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From the Editor

Today’s audiologists face tough challenges in attracting and retaining clients. The effect of the current economy can’t be overlooked, particularly in light of the lack of insurance coverage for hearing aids. Your patients may not feel they can afford out-of-pocket expenditures for a new hearing aid. At the same time, audiologists are battling their own budgetary obstacles. It can be expensive to own and operate a business. Salaries, office space, utilities, insurance — these all add up, and, with the potential of a reduced patient load, some audiologists are struggling.

You can find success in the midst of this adversity though. Growing your practice, while it may sound counterintuitive, offers you the best way to keep existing patients coming through the door and to attract new patients.

To help you keep your practice in bloom, ADVANCE for Audiologists invited industry leaders to share practical advice on how audiologists can develop successful marketing tools.

Effective marketing is the key to growing your practice at any time, but it’s even more important in today’s economic climate. You need to know where and how to best spend your marketing dollars. Is newspaper advertising the best way to get your message out? What about the Internet or open houses? How can you use your current patients to increase referrals? What about attracting new patients? How can you tap into the market of first-time users or understand long-term users better? These are only some of the questions industry experts address in the supplement.

It is our hope you find the supplement to be a valuable resource you can turn to again and again. Our goal was to provide a resource that educates readers on the multitude of marketing opportunities and helps you do what you do best: provide the best care to your patients.

Thanks to the following sponsors for their support of the supplement: AuDNet, Avada Audiology & Hearing Care, The Ear Q Group, GN Resound US, Hearing HealthCare News, MicroMedical Technologies, Oticon, Rexton USA, Sonic Innovations, Sycle.net, Varta Microbattery and Vivosonic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judi Biederman
Editor, ADVANCE for Audiologists
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Open House Events – 4 Simple Steps to Success

An Open House Event is a terrific way to introduce your practice and generate incremental business. Beyond opening your doors, there are a few crucial components to Open House success.

From the beginning, view your Open House Event as a four-step process: planning, promotion, execution and follow up. A busy practice might be tempted to skip a step to save time, but don’t give in. Successful events cover them all.

PLANNING
Set the date. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for staff preparation, creating marketing pieces, promotion, and response.

Define potential attendees. Your patient database is your most valuable resource. They already know you, and you know who could benefit from new technology. To reach additional prospects, purchase a mailing list of local residents within a specified age range.

Set realistic expectations. Knowing the results you can expect from a promotion can help guide your budget, tactics, and expectations. For example, direct mailers to known customers typically generate a 1.5% to 4% response rate. Prospect mailers may get 0.3% to 0.5% response. The percentages may seem tiny, but a mailer to 1,000 current patients could generate 15 to 40 appointments. If 50% of those patients make a purchase, the investment is worthwhile.

Train your staff. Every employee should be able to answer common questions, make prospective patients feel welcome, and when answering the phone, be prepared to ask for the appointment.

Prepare to measure response. Create a system to track call volume, sources of leads, appointments and sales made during the event timeframe. Record what worked well so you can develop best practices for future events.

PROMOTION
Choose promotional tactics. As you evaluate direct mail, newspaper advertising, statement stuffers and other tactics, consider which will be seen by the most potential customers. What is your competition is doing? What do customers like?

Telemarketing. Request phone numbers with the mailing list you purchased during planning. Call to follow up on your mailer and ask for an appointment.

Don’t reinvent the wheel. Ask your manufacturer or colleagues for samples of marketing materials that received positive measured results, then model your promotion after them.

Require appointments. Even though it’s an Open House, set appointment times as well to provide exclusive attention. Patients who feel valued will not only return, they’ll refer others. Encourage relatives or friends to come to the appointments. They may be more aware of the hearing loss than the patient, and they can help answer qualifying hearing loss questions and be available for familiar voice testing.

EVENT EXECUTION
Create inviting, comfortable experience. Talking about hearing loss can be unsettling. Provide refreshments, product materials and videos to help create a positive atmosphere.

Collect contact data. Record names, addresses, phone, etc.

Bring in reinforcements. Request a manufacturer sales rep or trainer to join your event. This is a great way to have a product expert address questions about devices or software.

