

# ASC FOCUS

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## Build a Data-Driven Marketing Program

*Foster relationships by eliminating the guesswork*

BY ROBIN NTOH



Relying on word-of-mouth to cultivate awareness is not enough to establish and build reputation among potential patients in today's competitive healthcare marketplace. Patients are using various means to shop for and select their care providers, and it is helpful to have a marketing program that connects with people as they consider options. Since marketing traditionally has not been a priority for healthcare organizations, an ASC might not know where to begin as it looks to cost-effectively generate interest without overburdening staff. Consider these tips for getting started.

**Allocate the necessary resources.** Marketing should not be a one-time push, but an evolving, living, breathing program. Assigning someone or a group of people to take ownership of marketing helps ensure a program is well-executed and maintained. Those leading the effort should have an interest in relationship-building and be committed to growing the organization's market presence. While marketing does not have to be expensive, it does require an investment that is adequate for paying for programs such as a website, software, promotional materials and events.

**Leverage data to focus the work.** The most lucrative marketing programs are based on data. Having information on how patients learn about your organization can lead to more targeted collateral. Without it, organizations can end up spending money on strategies that don't fully reach the right patients. Marketing tools—specifically, tools embedded



in a practice management solution—can efficiently run reports that generate a picture of how current patients learned about your practice and its services. For instance, they can offer data on the top sources for physician referrals, the most popular procedures, and whether patients heard of your facility through a mailing or event. By leveraging these reports, an organization can zero in on activities that will yield the greatest return on investment (ROI).

Most ASCs prefer marketing tools that involve minimal setup, relying instead on referral information that staff can enter into the patient's record. These tools can be designed so staff are required to enter this information before completing patient check-in, ensuring the data is comprehensive and accurate for optimized use.

**Foster referral relationships.** Probably the most important resource for supplying new patients is physicians. By building relationships with prac-

tioners, an ASC can increase referrals over time and improve information exchange between providers. Again, having access to data can help. By reviewing information about referral sources and how much revenue is tied to them, an organization can reach out to see that their high performers have all the information needed to confidently and consistently recommend the organization. This information could include referral cards that list the organization's contact information, leave-behind pieces that answer frequently asked questions or even a direct phone number for dedicated schedulers. Another way to connect with physicians—especially, those who could refer patients but are not currently doing so—is to contact and invite them for a facility tour, so they can see first-hand the level of care you provide. The goal of any of these communications is to reinforce that your ASC is a true partner in extending the patient experience.

The advice and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author and do not represent official Ambulatory Surgery Center Association policy or opinion.

**Embrace search engine optimization (SEO).** A hugely popular method for patients to gather information on potential surgical facilities involves searching online. By using certain keywords related to your business—common keywords include locations, surgery types, health conditions and so on—in online articles, blogs and other digital promotional materials, your organization can ensure that its name pops to the top of any search query. While you may be able to guess the words that would resonate best, using tools like Google Keyword Planner also can be beneficial.

**Continually monitor marketing program performance.** To verify your marketing program is accomplishing its goals, it is important to regularly monitor how well spe-

“Marketing should not be a one-time push, but an evolving, living, breathing program.”

—Robin Ntoh, Nextech

cific interventions generate referrals. Running reports through your practice management or marketing solution can show how many patients booked appointments, surgery, etc., as a result of specific efforts. By entering the costs associated with an initiative into the system, you also can quantify each program’s ROI, allowing you to accurately determine the cost-per-patient lead and whether

a marketing outreach campaign is worth continuing.

**Data Helps Chart the Course**

The key to making decisions that generate cost-effective and high-performing marketing is robust data. Without information, an ASC might focus on activities that fall short in delivering leads and miss opportunities to grow the organization. By using marketing tools that effortlessly capture and communicate relevant information through electronic medical records and other patient data, organizations can easily design activities that encourage new business. «

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