

Winning Their Loyalty

How to create more repeats, referrals and raving fans

Do you try to get everyone to road test your business? The key to profitability isn't more customers, it's more customers who keep on buying, and sending people they know to do the same. Regardless of how essential your work is, no matter how "mass" you believe your market to be, not everyone will be back.

Your product or service and its benefits are really only a small part of what influences a customer to buy from you a second, third or fourth time. The experience – or to be more precise, how the experience makes them feel – is the driving factor. You can't be all things to all people. Trying to will only put you on a treadmill, chasing more and more new customers to replace all those people who were looking for a different experience.

The process outlined here will help you refine your target audience and create a marketing communications plan that improves your loyalty percentages, grows your profit levels and reduces marketing time and waste. The steps are:

1. Profile your Ideal Customer
2. Recognize what your customers are really buying
3. Choose the right places to get the right people
4. Be an attentive, attractive suitor
5. Mercilessly eradicate obstacles

1. Profile your Ideal Customer

Marketing is the art of positioning your business to attract the most customers who are most likely to produce a profit for you. It's about knowing who you are and what you're selling, and who your Ideal Customer is and why they're buying. The harder you have to work to consistently be or deliver what customers want, the more your time, energy and money will be scattered, and the lower your profit margin will stay. Match who you are to who you attract (or want to), and everything from product/service selection to employee hiring to advertising becomes easier and more efficient.

Perhaps you're a step ahead, with a clearly-defined target audience – such as women 25-55 years old who make \$60,000+, live in major-metro areas and want great service. Wonderful! It's still not good enough. You're still wasting money up front, wasting time on the back end, and cutting into both the profitability and energy of your business. You need to know more.

Take Action:

1. Pull your last few months' client/customer/patient list, (or at least a large sampling). Cross out any first-timers. Sort the remainder from high to low according to how much income they've delivered.
2. Review the top-contributing half, and underline everyone who brings out the best in you – your best work, your easiest rapport, boosting your energy. These are the types of people you want more of. If you track referrals, highlight those customers who have referred others to you; these are the types who could be your raving fans.
3. Create a profile for these two categories of top clients. Start with the typical demographic stats (e.g., age, sex, race, geographic location, rough income category) but don't stop there.
 - ◆ When do they come in? What prompts them to call you?

- ◆ What line of work are they in?
- ◆ How did they hear about you?
- ◆ What positive feedback have they given you (or your staff)?
- ◆ If you're meeting in person, what do they talk about with you?
- ◆ What do they seem to like hearing about from you?
- ◆ What do they buy from you?
- ◆ What do they buy from others that you could (or do) also offer? Why don't they buy from you? What do they get from the other guy?
- ◆ What do they resist from you/your business or practice?

Get as much detail as possible; your profitability depends on it! You may even want to create a short survey and ask them what they like. Getting clear on which customers are your best customers is the only way to find more of them, and finding more of them will be infinitely more profitable than anything else you can do.

This **Ideal Customer Profile** now becomes the essential foundation for everything you do to get new customers.

2. Recognize what your customers are really buying

There is little these days that's not touched by personal service, and because of that your clients are going to be heavily influenced by the chemistry they feel between them and you, or (if you're a larger enterprise) the contact points between them and your business. (Even online shopping has chemistry.)

In essence, that chemistry is your *brand*. It's the combination of style and substance that helps people sort options and make decisions. Once you have a better sense of who your best customers are and confidently decide to focus on them, it's easier to own your branding

more completely. When you live and breathe it throughout your business or practice, you'll reaffirm the customers you want as well as attract more of them. (Note, by the way, that "You" is more than just you, it's the entire experience created by you and your team from the time they first learn that you exist, to the days and weeks following their first payment to you.)

Take Action:

1. Your first step is discerning what people are really getting when they buy from you. Set up a table with 4 columns, (see table on page 3).
2. In column 1, make a list of the top 3 most-frequently-bought services/products, and then add the top 3 most profitable.
3. Next to each, in column 2, list the overt benefits your customer expects to get from their purchases; write from their point of view, not yours. (Benefits, mind you, not features!)
4. In column 3, describe what it is about the way you do what you do, that is special. This doesn't necessarily have to be a point of difference from other businesses, but taken all together at the end it will describe your uniqueness
5. In column 4, you'll list the hidden benefits. This fourth column is more difficult, but very important because the hidden benefits reveal motivators you can leverage to encourage customers to return.

