Build Your Pharmacy Using Multi-Channel Marketing

It's essential that independent or small chain pharmacies market appropriately to compete with the chains/big box pharmacies. Branding and messaging should be consistent throughout print materials, your website, online store, e-marketing, and social media.

Marketing should use multiple channels for the greatest reach. Print materials (newspaper health columns, print ads, newsletters to health care professionals, brochures, postcard mailings) are now more valuable than ever, because people receive less mail, and newspapers have fewer pages so your ad or postcard is more likely to receive attention. However, e-marketing (website, online store, e-mail newsletters, blogs) enables the reader to quickly and easily share the information via email, text messaging, or social media (Twitter, Facebook, Google+). Consistent and repeated contact is required for a successful marketing program.

Print ads should direct customers to your website for more information and resources, and digital information can be readily updated. The same offer can be made in a mailing, on a website and via an email newsletter. Utilize different coupon codes for online and print to track the source. Site visits and traffic through the site, as well as response to specific ad campaigns can be tracked by Google Analytics. Google Analytics is a free service and reports can be analyzed when creating new ad programs or making website changes.

Additional recommended forms of marketing include health fairs, speaking to help groups, luncheons for medical offices to explain your range of services, radio ads, and a radio talk show - become a local celebrity and recognized health expert!

Regular posts to social media will help you to grow your business by spreading the word about your products or services and one of today's most cost effective marketing tools. It can be a full-time job to write posts and keep up with the continuous changes on social media, but the good news is that you do not have to spend your valuable time as pharmacy-specific posting services are available. **Be sure that the service you select directs your followers to your website, not a publishing site, for more information.** This is a key way to drive traffic to your website where visitors can see the full range of services that you offer. And, increased traffic to your website means better page rankings in search results.

Create landing pages on your website to archive key social media posts and provide more information on topics discussed on social media, or in e-mail newsletter or postcard mailings, as well as for special events. Be sure that each landing page has an appropriate page title for search engine optimization. Use your website analytics to measure clicks.

Apps are good marketing tools. Your app can be designed to send HIPAA-compliant reminders for Rx refill and events, and push marketing messages. A properly designed and utilized app can increase refill percentages, improve therapeutic outcomes, and increase your revenue.

There is a general shift to focusing on the client and promoting customer service as an extension of a company's brand.

Practitioners and patients value service differentiation, and it's important to market clinical and consultation services while explaining the benefits, process and any fees; generic savings plans; and private or professional supplement lines. By having your own online store, you can retain repeat sales of products you recommend. Match the convenience of other e-commerce sites while excelling in customer service and professional advice.

Google Plus (G+) was intended to be Google's competitor for Facebook. Although it failed as a form of social media, G+ is still vital as it helps viewers find your business in search results as well as obtain directions to your location. Therefore, it's important to verify your G+ page and edit it so that the information and location is correct. In addition, posts made to your G+ social media page will be used by Google as content to rank your website.

Anyone can post reviews to Google, Yelp, or Facebook pages. Be sure that you verify and monitor all pages for reviews, and politely and briefly respond to every review, whether it's positive or negative. Reviews weigh heavily when selecting a pharmacy, as no one wants a poorly rated company to care for their health.

Design your website for your users. Include calls to action and the information needed to turn visitors into customers. It is essential that your website is mobile responsive, i.e., that it automatically resizes and the menu reconfigures for a user-friendly experience on a desktop, laptop, tablet or smart phone. Also, current algorithms give preferential page rankings to responsive websites when a search is done on a mobile device. Customers obtained through Google searches have a lifetime value that is higher than the immediate value obtained from a single promotion. This underscores the value of a quality website designed for performance.

The Return on Investment (ROI) for a website is highly influenced by the design, performance, and services provided by the website. Once a customer or potential customer visits a website, its design (user friendliness, clarity of navigation) and performance (load times and utility) determine how long visitors stay on the site, how they travel through the site, what actions they take, and if they return.

Here are key factors in determining a website's ROI:

- Cost of design/website development.
- Cost of marketing your website (blogging, email marketing, social media). It is necessary to drive traffic to your website to improve your ROI. The number of visitors is the top line for measuring success. If your site is designed to be search engine friendly, it's far more likely to perform well. Ultimately, it's the marketing activity, not web design, that has the biggest impact on traffic.
- Cost to update. Ask your developer if your website will include a user-friendly content management system (CMS).
- Conversion Rate. The percentage of visitors who take actions, such as requesting an Rx refill or transfer, asking a question, filling out a consultation form or making a purchase from your online store through e-commerce, determines the bottom line results. Unlike traffic, it's the web design, not marketing activity, that has an impact on conversions.

It's critical that a pharmacy consider HIPAA compliance in every facet of marketing. For example, a Notice of Privacy Practices that follows HHS's current format is required on a pharmacy website. Would you like a digital log of who signs your NoPP? Your designer can set up your NoPP so that patients can sign online, and the signed NoPPs can be stored in a secure, HIPAA-compliant manner. If a company claims HIPAA compliance, be sure that company provides you with the required Business Associate Agreement. Remember, HIPAA compliance entails far more than secure data transmission.

Keep in mind that marketing a pharmacy is not like marketing a shoe store. People don't inherently understand the services you offer and why they need them. Lack of knowledge of pharmacy law, HIPAA requirements and marketing restrictions can end up costing you far more than you will save using a budget designer. Every form of print or digital marketing, from a brochure to your website, should show you are a professional who values attention to detail. Hire an experienced professional who understands YOUR business to help you develop a marketing plan and the elements of the plan. To get the best return on your marketing investment, measure your results over time, and modify the plan as needed.

Written October 26, 2016
By Patricia Storey, R.Ph.

References:
https://www.storeymarketing.com/
https://www.orbitmedia.com/blog/website-roi-return-investment-redesign