

Impact

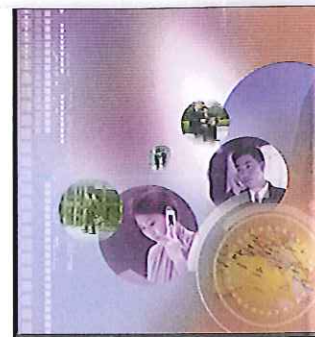
SEPTEMBER 2009

Direct Access, Community-Based Marketing & PR

FEATURES:

- New Trends in Practice Marketing
- The Art of Differentiation
- Successful Marketing at Public Events





Successful Marketing at Public Events

By Sarah Walmsley, PT

Executive Summary

In the age of direct access, community-based marketing can deliver fast, impressive, and measurable results. Read this article to learn practical steps to help you boost this part of your marketing programs.

There are many marketing methods that owners routinely use to grow their practice. Relationship building with referral sources, advertising, direct mail, and e-marketing seem to be the most popular. However, in our technology-laden, fast-paced world, who doesn't enjoy a real handshake, a look in the eye, and a simple conversation? People are looking for a connection. As physical therapists, we should excel at face-to-face marketing. We are masters of gaining trust, developing rapport, and displaying confidence with our patients—we just need to let those powers loose in the community and watch the new patients come in!

Community-based marketing can be done in many ways: holding seminars at your facilities, offering “lunch and learns” (seminars for companies during lunchtime) to businesses, hosting free screenings, participating in health fairs/trade shows, and attending networking events. The last three are where the best contacts can be made and should be integrated into your marketing plan on a regular basis. Don't tell anyone, but they are also the most fun!

Free Screenings

Free screenings can be performed at many different locations: gyms, bike or running stores, athletic clubs, and support groups are just a few examples. Setting up the screens can be as easy as introducing yourself to a person in charge, explaining the complimentary service you would like to

provide, and pointing out the benefit to them. Tell them that you are willing to supply flyers to help advertise the event within their facility and that you will distribute these flyers in the community to help promote the event. Most businesses are happy to have their name or logo on a flyer or on your website, as they gain free publicity this way.

Try to set the date at least three to four weeks out to allow you time to create the flyer and to post a sign-up sheet at the facility. Give each person who signs up a fifteen-minute time slot. Pick a day and time when the facility or store is at its busiest. Get the location's staff to talk up the event and encourage people to sign up. Explain what you will be doing and make sure they are aware of how beneficial this is to their customers. Don't forget to check in regularly to see how sign-ups are going.

On the day of the event, arrive at least fifteen minutes early to set up your area—at minimum, you need a chair—however, the best-case scenario is to have a portable massage table to allow you to screen people effectively. Wear a staff shirt and name tag and bring pens, screening forms (allow you to obtain contact information and give you an idea of the area of their concern), and any promotional material you have, such as brochures and business cards. Consider taking your clinic schedule book with you so that you can be ready to schedule people for direct access evaluations right on the spot. Bring enough staff to perform the screenings; no one likes waiting in line.

Be confident and professional during the screening period of two to three hours. Ask people, “What hurts?” “Any aches or pains today you want to talk to us about?” Take the approach that everyone can benefit from physical therapy; everyone has poor movement patterns, decreased range of motion, or bad posture. These are people you can persuade to come to physical therapy to avoid long-term problems.

Bringing a physician along with you to assist with the screenings can be a win-win. In a challenging economic climate, physicians are eager to get out and touch base with the public. Screening prospects together provides some great one-on-one time with physicians and allows them to see you in action.

