

# **MARKETING TO CONSUMERS**

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**>Marketing 101 Tutorial**

## **MARKETING TO CONSUMERS**

### **>Marketing 101**

#### **What is marketing?**

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Marketing to consumers is important — even essential — to your practice. Consumers are more involved than ever before in decisions surrounding their health — and their health care providers.

If you question the value of marketing directly to consumers, consider the billions of dollars being spent on advertisements for prescription medications. The power of consumer choice should never be underestimated!

We need to let consumers know two things: the value of physical therapy for diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of problems related to movement, function, and health; and why your practice should be their practice of choice for restoring and improving function.

#### **Reach consumers through effective marketing.**

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What is marketing and what can it do for you? At the most fundamental level, marketing yourself and your practice means letting others know about you, your practice, and the services you provide — and, most importantly, encouraging them to choose your practice when the need arises. Marketing is important for building a new practice, sustaining and growing an existing practice, and developing a specialty or niche program. And a sound marketing plan is an essential foundation for the health of your practice. Your plan must:

- define your practice
- identify your target audience
- analyze your strengths and weaknesses
- survey the marketplace
- analyze your competitors
- develop a unique selling proposition
- leverage key messages
- utilize promotional tools

#### **Define your practice.**

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One of the most important steps in developing and marketing your practice is to define the services you provide to the community. This decision should be based upon your clinical expertise, special interests, available resources, and the needs of your community. Many practices define their services through the development of a vision and mission statement as a part of their strategic planning process. Others take a more informal approach. The important point is to define the services you provide that are either not currently offered in your marketplace or are offered, but not as effectively or efficiently as your practice can provide them.

#### **Identify your target audience.**

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Your efforts will be most effective if they are highly targeted — from age and gender, to income bracket and the type(s) of publications your potential patients read. To identify your target audience (potential patients), consider starting by identifying common characteristics of your current patients. If you aspire to serve a specific target audience

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such as runners, teenagers who are overweight, or women with incontinence, define your ideal patient and use research to confirm a sufficient need for physical therapist services among that audience.

#### Demographics

Identify your patient demographic. Demographics refer to age, sex, income, education, race, marital status, size of household, geographic location, size of city, and profession. They are tangible, measurable facts that distinguish one group of people from another.

Research suggests that physical therapists may wish to consider targeting women between the ages of 35 and 54, because they are frequently the health care decision makers for their children, their parents, and themselves. Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are a demographic that is seeking ways to maintain long-term quality of life, and they are the key audience for our brand messaging. Additionally, we can expect that Generation X (born between 1965 and 1978) will be seeking options to maintain their active lifestyles.

Think broadly when it comes to determining who the decision makers are for your target audience. For instance, if you are focusing on adolescent sports injuries, you may wish to target coaches, teachers, and parents with your marketing efforts. If your interest is pain management, consider reaching out to support groups and community organizations. If you are considering providing services in women's health, reach out to women's clubs and organizations, community leaders, and online support networks — in addition to health care providers.

#### Lifestyle

Lifestyle factors are hobbies, recreational pursuits, media habits, social interaction preferences, entertainment, vacations, and other non-work time activities. These factors are particularly helpful when identifying the most appropriate promotion for your audience. For instance, if your target demographic enjoys cycling, you may choose to sponsor a local race. Or if you are targeting women with children, you might choose to write an article about low back pain for a local parenting publication.

### Review your strengths and weaknesses.

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Prior to marketing your practice, you need to have a clear understanding of the factors that will positively or negatively influence potential patients and clients.

- **Strengths:** What are the strengths of your practice and how can you capitalize on these strengths? For instance, strengths may include a high patient satisfaction rating, strong clinical skills for specific conditions, positive patient outcomes or a unique community partnership.
- **Weaknesses:** What are the weaker aspects of your practice and how can you correct or minimize them? Weaknesses may include inconvenient hours, a poor location, or a lack of experience compared to your competitors.

Consider making a list of your strengths and weaknesses, using a SWOT (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats) analysis to help you market your practice more successfully. For more, see APTA's "Marketing to Health Care Professionals" Tool kit at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing).

