

Finders Keepers: The Secret to Relationship-Based Marketing

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Becoming a successful practitioner has less to do with what you learned in school, and more to do with your ability to find new patients and keep them! Two skills every practitioner needs to master along the line are these:

1. Finding new patients.
2. Converting new patients into long-term wellness care patients.

There are a ton of ways to get new patients, all of which depend on your personality, the community you live in and specific clinic goals. I've tried several approaches through the years including flyers, mailers, business networking groups, radio advertising, radio talk shows, networking groups, group presentations — and YES, even good old-fashioned local phone book advertising.

I'm going to share a couple of secrets I've recently discovered. One day a light bulb went on in my head. A new approach to advertising emerged, that I hadn't used before, and it's really working well.

Social Skills

Before I tell you what it is, let me give you a little background. I'm very social and great when it comes to personal networking. When I was a kid, they called me a chatter box, which eventually turned out to be an advantage. The first thing I did when I opened my clinic was join a networking group. I was new to the community and didn't have any resources for building clientele. I figured this would be a great place to "talk to people" about what I do.

From among the many types of networking groups available, the group I chose was BNI (Business Networking International). I liked this one because it taught me how to focus on building relationships in the community rather than just finding "leads." I am no longer a part of this same networking group, but I gained a valuable education as a member. I met amazing business owners who have become really important resources in my practice in the way of accounting, marketing, signs, business cards, credit card processing, etc. The personal relationships I formed over a five-year period turned out to be invaluable.

A key player in my new idea came from a local PostNet owner. PostNet is a lot more than shipping and postage. They are actually a full-on printshop, focused on helping small business owners. In the past, I had used them for business cards, forms, mailings, signs, and name tags. Who knew they could help me find and keep patients? Here's how it happened...

Finding Patients — A "New" Idea

Recently, I was in my MD's office. As I left, they gave me several prescriptions — for medications and also referrals to see other specialists. The light bulb went on in my head. Why the heck had I

not created a prescription pad for my clinic?

I can't tell you how many people I have networked with over the years: chiropractors, medical doctors, physical therapists, OBGYN's, midwives and massage therapists just to name a few. Of course we chatted, and I left business cards. But I had NEVER left a prescription pad. These folks are already accustomed to prescription pads when referring patients. I was missing out on a golden opportunity.

The wheels in my head started turning. The possibilities of what I could create were unlimited. So, I called my friend from PostNet. (You see, we are friends now, because we spent five years getting to know each other really well through relationship networking at BNI.) I told her my idea and she had a pile of acupuncture prescription pads ready for me the very next day.

Here's how it works:

1. Make pads that are specific to certain conditions.

I made a pad for the OBGYN and Midwives that include symptoms such as: Lower Back Pain, Morning Sickness, Varicose Veins, Breech Baby Presentation, Vulvar Varicosities, Preparation for Labor and Delivery, Hemorrhoids, Lactation Difficulties, Mastitis, Edema, and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

For the MD's, I included symptoms such as: Chronic Pain, Fibromyalgia, Sciatic Pain, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Migraine Headaches, Tension Headaches, Neck and Shoulder Tension, and Stress.

I suggest you don't make a HUGE list of everything you can treat. Make the prescription pad simple and specific to the items that are treated in their office. This makes the pad more valuable. Your list will also help the practitioner realize you treat a lot more than the common "pain-related symptoms" most attributed to acupuncturists.

2. Choose syndromes that are difficult for the prescribing practitioner to treat.

Doctors are happy to refer patients with chronic pain. They know there is not much they can do for the patient besides offer a prescription. Many patients are asking for other options besides traditional pain medications. Breech babies and not going into labor are perfect examples. Most OBGYN's give the patient a waiting period. If the baby doesn't turn within a certain amount of time, the alternative is a C-Section. If the baby doesn't come by a certain date, then mom has to be induced. Moms who are under these circumstances are pushing their doctors for alternatives. In the past, I've received phone calls from these desperate moms. Many of them find me on the internet. The better option would be for the doctor to have a prescription pad. A referral from the doctor they trust goes a lot further than a search on the internet.