Handle objections. Identify possible purchase objections and prepare answers as well as a non-pressure option. Consider offering a hearing aid test drive. Have the trial agreement well thought out, and collect a deposit, credit card, or other collateral.

FOLLOW UP
Thank you cards. Send to all attendees within a week, whether a purchase was made or not. Thank you power can lead to a future purchase or referral.

Update your database. Note who purchased, who didn’t, and why. Send follow-up letters throughout the year reminding people of your services and the benefits hearing aids can bring.

“Tested Not Sold” event. Schedule a follow up event for the “tested not sold” patients. Invite a current patient to talk about their hearing aid experiences.

Using these four simple steps, challenge yourself to schedule Open Houses throughout the coming year. You’ll be well on your way to new business and Open House success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Sandy Baker is a marketing manager at Sonic Innovations.
Keeping Your Practice in Bloom

Advances for Audiologists

November/December 2009

Top Reasons Newspaper Ads Work in Today’s Economy

By keeping your practice name and message out there during a down economy, those who are able to make the investment come to you.

You can have effective advertising without a creative design degree. You need to weigh the options when considering who to use to create your advertisements. Various services are available to support your advertising efforts. It is recommended to use hearing healthcare industry-trained marketing departments, like EarQ Group, because they allow your advertisements to remain unique, understand patient needs and highlight your professionalism.

Newspaper readership is highest in the 55+ demographic with an average weekday readership of 63.7% in 2007 (Source: Scarborough Research Top 50 Market Report 1998-2007). This coincides with studies showing 25% of the population has a noticeable hearing loss by age 55.

Affordable and Flexible

The current economy reduced newspaper circulation and decreased demand for advertisements, thereby diminishing the expense of newspaper advertisements. You can further reduce rates by scheduling several at one time, in addition to negotiating with your newspaper representative. Another benefit is a newspaper campaign can be tailored to your budget.

Your messages, offers, colors and placement can change as needed. Short lead-times exist for placement, which enables you to be responsive to trends, time-sensitive events and other opportunities in your advertising.

Brand Building

Running a series of consistent advertisements in a local newspaper prominently distinguishes your practice, strengthens your professionalism and brand in your community.

Increase top-of-mind awareness for your practice and, more importantly, trust by placing a series of ads. For instance, instead of running one large advertisement once, run three smaller ads over time to increase effectiveness.

Local and national news sections have high readership, making them an attractive choice for ad placement. These sections tend to be more costly than other sections such as the classifieds. Another way to find your ideal spot is to ask your patients what sections they read, in addition to testing different sections to determine which one gets the best response.

Value Focus

Advertisements must make patients feel safe. Consumers are more skeptical now than ever due to the quantity of companies that closed recently due to an unstable economy.

Disposable income decreased for many people as well, which makes for more cautious purchase decisions. Your patients want to know your practice is stable and your products are worth their purchases. Display your warranties, innovative products and professionalism consistently to give your practice that added value.

Your advertising needs to be sensitive to your target audience. This means keeping your text size at 12 points or larger as vision impairment, just like hearing impairment, becomes more prevalent with age.

Reel Readers In

Catch readers’ attention right away with the design and use of color in your advertisement. Effective advertisements move your eyes away from an article or other items on the page. Your advertisement should also create an emotional pull to show readers how they are going to benefit from your services; answer the “what’s in it for me?” question.

Use offers and expiration dates. Compelling offers convey value, such as percents or dollars off, free trials or repairs and free warranties. Define and clearly state an expiration date in pieces to convey a sense of urgency in messages.

Get Started

Contact your local paper and request a media kit or schedule a meeting with a newspaper representative to plan your consistent campaign at the best rates. You will need to choose which source you are going through to create the advertisement.

Regardless of the source, keep your expectations reasonable and use the tips supplied to assist with getting the best possible response. Most importantly, keep advertising; it will pay off in the long and short term.

About the Author

Randy Kahn is marketing director at EarQ Group.
When it comes to educating and securing new patients, the Internet whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts. Some vital information every audiologist should consider:

- 74% of American adults go online, and 61% of those adults look online for health information. The term “e-patient” is used to describe this group.
- 52% of all online health inquiries are on behalf of someone other than the person typing in the search terms.
- 60% of adults who found health information online said it affected their decision about how to address an illness or condition.
- 60% of e-patients said they or someone they know has been helped following the health information found on the Internet.

