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Not as Sweet as it Seems: Five Questions for Evaluating Marketing Services

By Tracy L. Drumm

My three-year-old nephew Payton is the apple of my eye. As he is the first nephew in my family, he has been my personal crash course in childcare. Over the past few years, I have come to realize that when we spend time together, I am often the one learning.

This past year at a family party, I decided to take Payton swimming. After a dip in the pool, I carried my tall, slender nephew into the house to get changed. Dripping wet, I set him down next to the bathtub and turned my head for a split second to grab fresh towels. In hindsight, I should have seen the glimmer of mischief in his eyes as he spotted the bath soap sitting on the corner of the tub. This particularly novel soap was in the shape of a cupcake, complete with white artificial frosting that turned into luxurious foam when submerged in a bath. After grabbing the towels, I turned around just in time to see my sweet little nephew dart his tiny arm out as far and fast as he could. As if in one seamless motion, he grabbed the soap that resembled one of his sugary favorites and chomped his tiny teeth right into the not so sweet treat. I instinctively lunged myself at him grabbing the large piece of soapy "cupcake" from his mouth. "Ackey cake, bad cake," he began repeating with a perplexed look on his face.

I learned from my nephew's soapy mishap that it is easy to forget not every deal we are offered is as sweet as it seems. In today's world, it is easier than ever to be distracted by a sugary coating. Payton reminded me that often deals with the most "frosting" are the ones likely to leave you with a soapy mouth. When looking for solutions to get new patients in the door, remember to critically evaluate purchases to ensure you aren't buying hype or empty promises.

Before you decide to invest in consulting services or buy custom marketing tools, consider the following five questions to ensure your purchases will generate the influx in business you are seeking:

ARE THE TOOLS CUSTOMIZED FOR MY PRACTICE'S NEEDS AND TO MATCH MY BRAND?

The marketing services you purchase should match the brand you are striving to build or maintain. If you have a high-end brand, for example, be sure that promotional tools match this image. A coupon or discount program would be inconsistent with a "classy" brand and may hurt you more than help you. Instead, a gift certificate program would help maintain your elite status and offer the same value as a coupon. Choose a marketing consultant that recognizes the importance of building a consistent message.



ARE THERE ADDITIONAL COSTS OR FEES REQUIRED TO UTILIZE THE TOOLS?

Of all the questions to ask, this one is perhaps the most important as it can produce the most expensive answer. Ask the company offering marketing support the cost to execute their plans. Be careful to ensure that any “free” marketing services won’t require additional expenses that you had not budgeted (for example, postage and printing costs, data purchases, and monthly retainers are the most common hidden fees that can quickly add up).

Tools such as files for a newsletter or postcard mailer will require you to pay out-of-pocket to execute the printing and mailing. Be cautious of “grocery lists” filled with free marketing tools and evaluate the cost to implement versus the potential return.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THE TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS WILL BE EFFECTIVE?

Just as your patients want to see before-and-after photos to gain reassurance for your work, ask your potential consultant or marketing company to show samples of their past success stories. Case studies showing financial benchmarks will help depict results you can expect. Don’t be afraid to ask for references or to contact past clients.

HOW MUCH TIME/ENERGY DOES IT TAKE FOR STAFF MEMBERS TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM/TOOLS?

Your staff members likely wear many hats and have extensive daily to-do lists. How much time or additional work will the efforts require of your team? Does your consultant have a plan in place to help the staff implement new services with ease? As your employees typically control most of the patient interaction, their support is critical at determining the success of any new promotion. Experienced consultants will likely have a plan in place to assure their plans do not become a burden to your team. Be sure to inquire about additional training should you have staff turnover and need to train new staff on how to utilize the tools you have purchased. Some companies will charge extra for this additional training. Be sure to address this upfront to avoid “sticker shock” at a later date.

WHAT FOLLOW THROUGH WILL THE COMPANY/CONSULTANT HAVE AFTER I MAKE MY PURCHASE?

Marketing for the aesthetic industry should mirror your approach to patient care. Just as you have postoperative appointments to track the progress of your patients, the most effective marketing programs offer support after their initial services are completed. Marketing is an ongoing investment and will rarely get you busy overnight. Be proactive and ask what sort of support the consultant or company offers in the months following their services.

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