

A SIMPLE Plan for Practice Growth in 2016

The most effective marketing plans are built around six essential elements.

BY TRACY DRUMM WELDON

As the thrill of the new year countdown is officially behind us, it's time to think about the year ahead. As a marketer, I believe each January provides an opportunity to set your practice on a powerful growth trajectory. Strategic market planning this month can help your office gain and continuously build the momentum necessary to reach new levels of success.

The problem most physicians face when sitting down to update or start a marketing plan is that they don't necessarily know where or how to start. "How do we find new patients?" they often ask. "Do we tweet?...Should we co-brand?...And what the heck is co-branding?" From the influx of questions I've heard over the years, it became apparent that the "Now what?" or "How to" was missing from most marketing lectures or articles. Several years ago, my colleagues and I recognized this void and set out to find a solution. We began by analyzing nearly 100 marketing plans that we had previously made for our clients around the world. We realized a trend was emerging within the strategies employed by the practices that saw the most substantial growth: All of their plans had six consistent elements. We were thrilled to see that we could condense these massive marketing plans that had taken months to create into a natural, fluid formula that progressed organically and could be replicated for use by others.

The formula was based on six areas of marketing a practice that sequentially build upon each other. The strategy we discovered was intuitive, easy to follow, and most importantly, effective. This new approach to marketing finally gave practices a digestible and rhythmic plan to follow and offered a clear starting point to use each January or anytime a practice needs a marketing boost.

The answer we were all searching for while reviewing the plans was incredibly simple. By taking the first letter of each strategic segment, the acronym SIMPLE serendipitously formed. The SIMPLE strategy guides practices to always start marketing efforts by working with your strongest asset: your Staff. After strategic team building and staff training, you move into maximizing your Image, or your brand. Once branding efforts have

been fine-tuned, you incorporate Medical credentials into the marketing efforts to increase conversions, defend prices, and strengthen brand fidelity within your market. Patient education is the fourth segment and perhaps the richest, as it provides endless opportunities with the potential for an incredible return on investment. Loyalty and retention initiatives drive repeat visits and provide valuable patient insights. Strategically last, External marketing is the final component to the SIMPLE approach and consists of trying to attract new patients.

Working with practices over the years, I have found they often dive into pricey external marketing initiatives in their first attempt to increase profits. Although powerful and necessary, external marketing typically has the highest cost with the lowest return. Perhaps more importantly, if you start your marketing plan with external efforts and have not first invested in the preceding five segments, you are setting your practice up for a weak return on the hard-earned dollars being spent. One-hit-wonder external efforts are a dangerous way to try to grow. Even if you have a successful external marketing initiative in place, such as a new website, if your staff isn't trained to convert callers or you don't have loyalty metrics in place to retain patients, the investment will be fleeting and yield a fraction of its potential.

The SIMPLE approach encompasses all areas of practice marketing and provides a much needed compass to help you feel in control of your future. By dividing and conquering your growth strategy, marketing will actually take less time and have more impactful results.

Throughout the next year, *Practical Dermatology*[®] magazine will be offering a deep-dive into the SIMPLE approach. The articles will feature innovative strategies for each of the formula's segments and will infuse energy and change in your practice to help ensure 2016 is your best year yet. ■

Tracy Drumm Weldon is a medical marketing expert with more than 12 years of aesthetic experience. Check out her latest marketing book featuring the SIMPLE formula and hundreds of tips to grow your practice at www.tdrumm.com.