To uncover them, you'll need to identify the ways in which buying each product/service from you in particular (as opposed to any other service provider), makes a difference to them. This could relate to their priorities, the way they feel about themselves when they work or shop with you, or how the experience with you reinforces certain beliefs about themselves and their lives.

A larger business may need to commission a research study to get these answers, but smaller ones can infer a lot by listening to customers and applying some knowledge about what makes people tick. Let's walk through an example to see how this might look.

A Sample Case: The Cozy Chiropractic Office

Imagine you're a Doctor of Chiropractic. Patients like to share what's caused the latest twinges with you and you let them ramble; they comment on how quiet and soothing your office is, and how relaxed they feel when they leave. Joanne is a loyal patient – rushing around, a hectic lifestyle, but a regular who comes at least twice a month. She has a medical reason to be at your office, and she's been to chiropractors many times before, but never became a regular anywhere. Yes, she feels better after her adjustment, but that's not new. The real reason she returns, the hidden benefit you deliver better than anyone else she's met, is responding to her belief that she deserves to be pampered a little – without making her feel guilty or indulgent, as she might by going so often to a spa or massage therapist.

Now you decide to start selling a special therapeutic pillow for \$50. The company you get it from provides a brochure to help sell it; the literature covers the medical benefits of its product. The overt benefits are reduced neck pain and feeling more rested when they wake up – perfect for Joanne's condition.

If your pillow sits on a table with the standard literature that describes the clinical results, using medically-toned language and featuring a prominent diagram of spinal positions during sleep, she probably won't even see the display. Subconsciously she'll write it off as something for people with a medical problem, not for her – it just won't resonate, and making a sale will be difficult.

If, however, your display presents the pillow as a little splurge that will ensure she takes home that relaxed feeling she loves at your

office... hints she can feel that lovely escape every night... features descriptions of the soft cover and filling, fluffy-cloud graphics and a sleeping woman smiling slightly... and you'll have broken through her sales defenses. She'll feel happily self-indulgent, and smart, when she takes it home. (If the product delivers on its promise, you'll be in her thoughts again when she wakes up feeling great.)

Products/ Services	Overt Benefits of Product/Service	What We Do That's Special	Hidden Benefits of Getting the Product/ Service from YOU
Regular spinal adjustments	Move more freely. Less pain.	Listen. Invite sharing. Give longer appts. Turn attention to positives. Send thank you notes.	Patients feel pampered and special, making up for their stressful lives. They feel happier and more relaxed after visits.
Active Muscle Release Treatments	Move more freely. Less tension and pain.	Few offer this at all, so it's different.	Patients feel spoiled, like they're getting a special gift.
Therapeutic Pillow	Less neck pain. Better sleep.	A display that tells/shows how the pillow makes me feel.	Extends the relaxation and good feelings they get when they visit my office.

Here's how our chiropractor might fill in her columns

To sum up, you need and want to support the customers' beliefs throughout their experience with you so you make them feel great about themselves and their decision to buy from you, and to keep them coming back. *Consistency matters.*

3. Choose the right places to get the right people

In order to get the right people coming in, not only do you want your communications to be magnetic, you also need your advertising, networking, and PR locations to fit.

Take Action:

1. Ask yourself these questions as you review the places where you appear:
 - ◆ How likely is it that your Ideal Customers (prospects or existing) will see or hear your message?
 - ◆ What will they think about you if they see you in that space, medium or vehicle – how consistent will it be with your delivery and what makes you special – with your brand?

Most media sources will give you a good snapshot of their typical reader, recipient or viewer and you can use that to help narrow your choices down. If you're networking, you'll have to use your people-sense to determine whether those you're meeting are (or are well acquainted with) your ideal patient types.

