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The Success Profile—

A Guide to Telling, Not Selling

By Tracy L. Drumm

It's a simple fact: No one wants to be sold to. When it comes to advertisements and promotions, consumers are inundated with hundreds of messages a day. From text message alerts to Twitter promotions, there is more competition than ever vying for your market's attention and hard-earned dollars. So how do you remain competitive and ensure your message is heard in a market screaming with claims, including some that tout unrealistic results?

Simply put, you revert to one of the oldest methods of communicating: You tell a story. No one wants to hear a sales pitch, but everyone loves to hear narratives of people's journeys and personal triumphs. It is the basic premise of reality TV and even the secret behind the explosion of social media. Modern consumers are looking for more than swift slogans and catchy sales jargon. They seek and ultimately respond to communication and marketing that is realistic, engaging and relationship-driven.

In what could be called a patient profile campaign, you can restructure your approach to reaching patients by sharing the stories of those who are advocates for your practice. These profiles can feature nonsurgical or surgical treatments, creating a platform from which

your practice ambassadors can speak. Profiles bridge the results patients see with how they feel following their procedures. Before-and-after pictures are effective at showcasing physical results; however, the emotional transformation that takes place for a patient is typically absent from these photos. For your marketing efforts, the chapters of the story you want to tell consist of before-and-after photographs, a real-life after picture and answers to interview questions.

The how-to

Begin with the end goal in mind, and identify the top treatments you want showcased. Next, find five to 10 patients thrilled with their treatment outcomes. When contacting these patients, let them know their results were so great that your office has chosen them to be among a select few to be featured in a campaign by the practice. Many patients are flattered to be asked, and even if they decline they typically appreciate being considered.

Once a patient agrees, identify her best before-and-after photos and store them for later. Next, provide the patient with a photo consent form to sign and have her send it back, providing the necessary image release documentation. Then instruct participating patients to e-mail a photograph of themselves looking and feeling their best at a recent event, on vacation or even at home. The photo should reflect how patients feel after treatments.

For the interview portion, your staff can e-mail the patients questions, or phone interviews can be conducted. For the latter option, a phone call recording service can serve as documentation of the call and also be used to create audio testimonials. Interview questions should start at the beginning of the patients' journeys, inquiring about how and why they decided to use your services. Make sure to ask how they felt the day of their procedures, as well as immediately after. Then move into post-treatment

ABSTRACT:

Selling your services to new patients can be extremely difficult, so creating a marketing strategy that tells the story of your practice through past patients can be a wise move. By offering potential patients an idea of what they can expect and gain from working with your practice by building past patient profiles, you begin to create a dialogue with them that is a major part of today's communication system.

By **showcasing** the voice of those who have used your services, you are taking an active approach to engaging in the new era of **patient education**.

Their voice

A secondary value to educating potential and current clientele through past patients is that you are creating peer-to-peer communication. By showcasing the voices of those who have used your services, you are taking an active approach to engaging in the new era of patient education. In the past, marketing traditionally embodied a one-way communication model. Present-day marketing consists of creating an open dialogue between you and your target audience. By showcasing your patients, you are taking the first steps to engaging in this bilateral communication model that modern consumers are craving.

Web and social media strategist Ashley Ludgood explains why it is critical to embrace your patients' voices. "We are in an age where celebrities are everyday people. Through the plethora of viral mediums available on the Web, consumers are empowered to become their own reality stars and use these channels to spread their own messages and opinions. They recognize how influential they are, and by embracing something as simple as profiling your patients, you are encouraging potential patients to join your practice's community," she says.

Profile Creation Action Items

Select five to 10 patient advocates with before-and-after photos to profile.

Have each patient sign a thorough consent form.

Ask the patients to send in a real-life after photo.

Interview the patient.

Combine the photos and interview to create a powerful visual tool.

Incorporate the profiles into your marketing efforts.

The difference between selling and educating can be as simple as telling a story, and the story you need to tell is the journey your patients embark upon with you. The idea of incorporating profiles into your practice represents a global approach and shift in your marketing efforts. Successful practices are speaking *with* patients, not just *to* them. To keep your practice thriving as methods of sending and receiving messages continue to evolve, differentiate yourself by telling stories of past patients that inspire action from your prospective market. ●●



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TAKE AWAYS

- Telling a story instead of offering a patient a sales pitch is more likely to entice new prospects.
- To tell a good story, create profiles of some of the successes of your past patients.
- Good profiles should include quotes, before-and-after images and interviews from patients' friends and family.
- Profiles can be set up for use across a variety of mediums, including on the Web, through direct mail and in brochures.
- Telling a story helps spur a dialogue between patient and physician, and many patients today are looking for ways to be actively involved.