

5 Top Trends in Medical Marketing for 2012

How can your practice adapt to the changing Healthcare Industry marketing landscape?

Jason Borody explains the top medical marketing trends to drive awareness with new patients, retain existing patients, and stay on top of your market.

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The Healthcare Industry landscape is shifting

Patients are becoming more sophisticated, information is more readily available, and competition between healthcare providers is increasing dramatically. Doctors must adapt in order to drive awareness with new patients, retain existing patients, and stay on top of their markets.

Australian doctors are increasingly engaging professional marketing techniques, and 2012 will see further increases in healthcare marketing in response to these changing industry trends.

1. Increasing Patient Sophistication

Generation Y patients are beginning to require adult medical services. These are people who have never known life without the internet. Today's technologically savvy patients are more discerning, and accustomed to doing their own research when selecting a doctor, investigating treatment options, and making healthcare decisions.

As the market shifts from being solely physician driven to increasingly consumer driven, progressive medical practices are recognising the impact patient desires and expectations can play in the more effective delivery of healthcare. A key trend in 2012 will be the adoption of research surveys to discover patient attitudes regarding your practice. At Vividus we regularly have practice managers and principals comment on how valuable patient data from our surveys is in improving services and making better management decisions.

2. Growing Focus On Creativity and Professionalism

As more medical practices recognise the need to focus marketing efforts on patients, the channels for reaching patients are becoming more saturated. The challenge to doctors in 2012 is to present their practices more professionally and in a differentiated fashion to their competitors in order to grow or even retain market share.

Patients expect quality medical practices to present in a professional manner. Poorly designed or outdated logos, stationery and websites create questions in patients' minds as to whether such medical practices also employ the same sub-standard approach in their delivery of healthcare treatments. Creativity in communication and design, and the use of new technologies like internet marketing and social media to reach decision makers will become more important than ever before.

3. Increased Internet Communication

With its 24/7 availability, increasing speeds, decreasing costs, and sheer variety of uses, the internet is the most practical, adaptable, and effective medium for reaching patients. Studies have shown that 8 out of 10 Australians search online for information about doctors and healthcare options. In 2012 medical practitioners will continue to use the internet to communicate with their audiences - to gain new patients through marketing, but more importantly to keep existing patients and referrers informed through meaningful and timely communications.

At Vividus we don't just build websites, we also understand the importance of driving traffic to your site and increasing patient engagement with your practice through web based mediums. Important factors for online marketing in 2012 include:

- **Mobile friendly**, content managed websites that can be viewed easily on smart phones and mobile devices such as iPads.
- **Social media integration**. Social media has outranked personal email as the preferred method of online communications, and with over 8 million active Facebook users it is easy to understand the emerging power of this online channel. Forward thinking medical centres are already creating their own pages on these sites to better manage, and create positive online communications.
- **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)** and **Google advertising (Adwords)** to increase the number of people visiting your website by strengthening the likelihood of being found when people search online.

4. Targeted Local Marketing

According to Google, 97% of people search for local businesses and services online. The vast majority of medical practices operate locally - making **Google Places** an essential part of medical practice marketing. At Vividus we see many reasons why medical practices should use Google Places:

- It is one of the most cost effective channels for raising local awareness.
- A professionally optimised Google Places listing will improve your Google search rankings.
- With over 90% internet search penetration in Australia, the sheer volume of people becomes a significant factor - if you aren't visible when they search for your services, you will be losing patients to local competitors.
- The increased usage of smartphones and mobile apps means that more people are using mobile phones and tablet computers such as iPads to search Google or use GPS targeted information to find local providers. Even car GPS systems are now

incorporating Google searches to find the location you want rather than requiring you to know the street address.

- Your Google Places listing allows you to discover important insights about your practice, and the key search terms patients are using to find your practice. This information is highly valuable in making business and marketing decisions.

5. Physician Referrals Remain Essential

Despite the shift towards patient driven medical marketing, referrals from other doctors and healthcare providers are still important. Professional references and referrals are influential with patients as well as industry peers, and 2012 will see a mix of direct mail marketing (such as letters of introduction) as well as more strategic and designed communication tools.

What will you do?

Medical marketing will always be based in the design and delivery of excellent health services for patients. But in 2012 we will see increasing numbers of doctors becoming more patient centric in their marketing. We will see a higher degree of professional and creative marketing, as well as more medical practices employing newer technologies to increase local awareness, influence the types of patients attracted, and build ongoing relationships with both patients and industry members.

As you develop your marketing through 2012 be sure to keep abreast of the changing landscape and remember to always employ an agency that specialises in healthcare marketing and is familiar with Australian legislation and AHPRA guidelines for medical advertising and marketing.

About the author

Jason Borody is the director of Vividus Pty Ltd, a marketing agency specialising in Healthcare marketing including branding, graphic design, printing, signage, websites, internet and social media marketing, patient research surveys, and strategic marketing plans. For more information see www.vividus.com.au or phone **07 3283 2233**.