



Paul E. Okamoto, D.C.

Back Talk

Advertising - Part 2 (The sixth installment of this series)

Advertising is broken up into two categories 1) reaching your current and past clientele to refer others; 2) reaching those outside of your office that have never experienced your care. In the last article, I spoke about various means of in-house advertising. That type of advertising is reaching those who are already your patients. There are several very obvious benefits to in-house advertising. First of all, your patient has already utilized your services, realizes its benefits, and has confidence in you as their doctor. That person can make an excellent referral resource. Secondly, in-house advertising is quite inexpensive. If you are interested in what my thoughts and suggestions are about in-house advertising, you can look back on the previous article (Advertising Part I).

In this article, I would like to transition to advertising outside the clinic. Anywhere there are people, there are potential patients. Once again, your limitation is only according to your imagination. With regard to advertising, there are three major issues that must be considered. These are professionalism, cost effectiveness, and an ad that is appealing and easily understood.

In a past article, I stated that advertising must be professional. It is better not to advertise than to advertise unprofessionally. An unprofessional ad will tell the public that your services are unprofessional. This is especially true in the television arena. I have been on Christian TV with my wife talking about ministry. I have thought about going on cable TV to advertise chiropractic, but have not yet, because I do not have the confidence that I would be professional enough.

With regard to cost, advertising is expensive. I heard one practice manager state that the cost to obtain a new patient averages out to about \$200. I have found that figure to be pretty accurate. If you are advertising and your average is lower than that, I would say that you are doing a good job. In contrast, if you are spending more than \$200 on average to obtain a new patient, you should consider making some type of adjustment (not osseous). It could be that the means of advertising you are doing is fine, but you need to tweak something, i.e. make your language more easily understood by the public, having a clear and simple approach to have the person contact you, keeping the 1st visit charges low enough to not be an obstacle, etc.

Additionally, any advertisement must be appealing and easily understood by the general public. When you seriously think about advertising, I suggest that you place yourself in the place of the masses. If you read, heard, or saw your advertisement, would you decide to make an appointment to come in? I heard one chiropractor on the radio talk about how he removed subluxations and restored wholeness. My chiropractic educational background is subluxation-based, so as a chiropractor, I understood his thinking. However if I were a chiropractically uneducated person who has pain (the 85% of Americans), would I choose to see someone who talked about subluxation and wholeness restoration? In fact, in his whole ad, he never explained what a subluxation was or how that could help relieve pain. Of course, I felt that was wasted money. I am confident that ad did not bring in his desired results.

I would like to differentiate "advertise" versus "market." When I look up in the thesaurus these two words, both have the other word as a descriptive definition. However in my thinking, advertise is more general, kind of like

continued next page,

Any
advertisement
must be
appealing

Back Talk, continued,

throwing out seed on the ground and seeing what will grow. Marketing is advertising to a specific group or in a specific means. Such as growing a specific crop, like corn or wheat. Advertising can be sending out an ad to the general public, while marketing is targeting a specific group of people, i.e. athletes, attorneys, children, etc. When I use these words, you can apply the specific word to my thought. One crucial point - if you decide to market to a specific group, learn all that you can and become an expert before you start marketing. You may only get one chance to show your expertise of lack thereof.

I believe that God has given me a business mind and the gift of marketing. In the chiropractic profession, I have seen marketing that is quite good, some that is mediocre, and some that is very bad. Much of the chiropractic advertising to attract new patients is trying to reach or fight over the same patients (*the 10-15% of the public who already see chiropractors*). Thus I often see advertising that goes along the lines of "If you have a backache or headache, come and see me." Much of my advertising has been to reach the uninformed or the 85% of people that have never tried chiropractic. Thus the majority of my emphasis has been on education — what is chiropractic, what do chiropractors do, how does it help, what conditions benefit, and why someone should try it. Approximately 1 out of every 2 new patients that I see has never tried chiropractic.

Probably the most common type of advertising is yellow page. I have tried from one extreme to the other. I have placed ads that are single line, in column, 1/8 page, 1/4 page, and 2/3 page. It used to be that the larger the ad, the larger the exposure and the more the benefit. Because I had thought that to be true, I once put the largest ad in the Portland yellow pages. It was the 2/3 page ad and cost me over \$4000/month. Interestingly enough, I only drew 2 types of patients from that ad - cash patients who were looking to get well in a couple of visits and personal injury patients who were looking for large settlements. I have heard from several practice management firms that the days of benefit from yellow pages are behind us. I believe this to be true for several reasons. First of all, most young people do not look at the yellow pages. Rather they look at the web to obtain information. Because the web is so easily accessed, readily available, and has immediate up-to-date information, yellow pages, just as the newspaper, are becoming extinct dinosaurs. Secondly, people do not learn information about or decide to try chiropractic from what they see in the yellow pages. They are just trying to decide which chiropractor to visit. Thus it is still a good idea to make sure that you are listed. Consider either having an in-column ad or 1/8 or 1/6 page ad. If you are limited in resources to spend on advertisement, it is good to consider some other means to obtain a better investment than yellow pages.

Effective
advertising
does not
occur from
something
done once.

With regard to mass mailed coupon savers, I do not recommend them. I do not believe it is professional for a doctor of any type to be in the same mailer as restaurants, pest control, and heater vent cleaning. Additionally, I can confidently state that from an investment standpoint, the chances of it being profitable are not good.

A better means of advertisement is taking advantage of the web and having a good web page. Some people are very good at making an excellent front page on the web. If that is not you, consider hiring a professional web-marketing firm to make up your web page. That is what I have done, and I receive a number of comments from patients that our website is very good. In your web page, include your picture, resume, specialties, interests, testimonials, office location and directions, hours, and various conditions. You can also consider social media, as it appears to be an up and coming thing that will not go away.

Lastly, when you advertise, you must understand that effective advertising does not occur from something done once. Effective advertising requires repetition over and over again. In other words, you must keep putting your face in front of a particular group or type of people, so that when they have

concluded on page 10,

Back Talk, continued,

a need, they think of you. It is actually quite uncommon that when a person hears or reads an ad, he or she has a need at that time. However when the need does arise, if there is familiarity due to repetition of the ad, the person will remember you and feel more inclined to contact your office. I recall one patient who told me that when she heard my ad, she did not need my services just then. But she decided that if and when she did have a need, she would come to see me. She put my telephone number in her cell phone memory, and when the need arose 2 years later, she called me and came into the office. Another patient stated that he listened to me daily for 2 years before he decided to become a chiropractic patient and visit me. Thus for any advertisement to be successful, there must be long-term commitment. A person who decides to test the water and try something for several months will commonly not benefit. In my opinion, the minimum time length to consider if something is effective or not is 1-2 years.

Most of my advertising has been on conservative talk radio. I give 2-minute commercials and call them info-mercials, because they are commercials, but I give educational information, as well as relate a case history with each advertisement. I have consistently done this for over 20 years. It is a very costly and time-consuming method. For this type of advertisement, the doctor must be committed to public education, as well maintain integrity and professionalism, because sooner or later, news will spread throughout the region and the doctor's name can become a household word. If you have confidence and dedication in your service related to public education, it is worth it and will cause the practice to grow.

I hope this series of articles has given you some ideas and guidelines about advertising. Have a blessed day!

Dr. Paul E. Okamoto is a 1974 graduate of Palmer Chiropractic College and has been a member of the CCA since 1977. His practice, The Master's Touch Chiropractic Clinic, is located in Portland, OR.