3. Each office gets a minimum of two pads.

One can go in the mail to the doctor. A nice short introduction letter is helpful. If you are already seeing patients from his/her office, you can add that information as well. It's kind of hard to get a direct appointment or meeting time with the doc, but if your mail is clever and creative, your chances of the doctor receiving the package are pretty good. Here's the important part. Two or more pads should be delivered to the staff at the front desk. Don't just drop them off. Introduce yourself. Tell them who you are and what you do. Leave flowers, a loaf of bread or a treat of some kind. I promise you, your efforts will pay off. It's the front office staff who answers all the phone calls. They are the ones who get the call from the patient asking: "Can you refer me to an

acupuncturist?" or "I heard that acupuncture helps with sciatic pain. Do you know of anyone?"

Make sure you send a nice thank-you card when you receive referrals. Gratitude is a nice quality to have, plus your card is a nice reminder that you are taking good care of their patients.

4. Make it easy. Your pad should have all of your contact information. Business name, email, phone number, and even a map. You can have your pad created two-sided if you need more space. Typical pads are one-fourth of an 8.5 x 11 inch piece of paper. I like to have them made in color so they are easy to find.

Keeping Patients—A "New" Idea

I've got a bit of an addictive Earth personality. When I get something on my mind, I have a hard time letting it go. Creating pads at the printshop is a little bit like buying a cute pair of shoes. One pair just isn't going to do it for me. I need EVERY color and EVERY style in order to be happy.

There are now pads with my name on them all over town, but I didn't have any cute pads in MY own clinic. Another idea started brewing ... I needed an appointment pad for my office with the ability to schedule six visits at a time.

When a new patient walks through my door, I typically schedule them for a series of six treatments (once per week). You may be questioning my motive here. Six visits? You really book people for six visits at once? I know, it sounds like a bold move, but I have really great reasons why this approach is effective.

I treat a lot of chronic conditions. Before developing this system, I would have patients come into my office to "give acupuncture a try." Within two to three visits, many patients fell off the schedule for various reasons. The doctor may have given them some sort of a test result that told them what was "really wrong" with them. Some get just enough pain relief to bring them back to their "normal" imbalanced body. These patients quit at this point because they don't know what it feels like to feel great. Finally, there are those who cancel their appointment because of a schedule conflict and never got around to rescheduling because the initial excitement and momentum wore off. Really, it all boils down to commitment.

My conversation with the patient goes something like this:

"You are the perfect candidate for acupuncture. The problems you are describing make perfect sense from a Chinese Medicine perspective. The Chinese have figured out that we have an organized energetic system that runs through the body channel by channel. When everything is running smoothly, our body runs at optimal levels with the ability to naturally heal itself. When there is a blockage or a deficiency within certain channels in the body we develop pain, extreme emotions, and systemic symptoms—similar to what you have described."

"My job, as a Chinese Medicine Practitioner, is to be the engineer. I'll be working through multiple imbalances in your body week by week. At the end of six weeks we will evaluate the changes we have made—and make a decision on what our next goal is. You can expect that symptoms will progressively resolve over this next six-week period—and as an added bonus you may experience better sleep, more energy, less stress, and better overall health. We've found that patients who are seeing other practitioners such as MD, Physical Therapists, Chiropractors, Massage Therapists, and even Clinical Counselors get better results in these treatments because they are getting acupuncture during the process."

Patients get AMAZING results when I have the time I need to resolve problems. During this six

week process I do the following:

- Offer pain relief by working through the tendinomuscular problems on the surface of the body.
- Work through scar tissue imbalances.
- Really get to know the patient, which helps me to understand their diet, emotions, and lifestyle.
- Figure out the patient's underlying constitutional patterns to prescribe herbs and dietary therapy.
- Finally, the most important: Teach the patient about my wellness and maintenance care program.

It all comes back to relationships. By the end of six weeks, my patients have received a series of emails from me (see previous *Monkey on Your Back* article in the July 2013 issue). I've gotten to know them personally, week by week, while working through their chief complaint. I teach them how to change their lifestyle while I put their body back into balance. They, in turn, develop a trust in my care so it's really easy to refer their friends and family.

Maybe this "Finders Keepers" approach to bringing in new patients and keeping them forever, as longterm-wellness patients, will work for you. Relationships are everything. Who do you know in your town? If you don't know your local printshop owner, I'd suggest starting there. After that, you could wind up with friends all over town!

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