



## TAKE THE LEAD.

Internet Marketing Strategies for Success

# 2015 BEST MARKETING PRACTICES

By Gregg Nell



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To market effectively and get maximum returns on your marketing dollar, you must first identify your target audience. As a vein practice, are you marketing to consumers? Referral physicians? Both? Start by clarifying your most promising target market(s). These are markets that are most likely to have an interest in the clinical services that you provide.

If you are marketing sclerotherapy treatments, your target audience might be best reached with a direct-to-consumer approach. If you are marketing varicose vein treatments, you will target both consumers and existing/potential referral physicians. So ask yourself ... who is your primary target audience? and do you have multiple target audiences? In addition, make sure that the marketing message you send specifically addresses each particular target audience and what's important to them. The same message may not be nearly as appropriate and effective when sent to different audiences.

In a crowded field like venous disease treatment, successful marketing campaigns communicate what you do and deliver convincing arguments that you are the best possible provider to deliver the expected clinical results. What's important to the caregiver of a prospective patient, the spouse of a potential patient, or the referring physician of a potential patient ... may each be quite different from what's most important to the patient himself/herself. Focus on the doctor-patient relationship!

When marketing to existing and potential referral sources, you also have to keep in mind who your target audience is as well. It's not always the referring physician. It can often be their staff if they serve in a gatekeeper capacity for their practice. The staff that comes into contact with patients in the office directly influence patients and affect their decisions. Staff could include a referral coordinator, patient registration personnel, medical assistants, nurses, physician assistants and others.

### INTERNAL MARKETING

A vein practice typically budgets a significant amount of money annually to get the phone to ring. If you follow the correct clinical and administrative protocols, you should consistently convert initial

phone calls into appointments. But when patients visit your office, are you meeting or exceeding their expectations?

Your reception area is an immediate reflection of your practice. Put yourself in the place of a potential new patient and ask yourself ... if you were a new patient stepping into your office for the first time, and looking at the reception area while walking up to the reception desk, is your practice meeting your own expectations?

Is your reception area inviting? When you walk up to the reception desk, does the receptionist greet you warmly? Does it feel like the type of practice that is happy to see you? Or is it a bit on the cold side? Do you have to tap on the counter to get someone to respond? And when someone does respond, do they offer a warm greeting or matter-of-factly say "sign in please?"

Make sure that your reception area is consistent with the professional, warm and inviting image that you want to portray to your patients. Look at your reception area as a piece of your marketing puzzle – don't refer to it as a waiting area or a waiting room. It's a reception area. People don't like to wait.

Even when you strive to minimize the amount of time patients need to wait, there will inevitably be times that patients are sitting in your reception area. During these times you have a captive audience that you can market to in a variety of ways. Not only do you want them to feel as comfortable with you as possible, you want to use that time you have their captive attention to your best advantage. You want to reinforce in their minds that you are the best vein practice for them. Perhaps even more importantly, make sure they know all of your practice's capabilities – all of the treatment options that you provide.

Oftentimes, a patient will not know about all the services that you offer because they came to you for one particular treatment option only. Make sure you have marketing tools in place. Begin with what they can see and pick up and read in your reception area. This can be your first step towards making sure your patients know about all of your treatment options.

This opens a world of possibilities allowing them to take advantage of other treatment options offered – clinical services they are not using now and probably never even associated with your practice. It also opens an even larger door of possibility for them to refer others they know when the topic comes up. They may even think of some people they already know who are in the market for some of your services as they become aware of them – their friends, family, co-workers and neighbors.

## EXTERNAL MARKETING

These are the media that reach prospective patients that don't know you. Advertising in newspapers, radio, television, billboards, etc. target an audience that needs to know that you provide an answer for their vein care needs. There's little margin for error in an external media budget that is expected to produce a measurable return-on-investment.

## HIRE A PHYSICIAN LIAISON

Marketing to existing and potential referral physicians is a process that requires patience and tremendous planning. Activity breeds results. It's not as easy as just taking a PCP out to lunch and expecting immediately that they will refer all of their patients to you. It simply doesn't work that way. It's a process of continually demonstrating your clinical competencies to existing and potential referring practices so they learn to trust you and your practice as the best vein care specialist to treat their patient base.

The main purpose of adding a physician liaison to your practice is to reach out and meet referring practices in your immediate service area. The physician liaison can be a full-time or part-time position. It is critical to the success of this position that the community outreach initiatives remain consistent and provide value so that you separate yourself from other vein practices.

Think strategically about referral patterns. Do you know who refers to your vein practice, who doesn't and why? Ask your front desk staff to generate a weekly or monthly referring physician report by procedure. Which physicians currently refer and which types of cases do they send? Do the non-referrers know about all the conditions you treat or has a patient of theirs experienced a less-than-favorable visit to your office? Identifying the reasons why these physicians do and do not refer can provide the foundation for improving relationships and referral patterns.

Identify other vein practices courting your referral physicians. Success is not achieved by ignoring your competitors but rather by anticipating competitive issues and influences so you can always have a proactive plan and strategy for staying ahead of your competition.

