Marketing Tactics To Drive Patient Contracts
Key Strategies for Patient Advocates
Word of Mouth Marketing: 7 Strategies for Success

By Emily Mullin
If you’re an independent patient advocate on a budget, you may be struggling with ways to market your business. Word-of-mouth marketing can be an effective way and low- or no-cost tactic for increasing awareness about your business and attracting clients. Here are some ways to increase the presence of your patient advocacy business by word-of-mouth:

Ensure patient satisfaction. Provide quality service and treat clients with respect. In the healthcare field, it’s especially important to be compassionate and understanding. You may be working with patients facing a serious health issue or financial problem because of medical bills. As a patient advocate, you should be caring, sympathetic and helpful. Be sensitive to patients’ needs but also be clear on what they expect from you as an advocate.

1. **Network.** Attend industry events, trade shows and local meetings. You can often meet people who do the same things you do. Join professional healthcare organizations and go to church groups that cater to the sick or elderly. Bring plenty of business cards.

2. **Social media.** If you’re not well-versed in social media in this digital age, it’s time to dive in. As a small business owner, you can increase your presence and market yourself at no cost just by signing up to social media accounts and connecting with potential clients and other patient advocates. Create a Facebook page for your business and sign up to Twitter and LinkedIn. On your social media sites, make sure to explain what kind of services you provide. Reach out to friends and family members on Facebook. Follow healthcare organizations on Twitter. Connect with colleagues on LinkedIn. Social media may take some time to get warmed up to, but it will greatly enhance your image as a business.

3. **Stay in touch with former clients and their families.** Even after patients have no use for your services anymore, check up on them. They may have friends, co-workers or acquaintances that could use your services.

4. **Face-to-face conversation.** While phone consultations may be appropriate in some cases, patients will value in-person meetings more. Take the time to visit the patient in the hospital, home or neutral meeting place. In the healthcare field, face-to-face interactions are important, especially when a patient is confused, distraught or emotional about their medical treatment or costs.

5. **Ask for recommendations.** Ask your clients if they’d recommend your services. Have them to rank your services on a scale of 1 to 10. This way, you can assess your current skills and determine what you need to improve. Inquire about what they would change about their experience. If they had a good experience, ask if they would be willing to be a reference. If you have marketing materials for your business, capture their testimony or anecdote in the form of a quote or short biography on a brochure or your business’ website.

6. **Become a public speaker.** Talk about the importance of patient empowerment at local colleges and universities, industry events, local healthcare meetings and other venues. When you write a speech, include helpful information and tips for patients and their families.

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*By Emily Mullin*
A Public Relations Primer for Professional Patient Advocates

By Nina Dunn
Companies are always looking for foolproof communications techniques to increase the visibility and recognition of their brands. Although there are no silver bullets in public relations, one way to get greater publicity than usual is to leverage news cycles around awareness days, weeks and months. Although the number of such calendar days has significantly increased, and as a result its impact on the media has shrunk, many major awareness days and weeks are still significant enough to attract reporters’ attention.

The idea behind this approach is to find a perfect match between your company’s activities and natural media interest in an issue around a certain day or month. For example, you might have noticed that the coverage of Alzheimer’s-related issues spike during the Alzheimer’s Disease Awareness Month in November–Dina. With that in mind, a home care company or a retirement facility that specializes in Alzheimer’s care can leverage this media interest and raise awareness about care options for a loved one with the disease.

That being said, don’t expect reporters to drop their assignments and start writing a profile-type story on your company. Remember that public relations is only effective when you have something newsworthy to say and if you have working relationships with the appropriate journalists.

Generate News
The beauty of tying your PR campaign to an awareness day is that it makes your story instantly more relevant and interesting. However, to gain maximum publicity during this short period of time, consider creating news yourself.

For example, let’s take Fall Prevention Awareness Day. You could release findings of a falls-related study; create a local event at an adult daycare center educating seniors and their caregivers about potential health conditions and physical hazards that contribute to falling; or organize a Tai Chi class for seniors in local parks to improve their balance.

Creating events around an awareness day in your community will consume more effort and time than sending yet another press release. However, these initiatives will generate positive coverage in key media outlets and position your company as an industry leader.

Build Relationships
If you still haven’t developed relationships with trade media editors or appropriate general media reporters and bloggers, it’s time to do so. Several months before your media outreach, start familiarizing yourself with reporters’ writing and interests, follow them on Twitter, comment on their articles and then give them a call introducing yourself and offering an expert from your company who can provide them with insightful commentary on specific topics.

Contact a journalist only with the information you know she will be interested in. For example, a healthcare writer will be happy to report on new developments in Alzheimer’s research or how to care for a loved one with the disease.

To gain maximum publicity and to get ahead of the competition, media outreach should start early. While newspapers will need just a couple of weeks’ notice, publications with a longer lead-in time, like healthcare and general interest magazines, will require the content to be submitted three to four months in advance.

If your organization is not yet a recognized leader on a certain issue, it is important to establish your credibility before reaching out to general media. First, start writing blogs around the issue and discuss the topic...
on Twitter and LinkedIn. Then, reach out to relevant trade publications. In the case of Alzheimer’s Awareness Month, media focusing on healthcare, long-term care, aging and baby boomer-related issues would all be suitable. With trade media, more often than not, you will be expected to provide exclusive content authored by your company’s expert.

