



Networking, the Client-builder

ABSTRACT: To keep your practice growing, networking is essential. By getting involved with successful networking groups, developing a defining statement and maintaining the relationships built throughout, you can broaden your business's visibility, marketing and client base at little to no cost.

Medical practices are not immune to having to sustain themselves during these challenging economic times. The good news is the most effective ways to grow your practice are universal at all times, and the only difference is that right now it is critical to take action. A surefire way to gain more clients is not through more expensive advertising that isn't traceable—it's through networking and face-to-face marketing. Results can be tracked to see where your efforts are paying off, and it's low-cost.

From clients referring friends and family to your staff members belonging to at least one networking group each, getting the word out about your practice beyond your regular clientele is essential for business sustainability. But getting out—and more importantly, getting up—to talk about your practice isn't always easy. The good news is you don't have to reinvent the wheel—there are opportunities already developed.

Identify the group

Beginning a profitable networking program requires the entire staff's commitment. Start by explaining to the staff the benefit in its most basic form. Emphasize the rewards the staff will receive, not just how the practice will benefit.

WORTH A LOOK

These networking groups have a proven track record, and local chapters may be available in your area.



Next, there are many different networking groups empowering and motivating people who want to expand the possibilities for generating business. Research the available groups in your community. There will be several, and all have different ground rules for how they are run. Also belonging to networking groups for your profession is a great way to stay on top of trends and industry movement; however, it is beneficial to choose groups that only permit one member of a specific profession to join, as it will allow you to reach a broader base of people than just other physicians.

Be realistic about your availability. The ability to attend networking meetings is essential to success. Encourage your staff to share a networking group to maximize opportunities while providing good support and motivation. Attending networking meetings, even for the most social of people, can seem daunting. By sharing a group, staff members will be able to fully commit to the process and know they only have to attend an event every other week and have a back-up person to share the responsibility.

Visit the prospective groups in the area and get a feel for participants. Make sure this is a match with your personality and objectives. Pay attention to how many qualified referrals are passed. If it seems not many

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are coming out of the group, it could be a sign of an ineffective organization. Remember, you are there to build patient relations, not just to socialize.

Commercial-ready

When you are out networking, it is best to have a 30–60 second speech prepared about who you are and what you do. An effective presentation will tell a story. Share examples of experiences patients have had at your practice, how you work with them, the attention to detail you give with each service and other aspects that make you unique. By telling it in a story form, people are much more apt to listen attentively.

Also create a defining statement, which is a shorter version of your speech. This is something that can be said quickly and should become your response to the standard “What do you do?” It should include two distinctions about you and your business. Keep in mind people only buy for two reasons: solutions to challenges and good feelings. A defining statement needs both. There is a greater impact when you respond with a defining statement instead of with generic, detail-free answers.

Give to get

The surest way to get referrals from your networking partners is to give them referrals first. You have to give to get.

Create a book with your networking partners’ business cards inside, and listen to the needs of all the people you come into contact with. It is amazing how many requests you will get from people in the community who need goods and services. When you make referrals, you become a knowledgeable source of information. They will think about you beyond the services you provide in your practice.

Once you are giving a steady stream of business to your networking partners, they will feel obligated to do the same. The key to successful networking is to build relationships with each member in the group. This takes time, and your best efforts will come from setting up one-on-one meetings with other members. Have lunch with them, or visit their respective businesses. Arrive with a mental list of questions you can ask on how you can best support their needs, and work with them from there.

Commit

Participating in all aspects of the networking group is key. Most groups have some form of networking training or mentoring available—take advantage of this. Very few people are brilliant networkers right from the start. Many groups will walk you through the process of creating a dynamic presentation and how specifically to ask for your ideal and best client. Use this opportunity to learn from the group's other successful individuals.

Also, the more involved you are within the group, the more referrals you will get. Learning to understand the difference between a lead and a referral is also a time-saving technique. A referral is where one of your networking partners has found someone who has a need for your service, done some qualifying of the prospect, given them your information or business card, and told them you will follow up with a call. When you call, the referral will know who you are and is open to doing business with you.

A lead is where someone gives you a name but has not spoken to a person specifically about you. If the group you are in consistently appears to be turning over leads instead of referrals, consider switching groups or diversifying your interests. You may be able to reach out to a broader pool of prospective patients.

Build relationships

Though networking vastly enhances your odds of receiving positive responses, building rewarding relationships can take time. Remember one great relationship is not enough, as circumstances can change quickly. The foundation of a strong network is based on trust and establishing a history of mutual assistance. Maintaining communication with professionals you connect with is crucial. Through regular and consistent follow-up, you can stay updated on their changing needs and remind them of your own.

Unfortunately, there is no magic bus of patients coming to your door. Now is the time to go out and get them yourself. Professionals who belong to at least one networking group make, on average, 20% more than their counterparts who do not. Networking takes time and will be ever-evolving, but the results can be significantly worth the effort. 🍷



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TAKEAWAYS

- Getting involved in the correct and most helpful networking group is key.
- Developing a defining statement about your practice helps you promote it more successfully.
- The best way to start receiving referrals is to give them out.
- Take advantage of training opportunities to learn the latest networking techniques.
- Maintain the relationships you develop to receive the best results.