

# Marketing Your Uniqueness

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Successful marketing in healthcare must go beyond simply stating who you are, where you are, and what you offer. Because "many healthcare practitioners allow themselves to be lumped into broad categories without establishing any real point of differentiation . . . consumers assume that all providers are basically the same" (Thompson). They aren't. You aren't. It's critical to pinpoint and market that piece of your organization that makes you unique, the something different no one else has.

As an illustration, we have a client who went through a dedicated process to begin operating agency-free. The dollars flowing out for agency fees resulted in poor morale, an ailing bottom line, and decreased quality of service. Eliminating the use of agencies in all their buildings engendered positive outcomes that have set them apart from their competitors.

One of those positive developments is a marked increase in the comfort level felt by patients and their families. They see the same faces in front of them everyday - faces who are familiar with the patient's situation and who need not navigate a learning curve each day to reach a workable starting point. These faces are not from an agency. They are the organization's own employees - part of a stable, dedicated and well-trained staff. It is this piece that sets them apart from all other providers in the area.

The organization subsequently developed a marketing program highlighting the benefits of being agency-free, creating "in the customer's mind an idea that a particular product is different in an important way . . . [producing] a competitive edge over others in the marketplace" (Marketing the Uniqueness of Small Towns).

In addition to the benefit of having consistent and adequate staffing levels with a stable workforce of well-trained professionals, the organization can boast of being not only the provider of choice, but also the employer of choice. Being agency-free creates greater job security and staff retention, fostering that stable workforce - always a plus for patients as well as for the organization's positioning in the market. They can tout a twenty-seven percent annualized turnover in staff compared to the average of eighty-five percent. This commitment to long-term retention of well-trained staff helps create a focal point around which a marketing program can be built.

A similar situation is possible in any type of healthcare organization. Find the way in which you are unique and utilize it to "differentiate your products and services from your competitors, giving customers a reason to choose you over your competitors" (Carter). If you own the best outcomes in surgeries, treatments, rehabs, or percentages that show off well, you should be positioning those in outcome documents, spotlighting your difference and why that difference is important.

Dedicated outcome-based documents that get to the point are vital for effective market positioning. The more specific, meaty, and dedicated the information you provide, the better it markets to referral sources, case managers, practice partners, and the community at large. Include specifics: numbers for successful cases, results with certain types of treatment, testimonials from customers whom prospective clients can call to ask

about experiences with your organization, quotes from customer surveys, differences in cost or pricing alternatives, and most of all, that piece you offer that no one else does. Utilize those pieces that are exclusively yours.

Each organization owns its intellectual property as well as its product and service property. Remember that "no matter how you choose to be different, the important thing is to be different" (Thompson). If you don't take advantage of that difference in positioning your organization in the market place, then you are simply out there offering what everyone else offers: location, ambiance, ample square footage, newness of the equipment, a gorgeous van, and the like. By careful positioning, you can move from selling mere "stuff" to offering something that no one else does, and thereby reap the resulting rewards.

### **Works Cited**

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