your message needs to be simple, clear and easy to follow. Be aware of your medium when you develop your call-to-action; for example, a message online will be structured differently than a message intended for print publications.

No. 5: Measure up

Advertising is a great way to generate new leads that your practice can turn into new patients. But it is imperative to make sure that you are tracking which key area of your advertising is driving the leads. This will help you measure your return on investment as well as tailor your advertising budget to the most successful media to reach your target audience.

Marketing your practice is one of the most costly, and potentially most successful, things your practice can do. I hope these steps help you to better develop your targeted marketing campaign.

Welcome to the world of advertising! It can be tremendous, rewarding when it is executed properly.

For a limited time, OrthoSynetics would like to offer you the opportunity to have your marketing questions answered by one of our industry experts. Call Angela Weber today at (888) 622-7645, or join the “No More Spaghetti Marketing” club at www.nospaghettimarketing.com, and we will send the “Planning Guide to Successful Marketing” directly to your e-mail address.

About the author

Angela Weber is the director of marketing for OrthoSynetics (OSI), a business service company in the orthodontic and dental industries. She has more than 10 years experience in healthcare marketing working with practices throughout the United States. She knows her way around a P&L statement; the focus of her marketing strategies is to make a positive impact on the practice’s profitability. OSI has helped numerous practices achieve marketing success through strategy, creativity and implementation. Expertise includes generating new patient revenue through Internet, mass media and traditional marketing efforts.

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