

# THE POWER OF PLANNING: YOUR 2016 GUIDE FOR PROMOTIONS

BY TRACY DRUMM WELDON

For years I dreaded the month of December. Although I am not a “procrastinator,” I was guilty of letting the weeks slip by and being forced to join the hurried masses at the mall hunting for last minute gifts. By the time Christmas arrived, my overzealous “holiday spirit” was beaten into submission by long lines, crying babies, and over-crowded shopping centers. Then one year a light bulb went off: The actual date of Christmas never changes. Although this was a blatantly obvious observation, it was a defining moment for my holiday shopping and, more importantly, how I approached seasonal marketing.

After this enlightening realization, I challenged myself to map out and finish my shopping three months before the actual Christmas holiday. To my delight, this new approach resulted in a complete holiday make-over. By shopping in September, the malls were quiet, the “armies” of baby strollers were nowhere to be found, and lines were non-existent.

This situation reminded me of a recurring issue that many physicians I knew suffered from, playfully called “last minute-itis.” Every December the phones at my marketing company would ring non-stop with service inquiries from practices. They wanted to learn about options for holiday promotions for Christmas and New Year with the goal of retaining current patients and attracting new ones. Unfortunately, a call during the first week of December was too late. We sold most of our winter holiday campaigns in August and September and some years even had to turn down clients in November as many printers were already backed up.

The blustery winter months weren’t the only time of year “last minute-itis” flared. Events from fashion week to music festivals have always provided great opportunities for patient

engagement; however, most practices don’t think about these recurring dates until the month or week of the activity. Timing is crucial for seasonal marketing initiatives to be effective. For example, calling in January for a Valentine’s Day campaign forces everyone to rush preparing files, flyers, and social media posts and hardly allows time for the patient to receive the message and then take action. These last minute efforts create headaches similar to holiday shopping on December 24th.

My team and I wondered if we could take my holiday shopping experiment and use the same approach for promotional guidance. We analyzed the most successful holiday initiatives previously created for our accounts and realized the ideal strategy entailed a three month process, consisting of stages focused on planning, preparing and executing. We called this the “When in Doubt, Three Months Out” strategy which has now been used by hundreds of practices to create successful year-round promotions.

Planning is the key to maximizing these seasonal marketing investments. A campaign has to be set up to succeed and allow prospective patients enough time to receive the information and take the desired action. Further, with competition in the aesthetics space at an all-time high, practices should aim to have, at the very least, six or seven meaningful “touch-points” with patients throughout the year. By tapping into the calendar and using date-driven topics and newsworthy themes, you can quickly plan out a year of communication that will allow you to stay current in your patients’ minds. By proactively planning, you can also increase treatment volume during traditionally slower periods. Many of our clients for example, have executed successful holiday card campaigns

**BACKSTAGE PASS**  
Pick TWO  
Botox • Juvederm • Latisse • Vivite  
Get Latisse for \$100 (one)  
OR  
BUY TWO Latisse (one)  
Get 1 FREE Latisse (one)

**BEAUTY PALO OZA**  
ROCKING August's  
Best Treatments

**BACKSTAGE PASS**  
BUY 2 LATISSE OR 2 VIVITE  
GET 1 FREE  
Our Largest Size • Regularly \$179  
CRITICS ARE RAVING ABOUT  
THIS DEAL!

## EXECUTION TIPS

1. Map out your whole year of promotions to serve as the framework for your annual marketing plans.
2. Follow the 3-2-1 steps to identify tasks and timelines: 3- Three months out plan, 2- Two months out prepare, 1- One month out to begin and continue executing.
3. Be sure to identify the goal of each effort and make sure it is in-line with your overall practice needs (i.e. Reaching an external market, introducing a new treatment, rewarding loyal patients, or simply reinforcing your image as an expert).
4. Assign one person to be in charge of the efforts, "a calendar captain," responsible for adhering to the promotional timeline.
5. Track results; note efforts worth repeating.

that invite patients to use a gift card at the practice in January and February. These traditionally slower months have now become some of their most profitable.