Little doubt exists that the Internet is one of the most powerful influencers in decision making and knowledge gathering about health care. The question every audiologist should ask and want the answer to is, “How can I get e-patients to be my patients?”

**SEARCH-ENGINE OPTIMIZATION**

People find information on the Internet using search engines such as Google, Yahoo or MSN. With thousands of hearing aid, hearing care and even audiology information websites, the likelihood e-patients will see your Internet information depends directly on how important your Internet information appears to these search engines. Search engine positioning can be either sponsored, known as pay-per-click, or driven through strategic website design and management techniques collectively known as search-engine-optimization (SEO).

An individual practice website can use proven SEO techniques to help build greater search-engine interest. The likelihood that website will gain notable search engine attention is doubtful, unless it has hundreds, possibly thousands of website pages is constantly being updated, has hundreds of inbound links and is jam-packed with the key words targeted e-patients would likely type into browsers.

**TOWER WEBSITES**

The Internet visibility of audiology practices can be substantially enhanced when they link their websites to an audiology information Tower website — a national audiology information website where substantial and ongoing investments are made to obtain and maintain high-quality, audiology-focused SEO.

A well-capitalized Internet Tower web site containing comprehensive information about audiology care is an excellent SEO builder for individual audiology practices. Through SEO tactics such as constant content refreshment, daily blogs, hundreds of videos and inbound links a Tower website receives thousands of hits each month from the very e-patients audiology practices want and need to find.

Extensive use of video content through tools like YouTube, drive Tower e-traffic directly to individual practice websites and their videos that are linked to the Tower.

As e-patients gather information about audiology from the Tower website, they begin to understand audiologists are the hearing experts and grasp the importance of seeing an audiologist as a first step in the hearing care process.

The Tower website’s audiology locator links these e-patients directly to the audiology practice’s website, the audiology practice’s video(s) and the audiology practice’s contact information. In addition, a special toll-free phone number, prominently displayed on the Tower website, can ring directly to the linked audiology practice located in the area from which the caller is phoning.

Beyond the constant website management and other premium SEO-building infrastructure already embedded into a Tower website, as more individual practices link their websites and videos to the Tower website, the SEO of the Tower website grows, building massive search engine recognition across all of the major search engine tools — a level of recognition simply not possible through an individual practice website alone.

A Tower website is more interesting to search engines crawling the landscape of audiology-focused information websites for places to send their users. Search engine recognition drives e-patients to audiology practices linked to the Tower, maximizing the ability of these audiology practices to drive e-patients to their door.

Maximizing the effectiveness of your Internet presence is one of the most cost effective and necessary tools you can use to move your practice forward and obtain new patients. Linking to an audiology-focused Tower website is your best way to instantly garner substantial search-engine recognition.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

David J. Smriga, MA, is president of AuDNet.
When marketing their business, hearing care professionals may forget they are sitting on a wealth of information and sales data that could help grow their practice much faster than any list of leads. An up-to-date database is the life-blood of any business and can easily be the greatest resource when trying to increase hearing aid sales.

The importance of marketing to your current and prospective buyers cannot be overlooked in today’s economy. Acquiring a new hearing care patient can cost as much as $500. Reselling to a patient already in your database can cost as little as $15 a year. This sounds easy enough, but to ensure these marketing costs stay as low as possible, businesses must have an up-to-date system that will allow them to leverage the data needed to perform an efficient and cost-effective marketing campaign.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Ask yourself the questions to determine whether your current database system passes the marketing-ready litmus test:

- Do I have the ability to quickly determine which of my patients have 3-, 4- or 5-year old hearing aids?
- Do I have the ability to quickly determine which patients I have not seen in over 6 months?
- Do I have the ability to quickly determine which patients are about to have expired warranties?

If you are not able to answer questions like these with a confident “yes,” then it is time to implement a new database solution. No need to panic though. Practice management software has come a long way, and getting started with a new system is easier than ever.

