

Marketing for straight A's?

How one practice created a customer-service brand identity

reader take-away

- Find out what the four A's are and why they are important
- Read a case study of a pediatric practice that applied the four A's to its marketing approach
- See examples of materials demonstrating the group's corporate identity
- Review a list of the steps the group took to reach referring physicians and patients and create an identity in the community

While the concept of marketing was novel and even frightening to many medical practices 25 years ago, it has become an accepted — and necessary — business practice. In fact, because of the many changes taking place in health care, marketing is more important than ever.

As a practice leader, you may have to develop and maintain an effective marketing strategy. You may be familiar with the four P's: product, place, price and promotion. Although they remain relevant, customer service has become one of the most important elements — if not the most important. As a result, the cornerstone of successful health care marketing today is what I call the four A's: access, availability, accountability and accommodation.

A shift in focus

Health care today is increasingly about *servicing* patients. Changes in American culture and demographics are shifting health care's focus from the clinician to the patient. Patients now are generally better educated, better informed and more inclined to take control of their own care. With help from the Internet, many investigate physicians and health conditions before choosing a provider.

As a result, access, availability, accountability and accommodation drive a successful medical practice. These four A's are closely

interrelated and reflect patients' new power.

Access — Patients want the best care available, when and where they need it. They want the freedom to choose and be involved in decisions about their care.

Availability — They want to reach your practice when they need care. They want convenient appointment times, and they don't want to wait. They expect their physicians and other health care providers to be approachable and forthcoming about their condition and treatment options. They want both phone and in-person exchanges to be unhurried and compassionate.

Accountability — They want someone who will take responsibility and provide accurate answers and explanations. They expect leadership and guidance in navigating the complex health care system.

Accommodation — They want customization and personalization, not "cookie-cutter" care. They want to feel personally recognized by physicians and staff in your practice.

Patients have more alternatives

In today's business environment — and medicine today is a business — all the adver-

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tising and promotion in the world won't make your group succeed if you fail to remember the four A's and that your customers are your No. 1 priority. If you don't keep your customers happy, they will find a practice that will.

Finding primary care alternatives is easier than ever. Families can now seek health care services at locations such as Wal-Mart, CVS Pharmacy and Target. "Retail clinics" capitalize on the fact that many patients can't get ready access to their regular physicians. Many patients are increasingly willing to accept what might be considered a lower or at least different quality of care in exchange for access, availability, accommodation and someone who will accept accountability.

Here is an example of how one practice incorporated the four A's into its marketing strategy.

The four A's in action

Lake Mary (Fla.) Pediatrics was a successful midsize practice established in 1993. Although its leaders had done little traditional marketing, and its logo, collateral materials and signage were somewhat generic, dated and difficult to read, the group had a solid foundation from which to grow because leaders embraced the four A's. The practice provided patient-centered care and exceptional customer service.

Using a train theme, Lake Mary Pediatrics offered a "Rapid Track" walk-in service for patients with minor illnesses, Monday

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through Friday, 8:30-11:30 a.m. Their clinicians were available to patients at key hours, offering quick and easy access to care.

Unlike many pediatric practices that rely on hospitalists, the Lake Mary Pediatrics physicians attended to their hospitalized

Using the four A's to achieve your goals

Remember, it doesn't do any good to spend creative energy and financial resources without awareness of your practice's target markets, their needs and the systems and people to deliver what they want. As you plan your marketing strategy, ask:

- How many of the four cornerstones have we addressed?
- Will this marketing project allow access for our customers?
- Will we be available to our patients?
- Will our staff, both clinical and nonclinical, be accountable?
- Can we accommodate our customers?

You need this focus and foundation to achieve the outcome you desire.

patients, accepting accountability and providing friendly, familiar faces during stressful times for young patients and their families.

Over time, the Lake Mary physicians realized that an increasing portion of their patient base came from a neighboring county, Volusia, about 10-15 miles away on a traffic-congested highway. To increase access and accommodate these patients, the practice opened a second, full-time office in Volusia in October 2006. It provided convenience for current patients in the area and helped fill a gap in quality pediatric care.