Referring physicians often report dissatisfaction with specialists who are slow or late in providing consultation reports. Review your internal processes to make sure communication flows back to the referring physician within 48 hours of seeing patients. Before and after pictures are a good idea to support your clinical skills in the referring physician's mind to encourage additional referrals. Use case studies to bring attention to additional benefits of vein treatments.

## DIGITAL MARKETING

From websites and social media tools, to patient portals and mobile apps, digital marketing is a mainstream channel for marketing, advertising and public relations. Exactly how you use the muscle of the digital freeway can be highly effective and profitable, or a huge waste of time and money.

In the United States, Internet users conduct 5 billion searches every month directly on major search sites. A 2014 Harris Interactive Poll reported that more than 80 percent of consumers now research health information online. Imagine how many of those Internet searches are actually prospective patients in your service area looking for vein care treatment options. Obviously, you can't take advantage of any of this traffic if you don't have a well-designed practice website. If that's the case, now would be the time to get one.

## PAID SEARCH

Pay-Per-Click advertising empowers your vein practice to reach potential patients at the exact moment they're looking for vein care treatment options. While it typically takes months or even years of hard work to be listed anywhere in the top 10 of organic (free) search results, you can start attracting patients immediately by utilizing pay per click ads.

Most search engines have joined major networks headed up by Google, Yahoo and MSN. In other words, once you contract with each of these providers, you will get immediate access to hundreds of search engines, and will be visible to almost all searchers. Each network operates differently, and there are specific strategies that work for each of them. In fact, an entire industry has quietly grown up around pay per click.

- You can target your ads geographically, so you'll only pay for clicks from prospective patients in your area.
- Keywords are the name of the game. All the networks have keyword generators, but real success lies in brainstorming every possible phrase searchers might use to find you.
- Ads need to be direct response oriented. Ideally, you should have a powerful headline, an offer and call to action.
- Bidding amounts for most private practices will generally range from about ten cents to a couple of dollars per click. When possible, bid more on keywords most relevant to your practice.
- You should make sure visitors are directed to a page on your website where it is obvious that you are local. Web surfers are impatient, and will quickly move on if you don't have a local address prominently displayed on your website.
- Tracking is key. You need to track results and continually optimize your campaign.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Sponsoring an event is a great way to get your name out into the world and forge bonds of trust to your practice. Most communities have events happening all of the time in need of corporate sponsors. Check with your local newspaper for upcoming events. Alternatively, giving of your time or services to help in your community, even if it is unrelated to your practice, increases your connection to your patients/referral physicians and their faith and loyalty to you.

## EMAIL MARKETING

This is the easiest way to target your existing and potential patients. With assistance, it is easy to create, send, and track email newsletters and surveys. Email marketing helps remind your patients to come back and even more importantly, encourage potential new patients to contact your office. Email marketing places you in your patient's inboxes, keeping you in touch with patients who want to hear from you. With tracking software available, you can see who opened your emails, who forwarded them to friends, and even who you need to resend them to.

## REMEMBERING BIRTHDAYS

Birthday cards to patients are certainly a strategy that your patients will appreciate. Birthdays are very personal. They'll appreciate the fact you remembered them. It's also an opportunity to place your practice in the forefront of their minds for additional services. At the end of each month, identify all the patients whose birthdays are coming up in the next month. Then execute a campaign targeting them with a letter or card, and an offer for your services during the month of their birthday.

For your referral sources, I suggest getting the birthdays of your top referral sources, especially for your few “A” referral sources that represent most of your referrals. Your physician liaison should be able to get this information from their staff. Remember to acknowledge them on their birthday. If you provide a birthday gift, something personal based on their interests will be better than just a standard gift basket. For example, if you have a referral source that you know is a golfer, get them a gift that’s golf-related. Or if you know they enjoy a certain restaurant, give a gift card from this particular restaurant.

Finally, remember that it’s not only the doctor who can influence and refer the patient. It can also be their staff and mid-level providers, such as nurses, MAs, NPs, PAs, and front office staff. Be sure to remember their birthdays as well and let them know how much you appreciate their trust.

## **MATCH YOUR MEDIA TO YOUR PATIENTS’ PREFERENCES**

Media selection has a lot to do with the age demographic of your potential patients. Older target audiences get their information differently, and from different sources, than younger target audiences.

It’s important not only to have a presence on the web to reach both generations, but also to have proper search engine optimization and even use Pay-Per-Click so that these generations will actually get to your website. And once they do, you’re going to need a professional, comprehensive and interactive website that will satisfy their thirst for information.

So with this in mind, remember to target the delivery of your message so that it’s appropriate for your target audience. And if you have multiple target audiences, don’t have all your eggs in one basket. Spread your marketing budget across multiple media to reach multiple generations.

## **GETTING STARTED**

The tips above are great starting points, but like all things digital marketing, it’s easier said than done. The two greatest social media struggles – especially for small- to medium-size practices – are maintaining a relevant presence over time, and staying tech savvy.

Working with a digital marketing firm can take a lot of the stress away from jumping in head first.

Social media consultants are paid to know when Facebook changes their algorithm and what it means for your practice. They’re experts at crafting messaging that will speak to your demographic today, and two years from now, as trends shift. This is what WE do day in and day out.

Think beyond traditional marketing efforts and give your practice a digital boost with social media. **VTN**

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