

KEEPING THE FAITH

Accruing new patients is easy, keeping them is the tricky part.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

Patient loyalty is hard to come by, partly because today's consumers can easily and quickly access a wide variety of information about any brand. They can compare various products and services and analyze value on a smart phone or tablet in record time.

There are many reasons that a customer may jump ship. Close to 70 percent leave because they are not happy with the service, 14 percent are dissatisfied with a product or service and nine percent find they prefer someone or something else, according to research from the US Small Business Administration and US Chamber of Commerce.

Acquiring new customers is five to ten times more expensive than retaining an existing one, but the average spend of a repeat customer is a 67 percent more than a new one, *Inc. Magazine* reports. For these reasons, it makes sense and cents for brands to invest some of their marketing spend on patient retention as opposed to solely focusing on attracting new customers.

There are several key ways to help increase patient retention and build loyalty—all of which work in tandem to curb a wandering eye and keep your patients coming back.

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

American households have memberships in 29 loyalty programs on average, however, they derive benefit from just 12 of them, according to research from the 2015 Colloquy Customer Loyalty Census. The key is to design a loyalty program that adds value, such as:

A Simple Point System. One of the most common, yet effective loyalty programs is the point system. Develop a strategy where repeat patients can earn points which translate into a reward such as a discount on a product or service or a free product or service. A point program encourages your patients to keep coming back as they edge closer to their reward.

Early Bird Specials. Another effective way to build loyalty is to offer small rewards early on, and then increase the value of the rewards as they move up in the program. This strategy works because the time duration between a purchase and gratification is short.

WHY CUSTOMERS LEAVE

EXIT



67%: Not Happy With Service

14%: Dissatisfied with Product/Service

9%: Prefer Something Else

OUTSIDE-OF-THE-BOX PERKS

Sometimes there is more value to be had in non-monetary rewards via strategic partnerships or coalition programs with another related company that offers complementary products and services. Aesthetic patients tend to be image conscious and eager to feel as young as they look. Potential partners can include gyms, yoga studios, juice bars, and even local clothing stores.

A FIVE-STAR EXPERIENCE

Loyalty programs can help make patients feel special and wanted, but there is more to patient retention, namely providing a stellar patient experience—every single time. Even one bad experience can soil months and even years of impeccable service. Make sure all patient needs are anticipated and met in advance. Intel gleaned from patient feedback surveys can provide valuable and actionable insights on what



5 ELEMENTS OF A 5-STAR EXPERIENCE

- ▶ Develop a loyalty program
- ▶ Keep in touch
- ▶ Always say thank you
- ▶ Address any complaints right away
- ▶ Make sure your website is mobile-friendly

is working and what is not. This kind of information is pure gold as it allows you to further improve the kind of value your brand offers.

When a patient has a problem or a complaint, address it immediately. Your patients will remember the effort and feel “heard.” This goes a long way toward ensuring loyalty. In the era of online reviews, addressing any issues with service or satisfaction early and aggressively can keep bad feelings off-line. It’s a lot easier to prevent a bad review than to get one taken down.

Keeping in touch with your patients when you can also allows your brand to remain front and center in their minds. Introduce special offers as well as new products and services; remember them on birthdays and anniversaries and/or engage with them over social media. Fully 85 percent of Twitter users feel more connected to a brand after they start following them, finds a Pew Research Center social media survey conducted in September 2014. And never forget to thank your patients for choosing you over your competitors.

DIGITAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Yes, a patient’s in-office experience matters, but so too does their on-line one. The majority of your patients are tech-savvy and digital natives, which is why it is important to invest in digital marketing strategies including a mobile-friendly website. It is no longer enough to have an intuitive, well-built website, if your site isn’t thumb-friendly, your

patients won’t pass go.

Other bells and whistles that can improve the online experience and foster brand loyalty include service support apps. These typically come with how-to-videos, QR code scanning as well as context features which can help in tracking patient history and location. Adding social media buy buttons can also make purchasing more seamless. Social giants such as Google, Pinterest, and Twitter are all rolling out buy buttons, and they can be a perfect fit for a practice that does not have its own mobile shopping app.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Loyalty programs that speak to your patients, a five-star customer experience that starts with the first encounter and doesn’t end, plus an easy-to-navigate website will help cultivate brand loyalty and keep your patients coming back again and again. ■



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With a team of 130+ full time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps doctors who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call Naren direct at 877-249-9666.