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	Internal	External
Positives	<p><b>What do we do well?</b></p> <p>i.e. We see more pediatric patients than any other practice in the region; we partner with the local AAA baseball team; we have a very high patient satisfaction rate</p>	<p><b>What external trends or conditions can we capitalize on?</b></p> <p>i.e. There are no other practices in the region focused on geriatrics; more patients need cardiac PT than ever before</p>
Negatives	<p><b>What do we do poorly?</b></p> <p>i.e. Our hours are not convenient for many patients; we don't have many repeat referrals from physicians; we have limited experience compared with our competitors</p>	<p><b>What external trends or conditions should we be wary of?</b></p> <p>i.e. Reimbursement levels are declining; PCP's are offering PT in-house</p>

### Survey the marketplace.

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How large is your market? Can it sustain both your practice and the competition? What is the growth projection for the next five years? You can gather data from sources such as your local Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Census to identify the size and demographics of your marketplace. Utilize this data when locating, expanding, or promoting your practice. For instance, if your target demographic is Baby Boomers, focus promotional efforts such as direct mail in zip codes with higher percentages of individuals in that age group.

Snapshots of consumer data by zip code are available online:

[http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)

[http://www.esri.com/data/esri\\_data/tapestry.html](http://www.esri.com/data/esri_data/tapestry.html)

<http://www.claritas.com/MyBestSegments/Default.jsp?ID=20>

### Analyze your competitors.

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Consider the many options that patients have when they are searching for a solution to problems involving movement, pain, or function. Identifying the strengths of your practice in comparison to those of your competitors is an important step in developing your marketing plan. Start by identifying:

- Names of competitors — remember they may be practitioners other than physical therapists. In the mind of the consumer, options for treatment may include orthopedic surgeons, primary care physicians, chiropractors, athletic trainers or massage therapists.

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- Summary of competitors — their location, clinical expertise, methods of advertising, customer service, and promotional strategies. Collect their promotional materials and study their ads to identify both strengths and weaknesses.
- Competitors' strengths and weaknesses — visualize your competitors' strengths and weaknesses from the viewpoint of the consumer.

### **Develop a unique selling proposition.**

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To successfully market your clinic or practice, you need to identify the features that differentiate your practice from the competition. A unique selling proposition (USP) is a single statement that expresses this message. Ideally, your USP should be a sustained, competitive advantage, or something that a competitor cannot own. For instance, APTA's "[Move Forward](#)" campaign stakes claim to "motion experts" for physical therapists.

Your claim as a "motion expert" should be reflected throughout your messaging. However, your USP should identify a more tailored message that sets you apart from all of your competitors. To help stimulate your thinking, here are USPs for several well-known organizations:

FedEx: When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.

Domino's Pizza: Pizza delivered in 30 minutes or it's free.

Oil of Olay: You get younger looking skin.

The following questions will help you determine your focus:

- What does your practice do best?
- Which factors are most important to your current and potential patients?
- Which aspects of your business are totally unique?
- Which factors can be easily communicated and understood by your target audience?

Find answers to some of these questions by surveying current patients or simply asking them what they like best about your practice. Develop a patient satisfaction survey or questionnaire to learn more about your patients' opinions of your practice. Use this information to develop a strong message for consumers.

### **Direct access — our own marketing opportunity.**

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Consumers are playing a much greater role in decisions about their health care than ever before. This makes direct access to physical therapist services a great opportunity to build and develop your practice in new and innovative ways.

It is important to market to consumers even if your state law requires physician referral or ongoing communication with a patient's physician. Referrals are an important part of most successful practices in recognized professions such as accounting, law, dentistry, or medicine. These professionals depend upon referrals as a source of practice

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development. Whether referrals come from other professionals or from current or former clients, the value of developing strong relationships is undisputed.

Remember that referral requirements are opportunities to build relationships with other health care providers as well as with consumers. And communication between health providers, whether or not it is required by law, is always in a patient's best interest. Communication with other health care professionals is not only in your patient's best interest — it can also help market your practice.