In March 2007 the group established "Twilight Express" at this satellite location, the Orange City Station. With evening, weekend and holiday hours, this service provided the West Volusia community its first dedicated pediatric urgent-care center. Patients receive a financial advantage, as well, because Twilight Express bills all care as a regular office visit rather than an urgent-care visit, which typically has higher fees.

With this solid foundation, leaders at Lake Mary Pediatrics embarked on a marketing campaign in early 2007 to help the practice achieve three primary goals:

- Create an identity for the Orange City Station, establishing it as the preferred pediatrics practice in the West Volusia community;
- Create an identity for Twilight Express to position it in patients' minds as the first

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- From the home page, search for "marketing"
- In the *MGMA Store*, enter 6712 in the *Search Products* box for the book *A+ Marketing: Proven Tactics for Success*; 6712 for the book *Marketing Your Clinical Practice: Ethically, Effectively, Economically*; 6635 for the book *Star-Studded Service: 6 Steps to Winning Patient Satisfaction*
- From the *Practice Management* tab, choose "Tools" and then "Planning and Marketing" to find customer service training tips

e-mail us

What's your practice's marketing strategy? Tell us at connexion@mgma.com

Magnet, postcard, and flier developed by Lake Mary Pediatrics to establish brand identity.



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ALL aboard!

Destination:
Orange City Station Party

For:
Kids of All Ages!

Date: Saturday, August 11, 2007
Time: 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Lake Mary Pediatrics - Orange City Station
Twilight Express
2505 Junior Street (Junior Street is just past Kohls on Harley Stickland) - Orange City

Come see our Orange City office, meet our doctors and staff and play with our friends at Radio Disney!

* Free Food and Drinks
* Games * Prizes
* Music and More!

FREE EVENT!
BRING A FRIEND!

For more information, call 386-960-8282.



stop for children's illnesses and minor injuries that occur after hours, on weekends and on holidays; and

- Ensure consistent brand identity for their two offices and the communities they served.

One of the first marketing challenges was to develop a new logo and naming strategy that better communicated the brand Lake Mary Pediatrics had successfully cultivated and that clearly delineated its offices and service locations. The practice printed a new corporate identity package that included letterhead, envelopes, business cards and appointment cards, and developed new signage.

Leaders wanted their marketing materials to communicate the high level of access, availability, accountability and accommodation they provided to their customers. Lake Mary Pediatrics' primary target audiences were parents — mothers, in particular — and referral sources. These included OB/GYNs, family practice physicians and hospitals, as well as schools and teachers, daycare centers, local businesses and even realty agents, who play a key role in helping new families settle into a community.

They developed a few core pieces and strategies to achieve these goals:

- A flier describing the practice's services, distributed at referral sources by Lake Mary Pediatrics' physicians and nurse practitioners. This approach allowed the group's clinicians to make personal introductions for new referral relationships, reinforce current referral relationships and leave behind information that each business could make available to its customers.
- A magnet promoting the Twilight Express service at the Orange City Station and distributed to Lake Mary Pediatrics' patients and many target audiences, it helps parents remember this convenient service and provides contact information.
- An oversized postcard complementing the flier, mailed to families in the target market surrounding the Orange City Station. Intended to build awareness of

the new office and the Twilight Express service.

- A letter to current and potential referring physicians, printed on the practice's new letterhead, informing referral sources about the new office and Twilight Express.
- Letter to realty agents and home builders to capitalize on the fast-growing West Volusia community.
- Radio Disney campaign and event. The practice advertised for three months on the local Radio Disney station targeting young families. Radio Disney distributed 5,000 Orange City Station/Twilight Express fliers to its listeners and hosted a two-hour Orange City Station party before school started in August. This event, held at the new office, provided parents and children the opportunity to meet the physicians and staff. Attendees

received event T-shirts and keychains. The event and the radio campaign enhanced awareness of the practice.

The Lake Mary Pediatrics marketing plan was not terribly complex or expensive. It was, however, extremely effective:

- The Orange City Station grew by more than 1,000 patients in the past year;
- Patient volume at Twilight Express grew 150 percent after the initiation of the marketing campaign; and
- The majority of Lake Mary Pediatrics' patients report using Twilight Express instead of other urgent-care or emergency facilities.

The practice creatively, concisely and consistently communicated what it did well — providing patients with access, availability, accommodation and accountability. 🏥