Sycle.net is 100% web-based. This means no software to install and customers are set up with an account in a matter of minutes.

**DATA MANAGEMENT**

Sycle.net allows hearing care professionals to easily enter data during a patient’s appointment and at the point of sale. The information is organized and stored in Sycle. The system can then produce robust marketing reports and mailing lists with a few clicks of the mouse (Figure 1).

Not only are Sycle customers able to answer the three questions above with ease, they are able to slice and dice their database in dozens of different ways. These advanced queries ensure only the desired patient population is extracted into a mailing list. This not only saves money on postage, it allows you to customize the marketing piece to be targeted and relevant to each recipient.

**DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS**

Your database plays another important role in day-to-day sales generation, specifically when ensuring consistent, timely patient recall. Long past are the days when patient care coordinators depended on a box of index cards to keep tally of expiring warranties, clean & check reminders and birthdates.

Today’s most successful business owners rely on their practice management software to do this for them. No more so than Sycle.net customers who are able to completely automate their vital recall mail. This includes warranty expiration notices, birthday cards, thank you notes, tested not sold letters and more (Figure 2). Ensuring that these recall letters are automatically mailed promotes customer loyalty and provides professionals more time to spend with patients. These two factors alone have helped Sycle customers see sales increase as much as 20%.
Humans are creatures of habit — we repeat our morning routines, our summer holiday plans and where we shop for necessities. At their core, your patients are hardwired to be loyal, but, just like any relationship, careful tending is required.

Too often we focus our marketing efforts on finding new patients at the cost of neglecting those we have. A successful marketing plan is one that includes a mix of lead generation and customer loyalty initiatives.

Top practices know how to market additional hearing products and services to current clientele to increase loyalty. By doing so, you position yourself to garner repeat and new purchases, maximizing on their individual Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). Applied properly, this marketing technique will greatly impact your overall marketing return on investment.

WHO ARE MY CUSTOMERS?

The first step in building long-term customer loyalty is to better understand who your customers have been, so you can best build a relationship with them in the future. Examine your current customer database to determine when and what each has purchased from your clinic. Hypothesize as to when you will have the opportunity to sell product or services to them again. By identifying common purchasing habits — i.e., types of product or service, motivation and price point — you can identify common sub-groups within your database.

Use the data you uncovered in step one to determine the CLV of the sub-groups. The CLV can be defined as the potential total revenue earned by the purchases of one customer during the period of time he or she continues to buy hearing products or services. Simply put: (Total Customer Revenue - Total Cost of Goods Sold) x Potential Number of Like Purchases = CLV

For example, consider a client in his or her 60s who previously purchased a set of hearing aids from you for a net profit of $1,200. It is likely this individual will continue to purchase hearing aids every 5 years for 20 years, yielding an estimated CLV of $4,800 ($1,200 x 4 purchases). Through timely and targeted marketing, this client also purchases $500 of additional products and services each year, raising the CLV exponentially to $14,800.

If you have 20 customers like this one, the group value escalates to $296,000. The final step in using the CLV to increase marketing ROI is to determine which groups have the greatest income potential and to target them accordingly.

FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS

Step 1 - Communication: Do not just expect your customers to pick up the phone and call you in 3 to 5 years when it is time to purchase a new hearing aid. Maintain an ongoing dialogue with them via newsletters and holiday and new product announcements/developments. Remind them to come in for a tune-up of their current hearing aids at least once a year and, most importantly, remind them in advance when it is time to return and evaluate new hearing aid options.

Step 2 - Incentive: Everybody loves free stuff, but you don’t need to give away the farm. Start a battery club or a loyalty program that earns points towards their next hearing aid or interim service purchases such as cleanings and accessories. Coffee, along with a warm and welcoming clinic environment goes a long way.

Step 3 - Exceed Expectations: Train, and re-train where required, every member of your staff to understand the patient is number one. Remember patient names and the product they currently use, without referring to a file or chart. Offer shuttle service to your clinic for those less mobile patients and send birthday cards and other communications on a timely basis. Listen to patient concerns about products or your clinic and address them swiftly.

