



Your overall marketing approach

Any successful clinical program or business venture doesn't just happen – it requires doing some marketing to make sure you're reaching your target audiences, that your messaging is clear and compelling, and that you have special goals and milestones you want to achieve.

Here are the primary marketing steps for launching your successful balance clinic or program:

Step 1: Inventory your services ... and do a reality check

Take a good look at your existing programs and the new services you plan to add. What do you currently provide for your patients who are experiencing a balance problem? What benefits do you offer, and how can those be improved with future services? What sets you apart from your competition?

Next, take a realistic look at how you and your program are perceived by your patients, referring physicians and the community at large. Is there a perception gap? Are there issues that you're unaware of? The key is to know if there's a perception gap and to understand issues or negative attitudes that may exist. If your customers have largely favorable impressions about your program, then this is an excellent opportunity to build on your established position and strengthen your presence within the community.

Step 2: Define where you fit into the current market

Once you have clearly defined yourself and your current market presence, it's important to get an in-depth look at your community – and most importantly, where you and your program fit in. Find out what health care needs currently are not being met, how your new services will help fill that void, and what other programs will compete with or complement your services.

Define who your customers (both current and potential ones) are and where your referrals come from. Are you tapping into all your resources to make sure patients are aware of you and your program?

Look to your referral sources and ask them what their needs are. Talk to them about their patients and what services they would like to see available. What are their concerns and priorities in patient care? What type of outcomes are they expecting? Also, don't forget to include payers in your marketing and communications efforts. You can foster a better understanding of the value and benefits your programs offer, including the potential cost savings – something of great interest to your payers!

Conducting this research will help you learn more about who you want to reach ... and how you can set yourself on a higher plane than your competitors.



Step 3: Create an effective set of messages

By now you should have a good idea of the value and benefits of your programs, as well as why and how they fit into the community. You should also have a clear picture of your customers (patients and referrers). The next step is defining your messages.

A clearly defined set of messages will tell people: (1) who you are, (2) what services you can provide, (3) why your programs are important, and (4) how they benefit both patients and referrers. Your messages should be clear, concise and compelling – short bullet points work best, instead of lengthy descriptions.

Although there should be a core set of messages that applies to all your audiences, there should be a customized set for each major audience segment. There would be customized messages, for example, that target physicians, physical therapists, payers and patients.

Step 4: Determine the tools you'll need to deliver your messages

Now that you know what your messages will be, the next step is determining how to deliver them. There are a number of highly effective tools for delivering your messages – reaching a number of target audiences and that can be adapted to fit your particular budget. Read below under “Specific Tools for Marketing Your Services” for some tools and tactics that have worked with other balance centers and programs.

Step 5: Set up an action plan and timeline

The final step in developing your marketing strategy is to establish an action plan and timeline. For example, it may seem like a great idea to do community-wide balance screenings, hold open houses, do mailings, and distribute information all within a six-week period. But the reality is that it might work better to stagger these marketing activities.

As part of your action planning, ask yourself some important questions. Can your staff handle the marketing activities you have planned? Is your marketing budget realistic? Do you have a plan to handle the increased patient load if your programs grow too fast? Developing a timeline with evaluation “check points” will help you market yourself more effectively and will help you manage your program’s growth.

Step 6: Keep up the good work!

Marketing is an ongoing activity and doesn’t end once you’ve achieved your established goals. Instead, for long-term continued success, marketing should become an integral part of your clinic’s business activities. Constant communication with your referring physicians and payers, as well as continual community presence, will help ensure your position as the balance solution leader in your community.