

# Make 2011 Your Most Successful Year

**WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME** you evaluated how your marketing activities are performing? Do you know where most of your patients are coming from? Or more importantly, where they are not coming from?

Setting goals or objectives for marketing your business is an important step that is sometimes overlooked by practice owners because of the day-to-day responsibilities of running a busy practice. However, it is a critical component in determining where to allocate resources for the year. For example, if you want to increase the number of new patients coming in your door then you should allocate more resources to new patient outreach. Creating an annual marketing plan is the first step in achieving your established goals. It helps organize when activities will be conducted throughout the year, tracks the results from these activities and serves as a critical tool in designing your marketing plan for the next year.

## Getting Started

When developing a marketing plan for your practice, there are four major areas that you should consider: new patient outreach, existing patient outreach, community outreach and practice branding. Each of these areas will not only help you grow your practice, but also enable you to differentiate yourself from other practices in your area. Each practice is unique in size and resources and therefore the marketing activities you plan in each of these categories may vary every month. However, the key is to plan activities in each of these areas throughout the year and track the effectiveness of these activities. To get started, make a list of all of the marketing activities you did last year

(community seminars, health fairs, open houses, ads, direct mail) and categorize these activities into the four areas.

## New Patient Outreach

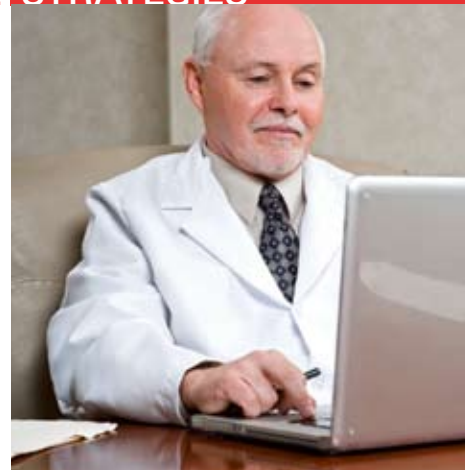
New patient outreach is essential to grow and maintain your practice. Practitioner surveys have shown that the lifetime value of a new patient to your practice is more than \$38,000.<sup>1</sup> Activities that you can do to attract new patients include newspaper advertising and direct mail campaigns. These typically will advertise a special event, lunch-and-learn or open house.

## Existing Patient Outreach

Surveys<sup>2</sup> have shown that in a typical practice more than 60 percent of sales come from existing patients. Existing patient outreach can be as simple as birthday cards, clean-and-check reminders and annual hearing evaluation reminder cards, or more elaborate like a practice newsletter. Your database also can be used to send periodic mailings to patients with older hearing instruments to invite them to try the latest hearing instrument technology. Ensuring that your patients return to you for all their hearing-related needs is critical to your continued success.

## Community Outreach

Community outreach and practice branding help separate you from your competition. Community outreach programs can include speaking at the local senior center or community center about hearing and hearing loss. Participating in chamber of commerce events or local community street fairs or health fairs can position you as the local expert for hearing health issues. When potential patients are ready to take action, they will remember you.



## Practice Branding

Practice branding focuses on you and your practice. What are the unique skills, expertise, offerings and services that distinguish you from everyone else in your area? When you are at a health fair or community center, provide visitors with pens, mugs or magnets with your name, logo and phone number on them. It is also important to establish credibility with local healthcare practitioners in your area so they value your expertise and trust that their patients will be treated well when they are in your care.

When you take the time to develop an annual marketing plan, it can help to answer some critical questions for the coming year, such as what are my goals and objectives for the year and are my marketing activities supporting these goals? Further, a detailed plan can help you track the outcome of your activities so you know which activities were successful and which should be modified the next time. Most importantly, if your focus is on diversifying your marketing activities, you can ensure that if you are experiencing a slow month, you won't be asking yourself, "What should I do next to get patients in my door?" You already will know the answer. [Lupa](#)

## REFERENCES

1. Oticon Inc. Online Survey. What is the value of a first-time user to your practice? June 2009.
2. Kochkin, S. MarkeTrak VIII: 25-Year Trends in the Hearing Health Market. *The Hearing Review*, October 2009.



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