2. Review your ads similarly:
 - ◆ How likely is it that your Ideal Customer/patient will read/hear it?
 - ◆ Will the experience they have in reading it or hearing it in this place match up with the feeling that you and your practice deliver in person and in your ongoing relationship?
 - ◆ Will it prime their expectations of the chemistry (your brand), they'll enjoy once they arrive?

4. Be an attentive, attractive, suitor

You've no doubt heard that if you build a relationship with your customer, you'll win their loyalty. The trouble is (as anyone who's ever had a crush on someone knows), you might want them badly, but you can't make them bond with you -- you can only do your best to influence how they'll feel. Again, it's chemistry!

Your best shot is to be clear on who you are, who your Ideal Customer is, and the overt and hidden benefits they receive from you. Using this information, you can work on how you present yourself and the steps you'll take to continue to meet their needs. That is what helps build the relationship. Do these things well, and you increase your odds of building a relationship with your Ideal Customers, and eventually win their loyalty.

Your communications – cards, letters, follow-ups, handouts, articles, signs, brochures etc. – can make all the difference at this point, especially as your customer roster grows large or your staff expands. Your plan should be designed to support customers' hidden beliefs and your own unique brand, and aim to help them make the most of your relationship.

A clear, systematized communications plan, supported by honest, well-crafted messages that resonate with your ideal customer's wants and hidden beliefs, has three major benefits:

First, it gives you more chances to remind them of the great chemistry you share. What you communicate, how, and when will vary depending on the Ideal Customer Profile you developed, but these elements all contribute to the promise you've made to your customers – that you'll be who you seem, and that you'll reaffirm their hidden beliefs. You want the relationship you're growing to have momentum, and stay on the right track; once they're hooked, they need a little attention now and then to keep feeling good about you, and keep thinking about how good you make them feel.

Second, a good communication plan helps you use your time and money more cost-effectively. Without an integrated plan, communications tend to be either haphazard or reactionary, or both – less likely to guide the customer down mutually-beneficial paths.

When you have a clear picture of your Ideal Customer and the role your practice plays within their lives, some common threads will emerge – threads that warrant specific types of contacts and messages. Map out a plan that enables you to consistently deliver on your promise to them and it's easier to manage, systematize and delegate a whole array of customer “contact points”. This will keep you in the forefront of your customers' minds, even as it frees up time and attention for the increasing number of people your efforts are bringing in, and that you and your staff must actively juggle on your calendar!

Third, the communications plan can help make up for any occasional missteps that occur during the patient's in-person experience. True, the most important element in the relationship is the one-on-one interaction... but everyone has bad days, slip-ups or mistakes.

Sometimes you know about them, and then a well-phrased note can help smooth things over. But often you don't know about them, and that's where a consistent communication plan can really make a difference, by bringing their attention back to what they love about your practice, lessening the sting of a misstep, and even inviting a dialogue that you might otherwise never have had.

Take Action I:

1. Role play being the customer, and walk through the process they take from first becoming aware of you through one year of interaction.
 - ◆ What points of contact do they have with you – in person, by mail, in the media, in your office literature?
 - ◆ What points of contact should they ideally have?

- ◆ Go back to your responses to step 1 – what do they buy from you, like from you or resist from you; how can you build on or improve this?

You may discover some additional revenue streams from the process too!

2. The prep work you've done up to now will provide the foundation for your plan; here are some more points you may want to consider as you develop yours.

Lead generating and awareness advertising

- ◆ What to use: Flyers, print, multi-mailers, direct mail...?
- ◆ Where to put them: e.g., Which media vehicle or networking group? Which section of the paper is best?
- ◆ When to use them: Day, time, stage of the relationship with existing patients...?
- ◆ What to say, and how? What will appeal to the upfront wants and hidden beliefs of your ideal customers?

Lead-generating information pieces

- ◆ What to use: e.g., PR/articles appearing in publications, brochures, flyers/handouts?
- ◆ Where to distribute them: Which media? Where in the office? What networking venues...?
- ◆ When to use them: e.g., How can you best fit the prospect's needs/wants? The goals of your practice?
- ◆ What to say, and how? What will appeal to the upfront wants and hidden beliefs of your ideal customers?