Begin implementing the strategy by looking at the year as a whole. You have 12 months that need plans for fresh, seasonal outreach. Follow an easy to remember 3-2-1 system to guide you through creating timelines and task lists. Each month should focus on efforts taking place three months away, so in March for example, you will plan for June initiatives. As part of this first step you have to answer three questions: what is the theme, what is the goal, and what medium will be used to deliver the information (the "medium" is the channel being used to communicate such as email, direct mail, text, etc.). Two

months away from the activity your task is to create relevant marketing material for the promotion. This should include writing any necessary copy, gathering any photos and having flyers or other necessary items designed and printed. The final step begins one month out and is the kick-off for executing the promotional aspects of the initiative. You should begin generating awareness for special offers the month before to allow patients time to receive and share the information and book their appointments. For activities that don't require a promotional build-up, such as posting a blog or updating a Facebook page, simply use the one month execution mark as your "due date" to have materials created so there is ample time to ensure details are correct. Remember, all practice communication is a direct reflection of the professionalism of your brand.

When brainstorming themes, be creative, and consider non-traditional "holidays" or annual activities, such as local fundraisers and community events. May, for example, has Mother's Day (obvious), but it also has National Loyalty Day and National Teacher Appreciation Day. Both provide fantastic outreach opportunities to communicate with current patients and your target market.

Consider "newsworthy" topics as well that are relevant to trends in pop-culture. For example, the highly anticipated release of the latest Star Wars Movie last December provided a great opportunity for laser education. "May the Force be with You: Laser Awareness Month at Dr. Johnston's Office" would have been a timely and entertaining way to educate patients on laser procedures or combination therapy. In year's past, we have executed "Sex and the City" parties, "50 Shades of Smooth" promotions, and helped create many "Kentucky Derby" events.

When selecting promotions for each month, be sure to analyze your practice goals and consider ways each effort will help you achieve them. For example, if your goal is to find new patients, focusing on National Girlfriends Day in August would

encourage patients to bring a friend to their appointment where they receive special perks for booking together. This has the obvious benefit of increasing new patient referrals.

If your goal is to simply keep your social media posts current and provide patients with valuable information, a Day Light Savings blog or paragraph in April would be a timely choice. You could discuss the importance of SPF and sun safety with the extra hours of sunlight approaching.

There are a few general rules for all promotions. First, include information on rules, exclusions or expiration dates. Expiration dates help provide a sense of urgency for follow-up. Additionally,

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**SD**  
*Girlfriends Appointment Day*  
Share your secret with your friends!  
Every Friday we offer Girlfriends Appointments.  
We'll book a block of time to pamper you and your closest friends.  
Each of you will receive:  
• Free mini facial before your treatment  
• \$50 gift card toward your treatment  
• Free mineral makeup application

**This fall give "back" to school a whole new meaning.**  
**Back Hair Removal by Duet™:**  
• Virtually pain-free  
• Latest technology with proven results  
• 15 minute treatment for entire back on men; under 25 minutes for both legs  
• First 5 patients to purchase a package get free touch-ups for 1 year (up to \$2,000 value)

**Laser Hair Removal (LHR) Specials**  
**Men:**  
Buy one back LHR package and get a neck and shoulder package free.\* (Savings of \$2,500)  
**Women:**  
Buy one bikini LHR package and get an underarm package free.\* (Savings of \$1,250)  
**Mix-and-Match:**  
Buy one Men's back LHR package and get a Women's underarm package free.\* (Savings of \$1,250)  
\*Pending Consultation. Expires on 7/31/10.

**true**  
SKIN CARE CENTER  
845 N. Michigan Ave.  
Suite 923E  
Chicago, IL 60611  
312-335-2070  
www.trueiskincarecenter.com

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## POWER TO YOUR PRACTICE

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remember to include a “call to action” that encourages patients to “book an appointment this week” or “email for more information.” Proper wording can help suggest the desired action you hope to achieve from the viewer. Finally, remember that frenzied energy is contagious and doesn’t lead to the ideal environment to welcome your patients. A well-planned message will positively impact your audience’s interpretation of the information. Remember every contact a patient has with your practice, whether in person, print or online, will subtly reinforce their impression of your brand and services. By proactively planning your efforts for the year, you help everyone involved in the practice operate with optimal efficiency.

The calendar is one of the most under-utilized yet effective tools for growing a business. It offers topics for fresh content, provides clear deadlines, and even has built-in benchmarking

opportunities. Its cyclical nature with predictable patterns provides the ultimate secret weapon, yet we rarely use this knowledge to our advantage. From Back to School promotions to Oscar Parties, there are truly endless marketing opportunities awaiting you in the calendar. Consider implementing the “Three Month Out” strategy to alleviate holiday headaches and business lulls and get ready to enjoy the incredible power of planning. ■



Tracy Drumm Weldon is a medical marketing expert with over 12 years of aesthetic experience. Check out her latest marketing book *DRIVE* that features 50+ specific ideas for unique holiday promotions [www.tdrumm.com](http://www.tdrumm.com).