MAXIMIZING VALUE

Anything you can do to make your current customers feel valued and important will go along way to maximize their CLV. They will purchase again, and we prefer it be from you and not your competition who, as mentioned above, is working diligently to obtain new leads who happen to be your patients.

CLV will evolve over time and is not a one-time exercise. In addition to a review of your client sales history, surveying customers from time to time is a useful way to better understand their motivations and forecast their future sales behavior. Once you’ve mastered the art of CLV, you can use it to evaluate the potential of new services or customer groups on your bottom line.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erica Helmer is marketing manager at Vivosonic.
The Patient Newsletter in an Audiology Practice

About 10% of patients leave their health care practitioner each year because “they didn’t feel cared for,” according to a Rockefeller Foundation study. How costly is it to replace these patients and any referrals they may make?

A patient newsletter is an easy, effective and economical way to prevent patients from leaving your practice. A newsletter improves patient satisfaction by providing regular contact. Satisfaction is also improved through useful information such as how to cope in a noisy restaurant and travel tips.

A patient newsletter is also a concrete demonstration of your professionalism and willingness to provide extra value service. The newsletter itself can be passed on to family and friends, increasing your referrals.

Making it work

The key to a specialized newsletter is substance, not style. A newsletter covering only services and products will be seen as direct mail advertising. A newsletter should be provided at least three, preferably four, times a year.

Many readers will be older adults, so type size and style should be chosen accordingly. Graphics are attractive but use up space. Since our readers are highly motivated, useful information is more important than visual effects.

Producing a newsletter may seem costly. Printing, postage and editorial preparation time all need to be accounted for. Printing and postage costs range from about $3 to $7 per year, per patient. A patient newsletter, however, generates significantly more income than it costs. Many manufacturers will reimburse from 50% to 100% of the cost through co-operative programs.

Consumer satisfaction and loyalty are crucial for success. A patient newsletter is an easy and cost-effective method to improve both, while generating additional revenues for the practice.

About the author

Dennis Hampton, Ph.D. is the editor of Hearing Healthcare News and an audiologist in White Plains, NY.

Measurement: Validation of Marketing Results

Advertising guru John Wanamaker once said, “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don’t know which half”. The first step in any good marketing strategy is building a system to measure the analytics of your marketing dollars.

Persevering to provide an acceptable ROI is challenging. A statistical analysis that provides valuable information on monies already spent can be helpful in selecting future advertisement mediums, campaigns and programs.

Many businesses spend 15% to 20% on marketing, yet practice owners cannot tell you their ROI in general, much less on each marketing piece. As advertising dollars stretch, the need for accurate and effective measurement and analytics grows.

In addition to determining ROI, it is imperative to measure Cost per Inquiry (CPI) and the Cost per Test (CPT) on every advertising piece. CPI and CPT remove virtually all variables and only measure the number of inquiries the advertising piece generated and how well the person who answered the phone did at converting this inquiry into an appointment.

Developing a system that tracks CPIs, CPTs and ROIs begins with the people who answer the phone. They should always ask for the source of the call and have a simple way of recording this information, as well as the call’s outcome. Several weeks after the campaign, divide your advertising cost by the number of inbound calls and resulting appointments to determine your CPI and CPT.

Dividing the total income derived from the advertising piece by the cost of the piece will provide you with your ROI. This requires the respondent be tracked all the way through your encounters with him or her until a definitive result is obtained.

Careful analysis of these data over time will provide you the metric goals you should expect from your advertising dollars. Remember, ROIs are not everything; they should always be considered in the same light as CPIs and CPTs.

About the author

Mark E. Walser is Avada Audiology & Hearing Care’s director of marketing.
A major component of successful marketing is how your office staff is trained to receive consumer responses. It is up to you to ensure your office staff properly handles curious consumers and potential patients.

Go over these basic tips when training new staff and reviewing procedures with existing staff.

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES

What is happening and when? Make sure your office staff — especially the receptionist or whoever is the first point of contact for consumers — knows what marketing activities you have planned and when to expect inquiries.

Answer the phone. A hot lead will be lost instantly if no one takes the call. Expect a rush of consumer responses to your marketing, and make sure you are staffed appropriately.