Loyalty efforts

- ◆ What to use: a mailing series, informational booklets, greeting cards, brochures and handouts, newsletters, e-mails, a website, billing statements and notices...?

- ◆ Where/How to distribute them: in-person (and from whom), by mail, by e-mail...?
- ◆ When to use them: what are your key patient contact opportunities? What's the best timing of contact intervals for your ideal patient? What identified missteps should be addressed?
- ◆ What to say, and how? What will appeal to the upfront wants and hidden beliefs of your ideal customers?

Please don't be intimidated by this list – not all points will apply to you, and you don't necessarily need to tackle them all at one time, either. That's the optimal approach, but time and budget may mean taking a rolled-out approach. Prioritize those contact points and tools that can make the biggest difference to your goal of attracting and satisfying your Ideal Customer.

As you develop your plan, remember too that patients are like all of us: they want you to want them, but not too much. You want to catch their attention and let them know you care without appearing either demanding or needy. The words you choose, the way you assemble them, their design on the page, when people see them... these are your brand too. And all these elements combine to affirm and reaffirm the one-on-one experience people have and love when they are in your office. If any aspect is off, it resonates as gratingly as a wrong note sung and over time erodes trust and confidence -- opening the door for direct or indirect competitors who are constantly out wooing your ideal patients.

The delicacy of this process is one reason many profit-conscious practitioners hire specialists (yes, like me) for help in developing both the plan and the communications themselves.

5. Mercilessly eradicate obstacles.

Nothing brings prospects or customers up short faster than obstacles. An obstacle may be an inconsistency in how you're presenting yourself (e.g., a low-skill salesperson at a high-end retailer). It may be a process that gets in the way or a desired option that's not offered. Creating loyalty is about fanning the flames of desire, and you do this by supporting each patient in his belief that they are your favorite (or at least that you're really, really happy to see them). Obstacles remind people that they're one of many, and may make them feel like the odd-man-out; it's like choosing them last for dodge ball. You may (unintentionally) give them the impression that you think you matter more than they do – or that you're just lamely bureaucratic. No matter what, obstacles must be eradicated!

Take Action:

1. Find out what's broken; mentally (or literally) walk through your whole customer experience, every aspect of it and figure out where they encounter a difficulty or rough spot. Role-play with others, pretend to be many different types of patients with different situations. Don't let your staff know it's you (or get a friend to help) – be secret shoppers!
2. Ask your staff to make a note of any time they say “no” to a patient – review these notes weekly to see if there's any way to find a yes or at least find a compromise.
3. Make sure your communications plan incorporates ways to reach out to patients who've received a no (especially if you can't find a way to turn it into a yes). Consider whether to broadcast to all your patients any change you make that creates a yes – it may make good news.

Want more profits *and* more time? I can help.

These 5 steps form the basis of an effective loyalty plan. Profiling your Ideal Customer, creating a plan and developing communications all take time, but it will be time well spent.

If you see the benefit of this approach, want to boost profits, but are shaking your head at the idea of getting this process underway yourself, please give me a call. I can help. If our styles are a match, I'll be able to help you:

- ◆ save time so you start seeing improved profits more quickly and have more time at your discretion,
- ◆ improve the relevance and content of your plan and materials,
- ◆ create systems that help make your operation more efficient and consistent,
- ◆ have more time and money to focus on the areas you enjoy most in your business, expand into new avenues, add staff... or pursue outside fun!
- ◆ Receive a fresh perspective; stepping far enough away from day-to-day business to see through your customers eyes is difficult even for the most objective of us. Working with a partner can open new windows onto your business and help you make giant steps forward.
- ◆ Stay focused on what you're most interested in and best at -- the products and services you sell, rather than marketing. Do what you do best, and delegate the rest!

If you decide that marketing and the written communications that will best support your loyalty efforts should be delegated then I hope you will give me a call. I'll be delighted to hear about you and your business, and to see if we'd be a good match.

Visit www.wsharrington.com for more information, ideas, samples, and to stay up to date through my loyalty blog.