



marketing minute

The Power of the Printed Word Use paper and ink to improve your image and build traffic for your practice. The right stationery, brochures, and newsletters can be invaluable and economical marketing tools.

BY JULIE K. SILVER, MD



There is something special about the printed word that the spoken word

often lacks—a certain authority and credibility. Even though most of us are wise enough not to believe everything we read, as physicians, we rely on the printed word for much of our information. Similarly, patients who are anxious about their health aggressively seek more information on the conditions that we might have had only a short time to explain in the office. Unfortunately, patients often turn to unreliable sources of information (e.g. the Internet or sensationalized media reports), because these

are readily available.

This leaves the door wide open for physicians to use a variety of printed materials to both educate existing patients and to attract new patients to their practices. I first realized what a wonderful service this was to patients when I was sitting in a waiting room at the Mayo Clinic just prior to taking my oral boards. The reception area was filled with brochures, newsletters, and fliers that covered a plethora of diagnoses. The materials were all profes-

sionally produced and the information was credible, succinct, and easy to read. I imagined that a patient who was anxiously waiting to see the doctor might pick up one of the brochures and, if nothing else, at least feel relieved that he was in the right place. I also imagined that after reading the brochure the patient would have confidence that the doctor he was about to entrust with his health was indeed an expert in his particular condition.

As I began to build my own

practice, I thought back on my physician mentors and preceptors. The most successful and empathic physicians had all developed unique ways of communicating with patients that nearly always included written materials. Not that these doctors were all writers in their limited spare time. Many of them used pre-printed materials that are readily available from local medical societies, the AMA, and a number of commercial publishers. Invariably, these pre-printed brochures and the like were combined with personalized information about the doctor—sometimes just a business card and other times as part of a large folder with a dozen different materials.

In order to optimize whatever resources you have for

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printed materials, consider their purpose and what they can do for you.

Business Cards and Stationery

Business cards and stationery are standard printed materials for physicians. Why not have them look impressive? After all, this is often the first image a patient or potential patient has of you.

If you have the inclination and resources to be creative, consider having your own logo designed. Your materials can also show distinction with the materials used to create them. Business cards consisting of mylar or colored plastic will stand out. Silver or gold accents add a formal touch. Laminated, oversized, and fold-over cards are also options.

Your stationery should complement your business cards. Always use a good paper stock to show quality. Keep in mind that both your business cards and stationery will be seen by many people including other health-care professionals who may be referral sources, as well as patients and colleagues.

When designing your business cards and stationery, it is important to have all of your contact information printed on them. When choosing a typeface, choose one that reflects your style but is easy to read. Avoid ALL CAPITAL LETTERS AS THEY ARE HARD TO READ. Also avoid overly fancy scripts, small or thin letters, and neon colors that are distracting. For some great design ideas check out the book *Print's Best Letterheads & Business Cards* (North Light Books) which features winning designs from *Print Magazine's* National Design Competition.

Fliers

Fliers are generally one-page printed materials that can be read at a glance and are designed to establish curiosity. Fliers can also be used to educate pa-

tients. For instance, in my practice, I routinely perform a number of office procedures including several different types of injections. I use fliers to educate patients about the types of injections I am recommending for them, the purpose of the injections, the medications I plan to use, and the potential risks of the procedures. Once they have read the appropriate flier, I verbally review the risks and benefits of the proposed treatment. These fliers expedite the consent process and give patients something to take home in case a spouse or other family member has questions.

In my experience, patients are often relieved to read the flier because it signifies that although this is a new procedure to them, it is not new to me. In short, a simple flier helps establish my credibility and experience with a proposed procedure and at the same time educates the patient.

Fliers can also be used to make announcements. For example, if you are extending your office hours for patients' convenience, you might want to post fliers in your waiting room or even do a mailing to existing patients. Similarly, if you are giving a talk at a local fitness club, you might want to announce it via fliers.

Keep in mind that fliers work best when they can be read at a glance and do not contain too much detail or small print. As with all printed materials, it is important to include pertinent contact information.

Brochures

Brochures are more detailed and sophisticated than fliers, so they offer the opportunity to explain diagnoses and treatment options as well as to answer questions. Yet, effective brochures are easy to read in a short period of time. Brochures that are

available in the waiting room can alleviate patients' fears and anxieties before their scheduled appointments. Brochures also offer the opportunity to present references and to provide details about your training and credentials.

One of the nice things about brochures is that there are many different types available for purchase from medical societies, specialty organizations, and medical publishers.

If you prefer to produce your own custom brochures, desktop publishing makes it easy to create brochures for a fraction of the cost of having them designed and produced by a professional. However, marketing experts are loath to recommend this route, because poorly designed brochures have the exact opposite effect you want. Poorly designed materials can damage your image and will discourage patients from seeking your care, so it may be worthwhile to hire a professional to design and produce your personalized brochures.

As with all printed materials, both the content and presentation of the brochure are critical. Raleigh Pinsky, author of *101 Ways to Promote Yourself*, lists some common mistakes that will sabotage your brochure. These include using too much running text and not enough bulleted information, using too many big words or complicated medical terms, and forgetting to put in contact information.

Newsletters

Newsletters are a great way to market yourself and your practice. They offer an interesting and detailed method of letting people know who you are and what you are doing. Ronnie Lipton is an expert in newsletter design who has taught newsletter publishing at a number of institutions including George Washington University. Lipton empha-

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sizes that, “An effective newsletter—one that marries the message with the content and the design—has the power to cut through the competition and attract new patients, while creating loyalty among established patients.”

Not surprisingly, marketing industry research reveals that newsletters are generally read more often and with more interest than most other printed marketing materials. This is in part because newsletters are viewed as legitimate informational material rather than advertising. This makes newsletters a wonderful way for physicians to improve their name recognition and to provide a service for patients and potential patients.

Before deciding to embark on publishing a newsletter, Polly Pattison, a graphic designer specializing in newsletter design suggests, “developing a mission statement.” Pattison recommends that you ask yourself, “What is the purpose of [the newsletter]?” Next decide how often you want to publish a newsletter. Pattison encourages people to be realistic about their time and resources—quarterly, semi-annually, and annually are all options.

Both Pattison and Lipton agree that producing an effective newsletter takes knowledge and skill. Pattison says, “The written word is always the bottom line, but your words are worthless if the reader is not engaged.” Pattison goes on to warn doctors, “Don’t let your staff or receptionist design your newsletter—go to an expert.” Lipton concurs and says, “If you choose to do it yourself, at least find a printer you can trust and listen carefully.” Pattison and Lipton each wrote a chapter in Elaine Floyd’s book *Marketing with Newsletters* which is an excellent reference for anyone interested in publishing a newsletter.

The printed word is a powerful tool. Quality printed materials have the ability to improve your name recognition, build

patient loyalty, and establish your expertise and credibility in your chosen field of medicine. Printed materials that are exceptional in both design and content also can help you to educate existing patients and to attract new patients. Keep in mind that printed materials work best if they don’t just advertise your services but focus on educating people about their health. You know they are effective if people keep them or pass them on to friends or relatives rather than throw them away. Even if you take advantage of the printed materials, such as brochures, which can be readily purchased, you will need to develop some customized printed materials. Since producing your own quality printed materials takes time and money, carefully consider what will work best for you in your current practice setting. If you need help, there are experts who are willing to consult with you at every stage. ■

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