#### **Tips for addressing referral requirements:**

- If a referral is required before any involvement with the patient, make sure that your practice/front desk does everything possible to help this potential patient obtain that referral. Often a referral can be obtained without a visit by the patient to the physician. Offer to make calls or send information to the patient's physician. Consider developing a customizable template letter to physicians requesting a referral for treatment for these patients.
- If your state law allows evaluation but not treatment, provide an informative and professionally written evaluation to your patient's health care providers (be sure to first obtain your patient's consent). This correspondence should help you secure a referral and develop a positive relationship with the physician. Remember that consumers who seek your services directly often have physicians whom you do not know — leading to new opportunities to build positive relationships with potential referral sources!
- If your state law requires ongoing communication or physician referral after a certain number of visits, diminish the administrative burden for everyone involved by working with physicians and their office staff to streamline this process. This will help prevent disruption of care and unnecessary visits to the physician. Consider this another opportunity to showcase the value of your services and to build strong relationships within the health care community.
- If a potential patient needs a referral because of state law but doesn't have a personal physician, use this opportunity to make a referral yourself. Recommend a physician you know and trust — and one who thinks highly of your services. This helps both the patient and your relationship with this physician.

Physical therapists are especially skilled at building strong relationships with their patients. Take advantage of each and every interaction to demonstrate the value of what you have to offer — both to them and to others. Your patients can be your most important source of referrals, so please don't underestimate them!

#### **Leverage key messages.**

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Key messages help guide all communication efforts by providing a consistent message that establishes need, benefit, and action. They should be written from the patient's point of view. As part of the "Move Forward" campaign, APTA identified three key messages that resonate with consumers:

- Physical therapists can significantly improve mobility to perform daily activities;

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- Physical therapists can provide an alternative to painful and expensive surgery, in many cases;
- Physical therapists can manage or eliminate pain without medication and its side effects, in many cases.

Other supporting brand messages are:

- Physical therapists have the most specialized education to help improve mobility.
- Many physical therapists are doctors of physical therapy and all are trusted health care professionals who have extensive education and experience in diagnosing and treating conditions that limit the body's ability to move and function in daily life.
- Physical therapists can teach you how to manage a condition so you can achieve long-term health benefits.
- In most states, you can make an appointment with a physical therapist directly, without a referral.

When developing messages that are specific to your practice, avoid stating features and concentrate on benefits. Try taking the phrase “you get” and convert it to “which means.” This allows you to focus on benefits to patients. For instance, “you get a brand new, 21,000 square foot facility” may mean “our facility is designed to focus on the needs of each patient and includes many private treatment rooms.”

### **Build community among existing patients.**

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APTA research has shown that the vast majority of patients coming to physical therapists without physician referrals are former patients or friends and family of former patients. This is evidence of how great physical therapists are at building trusting relationships with their patients. They want to come back — and they refer their friends!

There are many things that a practice can do to build community among its current and former patients. For instance, a monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly newsletter that can be mailed or e-mailed to patients is a great way to continue communication and showcase your special programs and new services. Educational seminars, open houses, and annual fitness assessments are also great ways to stay connected to patients and expand your practice (invite them to bring a family member or friend!).

Providing health information to patients in your waiting room benefits both your patients and your practice. Consider downloading APTA's free consumer handouts, available at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing), under “Reaching Consumers.” They will not only be read by your patients, they will be passed along to friends and family!

### **Your Web site – the “face” of your practice.**

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Your practice's Web site can be one of your most important marketing tools. The impact of a well-designed Web site and great content cannot be overstated. If you are considering a Web re-design, take a look at APTA's Web site templates, Web banners, and Web buttons at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing), under “Reaching Consumers.” Whatever you choose, APTA encourages you to provide a link to [moveforwardpt.com](http://moveforwardpt.com) to provide your viewers with the most up-to-date consumer information provided by APTA.

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Make sure that profiles of your clinicians, including photos, are posted on your site. Each physical therapist in your practice should be listed in APTA's Find a PT database. Find a PT serves as a showcase for your practice as well as for individual physical therapists. Make sure they keep their information current.

While developing your Web site, make sure that you have done what is needed to optimize placement on search engines. There are simple ways to increase your prominence in searches:

- Provide many links on your Web site — not only to other sites, but also back to your home page.
- Include commonly-searched terms as part of the copy on your home page (i.e. physical therapy, back pain, Chicago physical therapist).

### Utilize promotional tools.

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Advertising and other media involvement can be expensive and time consuming. Before committing your resources, identify which strategies will be most effective in reaching your target audience. For instance, if you are trying to reach young women under the age of 25, you would not want to target local newspapers, due to their declining readership among younger people. However, buying advertising on cable television or Facebook could be a more efficient use of your marketing dollars for this demographic.