Make a good first impression. If personnel know about current marketing activities, they will respond better and more warmly to consumer inquiries. Don’t risk losing a potential patient through uncertainty and miscommunication.

Script a conversation. Consumers will have a lot of questions about your practice and available products. Coach your personnel on what to say — and what to avoid saying — when talking with consumers and guiding the conversation to booking a visit.

Remember the goal: schedule an appointment. The primary objective when consumers call from a marketing piece is to get them into the office. Keep answers and other conversation to a minimum and always return to the question, “Would you like to schedule an appointment?”

Get their contact information. If personnel are unable to provide an answer, do not ask callers to call back. If they hang up without leaving contact information, they may not call back and the opportunity is lost.

SCHEDULING AND SCRIPTS

Emphasis is added to scheduling appointments. Below are five quick steps to achieving this primary goal. Getting just the essential information courteously and quickly will lead to more appointments and less overall time spent on the phone.

- Develop an office greeting with practice name and name of person answering phone: “Thank you for calling ABC Hearing. This is ________, how may I help you?”
- Ask the caller’s name and if he/she is calling on behalf of him/herself or someone else.
- Ask the caller if he/she would like to schedule an appointment. Establish the date and time and how long the appointment will take (45 minutes minimum is safe).
- Get the caller’s full name, phone number and address.
- Confirm the date and time of the appointment, and provide directions to the office if necessary before hanging up.

Another good area for preparing scripts is to address callers’ frequently asked questions.

The most commonly asked question is, “How much does the hearing aid cost?” Potential customers may be intimidated by the high cost of hearing aids. Try a general approach with the intention of discussing more during their appointment.

EMPHASIZE THE POSSIBILITIES

Start by emphasizing the possibilities. Provide the price range for the hearing instruments your practice offers. Explain the difference in price is related to the level and combination of technology features. Let callers know the audiologist will be able to discuss different models to meet their specific hearing needs, your monthly payment plans and if their insurance will cover any portion.

Entice them further with special offers available during the promotional period. Provide a dollar or percent discount for appointments scheduled before a certain date, or offer an incentive such as free batteries or gift cards for purchases made before a certain date.

Some of your existing services may be free to patients such as consultation and hearing tests or future programming or hardware adjustments. If patients can try a hearing device at no charge for a specific period, make sure callers — your potential patients — know this.

Paying attention to how office staff answers the phone, talks with callers and address questions is vital to how your office is perceived by the consumer — your potential patient. This process is important for scheduling appointments and turning marketing leads into successful patient fittings.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lani Rector is the consumer marketing strategy manager at GN ReSound US.
‘Now’ Is Always a Good Time to Expand Your Practice

Whether you are in business for yourself or you are employed by someone else, it will be to your benefit to expand the services you offer and/or expand your customer base, particularly in uncertain economic times. Adding services or reaching out to a new referral or patient base should add to your bottom line, especially as Medicare and insurance reimbursements are likely to be reduced.

Whenever you consider expanding, create a strategic marketing plan. Your clinic objectives and goals must be defined clearly before you start, as you seek to provide a technological and professional advantage over your competitors. As you move toward expansion, remember to market to both customer bases: your referral base and your patient base.

Your marketing plan should use several different strategies to achieve goals that will provide a consistent message, a professional image and quality service. What your customer base thinks and feels about you will depend on how well you brand or re-brand yourself. Your brand should answer three questions: What is your expertise? What makes you stand apart from the competition? What makes you trustworthy?

Focus on three core objectives once you determine the direction of your expansion.

- Gain credibility
- Create visibility
- Get involved in your new niche

Take time to learn, then take time to teach. For example, learn and add new services and new technologies. Once you are comfortable with that, take the time to teach your referral base the importance of the new service or technology. Marketing the new you to the patient base may be accomplished with a broader, softer approach, but education should be the primary tool to gain credibility and create visibility.

Finally, get more involved in your new expanded market from all aspects of your customer base and soon you will gain the competitive advantage and growth you were looking for.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Diane Miles is the president of MicroMedical Technologies.

Your Practice Identity Sets You Apart

As a private practitioner, how can you set yourself apart in today’s competitive market? Your practice identity is key in your competition against others. It goes beyond your logo and slogan to encompass your value proposition, company personality and the services you provide. Creating a strong identity is vital to the longevity of your practice.

