



Paul E. Okamoto, D.C.

# Back Talk

## Advertising - Part I (The fifth installment of this series)

In this 2-part article, I would like to discuss the various aspects and types of advertising, pros and cons, and advertising versus marketing. But first of all, I want to give several introductory thoughts about advertising. Once a doctor graduates from school, it might seem natural to just hang a shingle, open the doors, and let the patients roll in. If the doctor is a medical doctor, this might not be unusual. The reason being is that the medical profession is well established and accepted by the general public.

The chiropractic profession is very different. Only 10-15% of the American public goes to see a chiropractor. Thus, the vast majority of Americans have never tried chiropractic and do not realize its benefit. Some chiropractors are very adverse to the words, "sell" or "salesman." The thought of being a doctor and having to sell your product seems unprofessional and demeaning. A person might think of Billy Graham who started out selling Fuller brushes going door to door.

I have heard of selling or salesman in this light. It is having a product or service that you know helps the public, educating the public to understand how that product will benefit them, and then letting them decide if they will choose that product or not. When a person thinks about sales in that perspective, it makes the thought of selling more palatable. It was James Parker who boldly used the word "salesman" and stated that it was essential that chiropractors view themselves as salesmen and saleswomen. His opinion was that chiropractic is a great product, but was hidden from the vast majority of those who could benefit. Only as the doctor educated and sold the idea of chiropractic to the public would they desire that service. I believe that it is imperative for each chiropractic physician to make public education a daily part of practice if the doctor and the profession are to succeed.

This might be treading on sacred ground, but I think of the Gospel in the same light. The vast majority of people do not understand why Jesus Christ came to the earth. It is our job as Christians to help them understand the true reason, see their need of this Divine Sacrifice, and then allow each person to make the choice of accepting or rejecting the product that was given on the cross by our precious Savior - eternal life. Hopefully you have not given up on me as some sort of heathen or felt I am out of my mind and will finish this article.

For any business, there are basically two different types of advertising 1. In-house 2. Outside (not outhouse). In-house advertising applies to marketing to your existing customers/patients while outside advertising applies to advertising to the general public who has not yet utilized your services. I would like to speak about both types, but please realize that my thoughts are by no means all inclusive. The means to advertise, how to advertise, and to what groups to advertise are as vast as your imagination. May I state that whatever

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you do, you will probably obtain some benefit. There will be some fruit. Of course, the reason to advertise is to have more patients or raw material. If your office is busy enough, then you can advertise less. One must remember that there is always attrition of patients associated with a number of reasons, i.e., no symptoms, lack of funds, moving out of area, changing to a different insurance company, etc. Thus it is imperative for all doctors to advertise to some degree, even if just approaching current clientele about referring friends and relatives.

In this article, I will talk about in-house advertising. In the next article, I will cover outside advertising. With regard to in-house advertising, the ways that I will mention have all been things that have been mentioned at various seminars I have attended through the years. I would first like to compare cost. In-house advertising is much cheaper for several reasons. First of all, you have a captive audience. The person that you contact, whether in person, by telephone, or by mail, has utilized your services, realizes the benefits, and has confidence in you as their doctor. It is very easy for that person to bring in their family, as well as tell others about your services.

There are numerous ways to do in-house advertising. I believe that the most effective way is face to face. First of all, you must let patients know that you desire to see new patients. Although it might seem obvious to you that you need new patients, it is not as obvious to existing patients. Most patients assume that when a person is a doctor, the doctor is busy and does not need additional patients. Thus it is imperative to ask the patient to refer friends or relatives. The best time to ask for a referral is as soon as the patient notes benefit. As soon as the patient has noted relief, he/she is very excited about the benefits of chiropractic care. When the patient tells you that he/she is doing better, rejoice together, and then ask that person to send someone else in to see you. Most management firms state that the most common time for a patient to send in a relative or friend is within the first week or two of care. I should state that it is not unusual for a chiropractor to hear about treatment benefits from patients so frequently that we become insensitive and not excited. Beneficial results may be everyday norm for us, but for the patient who has never tried chiropractic, it is a newfound discovery. When we do not rejoice with them, we can pour cold water on a patient's enthusiasm.

Another excellent means of in-house advertising is lay lectures or spinal care classes. Patients who come to these will understand the benefits of chiropractic care much better and will be more willing to refer. Additionally, you can advise that the patient bring a spouse or friend to your lecture. For those who come to the class and are not a patient, you can offer a complimentary examination if they sign up at the class. This can be done at the office in the evening after work. Also, it can be done at a patient's home when that person has agreed to invite friends or neighbors for your talk.

Although some chiropractors offer free or greatly discounted x-rays, I am not one who recommends that, as I believe it gives the public a wrong message. I have never seen a medical doctor or dentist offer free x-rays. If the public sees that a doctor offers free x-rays, it is easy to conclude that doctor is either desperate and not skilled or it trying to give something free in the beginning in order to gain a lot in the end. I might state that for several years, I offered free examinations and x-rays. Although it did bring some people in, I came to several conclusions. The people who take advantage of free services have limited funds and do not stay long. The second thing was that I felt that I must continue that practice to see other new patients. Therefore, I stopped the custom of free or greatly discounted x-rays and believe this gives a much more professional image. Of course, I am always diligent to raise my professional skill and knowledge.

The third way to advertise is to market a specific condition. I recall one speaker state that a doctor can talk about one patient's condition and

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