### Media relations

You can serve as a significant resource to your local media, but you should realize that they have no obligation to promote your practice. Read your local newspaper, watch your local news, and listen to your local radio to understand what is perceived as newsworthy. The opening of a new practice may not make the news; however, free consultations for returning military veterans may result in an article - and free exposure for your practice.

- Instructions for creating letters to the editor, news releases, and media alerts may be found on [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing) under "Reaching the Media." Press releases provide the media with all the facts and information about a potential story. As newspapers reduce staff, press releases help simplify a reporter's job.
- Story ideas – a less formal approach may be better accepted in some markets because it gives the reporter some flexibility and involves less self-promotion. You can contact a local reporter with a story idea, such as the rise of sports injuries following New Year's resolutions, and offer to serve as a reference.
- Bylined articles – smaller publications tend to be receptive to articles written by experts. Contact your local business weekly and offer to write a piece on reducing back pain at work. In some instances, they are willing to give you a weekly or monthly column. In many cases, APTA's Consumer Interest press releases at [www.apta.org/media](http://www.apta.org/media) which may be re-worked into bylined articles, so there is no need to "reinvent the wheel."
- Experts – contact local newspaper and television reporters and offer to serve as an expert on a variety of physical therapy-related health concerns. Most

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members of the media are looking for comments on particular stories from an expert's perspective or even for guests during noon news segments.

#### Community events

Community events provide a different forum to connect with current and potential patients. When you host or sponsor an event, you demonstrate your commitment to the community. For more information, go to [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing), under "Reaching Consumers." To maximize your participation in these events:

- Wear matching clothing with your facility's logo. APTA offers official "Move Forward" merchandise on the "BrandBeat" link.
- Provide appropriate brochures and handouts at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing) under "Reaching Consumers."
- Post information about the event in your facility and on your Web site, including photos and results, if applicable.
- Invite the media to participate in events you are hosting (for instance, a "celebrity" emcee or a live radio remote as part of a radio advertising media-buy).
- Consider a free consultation for event participants.

#### Advertising

Paid media offers the greatest control for marketers. You can control the message you deliver as well as when and where it is to be delivered.

- Traditional media — traditional media includes newspapers, television, radio, and magazines. The media landscape is different in every market, but it has changed significantly everywhere in recent years. Newspapers have seen a drastic decline in readership, radio stations have suffered due to satellite radio, and cable TV audiences are now comparable in size to those of network television. As part of the "Move Forward" campaign, APTA has developed television and print advertisements that members can customize and place locally. Cable is a very effective advertising buy because it is targeted and tends to be less expensive than network television. Specific media buying tips are included in APTA's "Media Buying 101" resource at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing) under "Reaching Consumers"/"Television Ads."
- Online — examples of targeted ways to reach your local audience online include local television station and newspaper Web sites. While banner ads have low click-through rates, they can help increase the public awareness of your practice or clinic. Facebook can be an efficient advertising medium, especially since the fastest growing demographic is women age 55 and older. You can target your online audience by age, location and even factors such as level of education. Remember, if you are considering updating your current Web site, APTA offers free Web site templates for members and components at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing) under "Reaching Consumers."
- Direct mail — direct mail tends to have low response rates (1-2 percent), but it allows you to place a controlled message in the hands of a small (or large) group of individuals in a specific zip code. If you live in a large metropolitan area, this

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may be more cost effective than paying to advertise in an expensive market that reaches an audience that may be too far away to reasonably consider your practice.

#### **Social media**

Social media, which includes blogs and online communities such as Facebook and Twitter, helps to build conversations with your key audiences. See “Social Media Tips & Best Practices” at [www.apta.org/prmarketing](http://www.apta.org/prmarketing) under “Reaching Consumers” to learn how to properly engage in social media.

#### **Develop a plan.**

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Once you have completed an analysis of your target audiences, your practice, the marketplace, your competitors and your promotional tools, formulate a written marketing plan that sets simple, realistic goals and describes strategies and an action plan. APTA offers a sample plan that is specific to marketing to other health care professionals that may be helpful to review. Identify your measures for success and follow up throughout the year to ensure that you remain on track. You should evaluate and revise your plan annually. A strong marketing plan not only keeps you from being “reactive” to the marketplace, it will help you reach your goal of building and growing a successful practice.