When creating or redefining your practice’s identity, think about how you want to be perceived in the market. Think about the types of patients you would like to attract. Do you want to be a company known for excellent customer service, innovative products or the benefits provided? Whatever you decide, the qualities you communicate should be calculated and deliberate, rather than unintentional and random. It is best to avoid focus on low prices in isolation. A competitive pricing advantage is usually temporary and does not tell your audience about your identity.

To create your identity, adjust your marketing strategy to reflect the core values of your business and the qualities you want your customers to associate with you. If you want to emphasize your professional credentials and high-tech solutions, don’t advertise aggressively low prices. This contradicts your strategy for marketing your practice’s identity. Instead, highlight your experienced staff and benefits of a particular product.

To attract younger patients, highlight extended business hours convenient for busy professionals.

As a private practitioner, your identity must set you apart from other companies in the market, making you either better or simply different from the practice down the street. Whatever route you go in maintaining your identity, it must remain consistent and truthful to the company that you are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Heidi Mathis is a marketing specialist at Rexton USA.
Don’t Overlook a Revenue Stream

With the development of new digital and environmentally friendly hearing health care technologies, audiologists may offer a growing variety of products and services. With the cost of doing business on the rise, new revenue and profit opportunities are always welcome. One valuable source of revenue often overlooked is the sale of hearing device batteries.

In-office battery sales deliver a dependable and ongoing revenue stream, high profit margins, low inventory demand, minimal sales effort, the opportunity to sell to your customers more often and the ability to position your practice as a leader in the community. Considering all the upside advantages to offering customers premium hearing aid batteries, the decision to do so should be an easy one.

**PREMIUM QUALITY**

Offering premium quality hearing aid batteries can provide an important marketing tool as well. Highly satisfied customers can support the growth of the practice through word-of-mouth advertising to friends and relatives. Personal referrals are perhaps the most productive form of promotion as the issues of value and trustworthiness are established from the start.

The product offered is an important consideration. If the practitioner offers superior-quality hearing aid batteries, the competition from drug and big-box stores can be mitigated to a large degree. A top-quality cell will last longer, perform better and is less likely to cause damage in delicate hearing devices.

Premium-quality, power one brand batteries, for example, are available primarily through the professional audiologist and thus set them apart from drug store commodity brands. Power one IMPLANT plus is the only battery recommended by Cochlear Corporation for use in their cochlear implant products. By offering a premium battery brand, you send the message each and every product and service you offer is of the finest quality.

**ENVIRONMENT AND DESIGN**

Green and environmentally friendly products are a fast growing segment of the modern product mix, and hearing aid batteries are on the cutting edge of this trend.

Power one ACCU plus brand offers a full range of rechargeable hearing aid batteries and portable recharging solutions. Work continues on other environmentally focused products including a line of hearing aid batteries that contain no mercury and packaging manufactured using a high percentage of recycled materials.

The power one brand has come to represent innovative hearing health care product design and has been the recipient of numerous international product design awards. Consumers may have a difficult time comparing the quality of one battery brand to another. Factors such as long hearing time, ease of use and environmental effect become important considerations.

**BUSINESS MODEL**

Offering hearing aid batteries through your practice is simply good business.

Assume the average device requires approximately 60 cells and your practice sells 150 hearing devices in one year. That’s 9,000 cells required to satisfy the devices sold. Consumers pay an average of $1/cell, packaged as $6/card with six cells. Conservatively, your battery profits could be well over $5,000 in one year. Double the number of devices sold and the profits from batteries can exceed $10,000 in just a year.

Considering battery sales require very little space and effort, power one makes selling batteries extremely easy. The power one battery franchise kit contains everything needed to start selling premium-quality power one batteries; a fresh starter supply of four popular size cells (p10, p13, p312 and p675), attractive Plexiglas counter display and marketing materials. The battery kit is offered at a special introductory price so practitioners can start generating profits immediately. Power one U.S. fulfillment centers provide shipments of fresh power one brand batteries and products when and where you need them, reducing the requirement for large inventories.

