Finding and Developing a Niche

One Audiologist Shares Her Experience of Starting and Growing a Private Practice

By Paula Schwartz, Au.D.
The Niche

Audiology Concepts in Edina Minn. added a secondary business – the Tinnitus and Hyperacusis Clinic – providing a business niche and marketing niche to complement our audiology practice. With a keen interest in tinnitus and knowing that few audiologists or otolaryngologists are interested in dealing with the distressed tinnitus patient, I knew this was an opportunity to offer a different and desperately needed service. We receive referrals from primary care physicians, neurologists, otolaryngologists and chiropractors, with some patients driving in from out of state for our services. Keeping tinnitus in the forefront of our marketing, particularly in the medical journals, has provided us opportunities to speak to the medical community about both audiology and tinnitus.

The Market

We do not try to be everything to everyone. My original marketing plan involved only physician marketing in physician journals and image marketing directed at the Baby Boomers. Only once have I marketed a product (I regretted it the moment I did it). This marketing technique differentiates Audiology Concepts from all competitors running full-page newspaper ads and relentless direct-mailing campaigns. Our patients often comment that they appreciate the fact that we are not focused on one particular product, but a variety of products to ensure they have one best suited for them.

The Patient

Our goal is that every patient walks out of our office feeling that they were treated with respect, compassion and understanding. People don’t get sold anything, instead they have professionals looking out for their best interest who are committed to working toward finding solutions best suited to their needs.

I spend a great deal of time educating patients on various options helping them make an informed decision based on their hearing loss, cosmetic preferences, lifestyle and budget. I am comfortable with patients leaving our office to “think about it.” They receive so much information during their first appointment that we like to allow them extra time for processing everything. This time ensures that the patient returns to our clinic when they are ready to take action. They are appreciative that they were not “sold” or pushed into making a decision.

I recently formed an Advisory Council consisting of 12 patients from all walks of life. We meet quarterly to discuss business ideas, marketing ideas and sometimes just for a good focus-group discussion. It is invaluable to hear what patients think and experience. We incorporate their ideas for improvement.

The Physician

Establishing a relationship and referral relationship with the primary care physician takes time but is absolutely worth it. Patients referred by their physicians walk into the office with a different level of confidence from those leads generated by a marketing event. Each report we write is a marketing opportunity with their physician. Physician newsletters, annual lunch and learn, “Physician Days” that provide free hearing testing for the physician, and marketing in the medical journals keeps our practice in the forefront of their minds and referral manuals. None of this is as important, however, than the report that their patient gives on their entire experience in our office.

Dr. Paula Schwartz of Audiology Concepts in Edina, Minn. is a registered audiologist by the state of Minnesota with more than 23 years of experience. Dr. Schwartz specializes in the latest technological advancements in hearing assessment, rehabilitation and is committed to helping people hear by educating them on available solutions to their hearing needs in a three-way relationship between primary care physician, patient and audiologist. Contact her at (952) 831-4222 or by e-mail at plschwartz@msn.com.