The next step is follow-up. This is often overlooked, yet it is the most important part. Follow-up for any event consists of the following:

- ▶ Writing thank-you cards to the facility where you staged the screening
- ▶ Entering contact information for the people you screened or met into a database
- ▶ Calling the people you screened to get them scheduled at your practice
- ▶ If you promised information to someone, getting it to them in the first week
- ▶ Setting up the next event

Trade Shows and Health Fairs

The procedures for trade shows and health fairs procedures are very similar to those for screenings. You must research the shows/fairs in your community. You can do a web search, ask other local professionals (chiropractors especially seem to know all the local events), and read the event calendar listings in your local paper. Some of these events are free to participants, and at some you need to pay for your spot. Ask the following questions to determine if it is worth your while to participate:

1. How many years has this fair been running?
2. What is its expected attendance? Last year's attendance?
3. What population is the fair marketed to, and how is it being marketed?
4. How many other vendors will there be, and how many other physical therapy practices are exhibiting?
5. What is the cost? Does it include a table, two chairs, tablecloth? Advertisements? Electricity if needed?
6. What determines where your booth will be located? You want to get a high-traffic location and may need to pay more for it.

With this information, you can decide whether to participate. If you decide to, remember that you can always negotiate prices or upgrades—especially if the date of the event is close and the organizers are desperate for vendors.

On the day of the show, bring all of your tradeshow materials. Typically, they include a tablecloth, banner, brochures, business cards, promotional giveaway items, and either a tabletop display or a vertical screen to place near the table. It is wise to have a small cart, as often the distance from your car to the site is very long! Think ahead: Do you want to offer free screenings? Do you want to raffle items? If so, you should have a sign

advertising this. These two activities allow you to capture people's names and contact information.

You should also bring two people with you. This is important for networking with other vendors. You can gain invaluable information simply by introducing yourself to others and finding out what their companies do. Often you will get introductions to people they know and you can develop some cross-promotional relationships. For example, at a health fair I met a woman who ran the local chapter of the Arthritis Foundation. Since that meeting, our practice has placed an article about direct access in their newsletter, teamed up with them for a local walk, and currently is trying to get a board member position for our CEO. See where a simple conversation and good follow-up can lead?

Networking Events

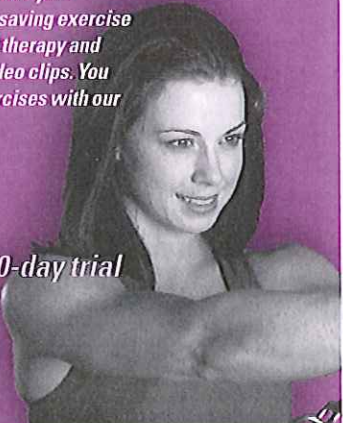
Nowhere is expanding connections easier than at networking events. These are informal business and social gatherings scheduled for the sole purpose of helping businesses work together to make each other successful. Networking events are listed in local papers, community magazines, and online on at meetup.com and similar sites. Your local Rotary Club, Chamber of

SUCCESSFUL MARKETING, continued on page 23

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Commerce, and other professional clubs regularly host events that are very worthwhile.

Before you attend a networking event, define your purpose and set goals; for example, to gain information to schedule free seminars and to make five meaningful contacts. Show up early, as these events usually do not last long. This will give you an opportunity to talk to the organizers, who may be able to introduce you to key people. Create and practice your “elevator speech” (a thirty-second statement of what you do and what contacts you are trying to make) and bring plenty of business cards. When you receive a card, write a bit on the back to remind

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you about the person you just met. It is difficult at the end of the night to remember everyone you spoke to. Beware of the people who are happy to talk to you all night! Politely explain your goal of meeting five to ten people and let them know they are only number three. I have found it useful to bring another staff member if the group is large, in order to maximize contacts.

Continue to go to networking events put on by the same organizers. This will help you build relationships quicker as you start to see the same people at each of them. Become a “connector”—someone who is familiar with a lot of people and can introduce parties who may help each other. Although this introduction may not benefit you directly, people always remember a good deed and will find a way to repay you. Again, remember to follow up the next day.

Everyday One-On-One Marketing

When I go to an event, I almost always gain a referral simply by stating what I do for a living. Everyone knows someone (if not themselves) who has pain or a functional movement problem. Since this so effective, I turn every day into a networking event. I tactfully tell everyone what I do and how I can help: my hairdresser, the person grimacing while walking up the stairs, the trainers at my gym, and even the older woman whose cane is adjusted too high—they all get my card, because you never know. And that is the beauty of face-to-face marketing. ■

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