Satisfied patients are the best resource for advertising, as a single satisfied customer will often tell up to six other people about the great products and services provided through your practice. In a 12-month time frame, over 1,000 people in your community may come to hear of your practice and seek the superior service you offer.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

William Flanagan is national sales manager for power one at Varta Microbattery.
Although the term “marketing” has an uncomfortable, commercial-sounding ring for some audiologists, many discover strategic marketing is a way to educate patients and promote best practices.

Most practices serve two distinct markets — first-time and current hearing aid wearers — each with different characteristics and needs. Practices better understand current wearers but often lack specialized strategic approaches for first-time users. Considering approximately 75% of hearing-impaired people are non-users, attracting first-time users is hearing care’s most striking opportunity. Indeed, more effective hearing instrument dispensing to first-time users provides a valuable rehabilitative service and a profitable revenue stream.

**MOTIVATION AND DESIGN**

Oticon conducted extensive research into deep-rooted psychological factors underlying resistance to hearing aids. In-depth interviews of reluctant non-users revealed no matter how good the functional outcome of amplification, at a deep level, the hearing aid was a constant reminder to the patient and the outside world that “I am flawed.” First-time users need an approach that disarms prejudice and delivers what they are really looking for—transformation.

The Oticon Center for Design Thinking in collaboration with industrial design consultants developed a triangular product concept designed to change attitudes. The shape was chosen for multiple reasons: best and most discreet fit into the space behind the ear; optimized placement of directional microphones; and a small, pleasing non-hearing aid appearance.

Patients of all ages responded enthusiastically. It transformed their experience of what a hearing aid could be and did not threaten self-image. These responses sparked the development of Dual, addressing major concerns of new users while giving audiologists technology they know will deliver. For the first time, the tangible experience of seeing and touching the product reassures rather than overwhelms, helping non-users move forward to trial and purchase. That’s why Oticon’s marketing materials display prominent images of Dual.

Transformational metaphors — “Open up to a new world,” “Your new life starts now,” — appeal to first-time users, echoing deep-level metaphors uncovered by our research. Oticon’s messages are tested and have proven consistently to motivate reluctant non-users to take action. Your consumer marketing will be more effective if you use Oticon’s transformation metaphors to speak directly to subconscious emotions.

**FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE**

Most first-time users have recent memories of life with normal hearing, and they miss it. A positive first experience will avoid further delay.

They require state-of-the-art technology designed with their needs in mind: a comfortable, open fit with extremely low circuit noise; effective feedback management; clear, crisp sound quality with extended bandwidth; and improved benefit in their problem situations. First-time users appreciate hands-free automatic performance, ideally with no user controls on the instrument. Some of today’s first-time wearers also want to connect to phones and TV, using their hearing devices as high tech headsets.

Hearing solutions for first-time users must look non-threatening, but their potency must be communicated and demonstrated, otherwise non-users will not buy them. An instant-fit solution gives patients an opportunity to experience the benefits for themselves. Dual is attracting and satisfying new users at a very high rate. Oticon end-user surveys show 80% of Dual Mini wearers and 69% of Dual Connect wearers are first-time users.

Follow this simple strategy for marketing to first time users, and you will surely increase your profitability and influence with this important group:

- Understand their fears and motivations
- Use effective, proven messages to get them in the door
- Present them with an attractive device that does not resemble a hearing aid
- Offer a way to try amplification risk-free
- Dispense first-rate technology that improves their hearing and provides the transformation they are seeking.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mary Porath, Au.D. is channel manager for Oticon.
Oticon • Dual

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Expanding Your Practice?

Whether you have an existing vestibular practice or are expanding to add dizziness and balance testing, Micromedical can provide you with everything you need. In addition to the VisualEyes VNG, we offer the 2009 Dizziness Reference Guide (DRG) and its companion Vestibular Marketing and Reimbursement CD. The DRG is intended to be a "quick access" to information when seeing a patient complaining of dizziness and together with the CD provides you with:

- Questionnaires
- Patient education hand-outs
- Practitioner Reviews for several common disorders
- Information on coding and reimbursement
- Marketing Vestibular Services information
- Powerpoint presentation for your referral base

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