Once you gain recognition within a professional community, start reaching out to appropriate reporters in the general interest media. Think outside the box: health writers are not the only ones who will be interested in the consequences of falls during the Fall Prevention Day.

Associating with a larger issue will take some preparation and will require substantial efforts on the part of your communications team and key spokespeople. However, the return on your investment can be significant not only in the short run — increased visibility and name recognition — but also in the longer term, through an enhanced reputation, strong media relationships and the goodwill that will come through the initiative.

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How to Secure Patient Contracts: 7 Tips

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Patient advocacy is an emerging field in healthcare, and if you’re going out on your own to establish a business, you may be wondering how to go about finding and contracting with patients. One of the strongest methods for finding patients who need your services is word of mouth. But when it comes to charging fees for your services, that’s where contracting with patients can get tricky.

Here are some things you’ll want to consider when developing your client base and contracting with patients:

1. **Who will hire you?** This is one of the first things you’ll want to consider when starting a patient advocacy business. Identify your skills – whether it’s a knowledge or insurance or billing or background in a specific disease, like breast cancer. You should consider what population your business will target.

2. **Do market research.** Before you start your business, you’ll want to do some research on the patient advocacy market in your city, state and region to determine whether other similar businesses exist in your area. You’ll also want to research your target population and how many patients you hope to serve.

3. **Make a list of your services and prices.** Your clients will want to see prices on paper, so you should make this courtesy available to them. On your marketing materials, such as brochures and your website, list services in an easy-to-read format with pricing details. Don’t try to hide prices from patients; this could be a big turn-off for potential clients and their families.

4. **Talk to the family.** Patients and their families seek out health advocates for a variety of reasons. Family members might not have time to commit to dealing with their love one’s illness. Patients may not understand their condition and feel overwhelmed. This is where you fit in. The best way to promote your business is to focus on your strengths when trying to convince patients and their families that you services are valuable. Face-to-face conversation is preferred, especially when you can talk to the patient and a member or two of the family.

5. **Have your credentials available.** Make your resume available to the patient and family. Clients and their family members will want to know your background in the healthcare field before they hire a private patient advocate. Bring a resume with you when you have an initial meeting with a potential client. Another simple way to promote yourself and to showcase your experience is to join the social networking site, LinkedIn. Your profile acts essentially as an online resume so when patients and their families research you or your business online, they can also have easy access to your background in the healthcare field.

6. **Establish relationships, not just business connections.** Make sure patients and their families know that you can be trusted, but don’t be overbearing. Know where you role as an advocate ends and where the role of the family caregiver begins. Do give patients and their caregivers your cell phone number or other contact information in case they need to get in touch with you in the event of an emergency. Encourage them to ask questions about what you can do and how you can help a patient.

7. **Be a good communicator.** Being a good patient advocate means putting the patient first. Your job is to find out what the patient needs, wants and expects out of an advocate.
Expand Your Influence as a Patient Advocate: 4 Strategies for Enhanced Reach

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As a patient advocate, you have the ability to influence not only your clients but other healthcare consumers around you. Health advocates also play a role in pushing for changes within the healthcare system, and sometimes being an advocate can be as simple as talking to friends, family members and acquaintances about health issues.

Not sure where to begin? Here are some tips on how to expand your influence as a patient advocate.

1. **Share your experience and knowledge with others.** Share your stories and understanding of health issues and the healthcare system with your friends, family and co-workers. Let people know that they can come to you with questions about healthcare and other medical issues, like billing or insurance. If people don’t have the proper tools and resources to find something out on their own, point them in the direction of websites, books, magazines or other sources that can help them with their own questions and problems.

2. **Join a nonprofit or other health advocacy group.** Reach out to local organizations and see how you can aid their cause. Many nonprofit groups have small budgets and a minimal staff so they welcome volunteers. Offer to speak at events or group meetings. Volunteer your time during a campaign season to get a particular piece of health legislation passed by writing letters to local newspapers, distributing campaign literature or helping out at a phone bank. Even if you have other obligations like a full-time job and a family, volunteer work is often very flexible. Do what you can but don’t over-extend yourself. If you don’t have a lot of extra time to volunteer, there’s always the option of donating money to a specific cause or organization that you support.

3. **Get others involved.** Whether it’s running a marathon to benefit cancer research or helping staff a free clinic for low-income individuals, volunteering can be more fun and rewarding when you do it with other people. Tell your friends and family members about your cause. Put up fliers in your office and around your neighborhood. Explain the benefits of volunteering and supporting a good cause.

4. **Organize.** If there isn’t a local organization dedicated to the specific health issue or cause that you want to promote, create one. Visit the community hospitals to distribute information and ask if you can put up signs in the lobby. Hospitals often have public bulletin boards, which you can use to advertise your new group. Approach church or temple groups and ask them for their support. Talk to people at club meetings, senior centers and union halls. Explain the issues you are supporting or promoting and how people in your community could or would be affected – such as by a certain disease or by a piece of legislation. Let people know what they can do to help. Connect with other like-minded people online by utilizing social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook and Internet forums, such as those on health advocacy websites.