

SUCCESSFUL MARKETING – IT’S ALL ABOUT PRINCIPLES

A principle is a fundamental truth that serves as a foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning. Principles are the driving force behind everything. They exist whether we know it or not, and they effect us whether we are aware of them or not. If we choose to understand principles and live in accordance with them, we will likely succeed, if we are oblivious to them, ignore them or fight against them, we will likely fail. Imagine trying to build an airplane, the better you understand the principle of aerodynamics, the more likely you are to fly. The more you fight against it, the less likely you are to leave the ground. What does this have to do with marketing you ask? Well, just like everything else in life, there are principles that drive purchase decisions and therefore regulate the rules behind smart, strategic marketing. The better we understand what is fundamentally driving patients to purchase our services, the more successful our marketing efforts will be. So what are these principles?

1. Needs and wants are based on perception.
2. Initial purchases are made on the perceived value of the purchase in relation to a perceived need or want.
3. Forming a perception requires information.
4. Knowledge must be given incrementally.
5. Knowledge of differences creates a platform for choice.
6. Trust is earned or lost through increased knowledge.
7. Purchase requires trust.
8. Rewarded trust leads to subsequent purchases, unrequited trust leads to lost opportunity.
9. Continually rewarded trust engenders loyalty.
10. Loyalty is necessary for the long term success of the business.

Let’s take a look at each of these principles individually.

PRINCIPLE 1 - NEEDS AND WANTS ARE BASED ON PERCEPTION.

Our perceptions are formed by influences from the world around us. What some may believe as a fact, others will claim as false. (Think of global warming) Therefore just because something is “true” to one individual, it may not be to another. However as individuals we tend to think that others see things as we do. As a dentist, you may assume that your patients or potential patients see your practice and services the same way you do. You may think they “need” continuing care. They may not. Understanding that just because you see something in a certain way but others may not, is important in understanding how to communicate effectively with patients and potential patients. Never assume your patients see things the way you do. In fact, you should always assume that they don’t.

PRINCIPLE 2 - INITIAL PURCHASES ARE MADE ON THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF THE PURCHASE IN RELATION TO A PERCEIVED NEED OR WANT.

Because this only deals with initial purchases, this principle only holds true for the first purchase of a product or service. (we will discuss subsequent purchases in principle 7 in the next newsletter) Until a patient actually experiences your services for the first time, they can only perceive what that experience will be. As a dentist then, it is up to you to create a perception that is true to the actual experience. It is also up to you to ensure that the actual experience holds real value. If the actual experience holds real value, and you create a perception that is accurate to the actual experience, you will create the perceived value necessary to bring about an initial purchase.

PRINCIPLE 3 - FORMING A PERCEPTION REQUIRES INFORMATION.

This is what marketing is all about. Marketing is the act of conveying information in an attempt to create a perception. Unless you convey information to someone, they won't be able to create the perceptions necessary to see the value that fits their particular need or want. Additionally, if you are conveying the wrong information, you are probably not creating a perception that will lead to an initial purchase and wasting money. The other side of this is that if you are conveying information that isn't true to the actual experience this creates problems we will discuss in principles 8, 9 and 10, in the next newsletter.

PRINCIPLE 4 - KNOWLEDGE MUST BE GIVEN INCREMENTALLY.

As humans we like to learn by moving from simple information to complex. Think about mathematics, you start by counting, move to addition and eventually get to calculus. The truth is, we best assimilate all information this way. This includes marketing messaging. This is especially true in today's over-marketed world where we are continuously bombarded by all sorts of marketing messages. We first digest simple easy messages, and then if we like what we hear we can handle more information. Start simply with your messaging, we are lucky to initially get one message through to someone. Even though your practice may have many benefits and advantages that could appeal to potential patients, start with the best one and move from there.

PRINCIPLE 5 - KNOWLEDGE OF DIFFERENCES CREATES A PLATFORM FOR CHOICE.

Returning to principle 4 for a moment, how do we know what the best message is for the initial contact with a potential patient? The answer lies in how we make choices in the first place. Our choices are based on perceived differences. Think about asking a co-worker if you can borrow one of their pens. If they pull two identical black pens out of the box, it doesn't matter which one you choose, you just leave it to chance, pick one and use the pen. What if that same co-worker offers a black pen and a red pen? Now you have a choice and you can consciously think about why you might prefer a black pen or red pen before you take the pen. Smart advertising will leverage this principle by exploiting the differences of a product or service. If three dentists all send out postcards that highlight teeth whitening, the potential patient's choice becomes a gamble. The potential patient will naturally look for differences to assist in their choice. They will move from the message you hoped to convey, to ancillary information such as your location, the picture on the postcard or overall design. So rather than creating the perception you wanted to convey, you may end up losing out on a patient because you didn't exploit the right difference.

PRINCIPLE 6 - TRUST IS EARNED OR LOST THROUGH INCREASED KNOWLEDGE.

As we learn more about anything, we either increase or lose trust in whatever we are learning about. Think of when you were deciding on which dental school to attend. As you weighed your different options, different pieces of information lead you to trust one school over another. It may have been price, credentials, location, etc., but all of these things helped you to make an informed decision. As you market your practice it is important to remember that everything you say is either building trust in your services or losing it. Combined this with principle 5 and you can understand why it is very important to convey information in a logical manner that builds trust. Sometimes even the best information can lead to lost trust if it is received at the wrong time.

PRINCIPLE 7 - PURCHASE REQUIRES TRUST.

We don't purchase products or services we don't trust. (If you do, I have some land I would like to sell you.) Moving someone to a sale after they have become aware of your services is all about giving them enough of the correct information to help them reach the required point of trust to make a purchase. In the dental industry trust is especially important. Many patients fear dental work and therefore more trust is needed than someone looking to purchase a box of cereal. Business tends to look at sales as numbers that add to the bottom line. I prefer to think of them as individuals putting their trust in me or my product.

PRINCIPLE 8 - REWARDED TRUST LEADS TO SUBSEQUENT PURCHASES, UNREQUITED TRUST LEADS TO LOST OPPORTUNITY.

When was the last time you put your trust in a product or service and felt disappointed in the results. Maybe you've seen an ad for a new restaurant that promised outstanding cuisine. The food turns out to be bland and overpriced. What are your chances of going back? What if the opposite were true. The food was excellent and worth the cost. Now what are the chances of you going back? If building trust is important for the success of a practice, rewarding trust is critical. How much is a patient worth over their lifetime? If you want to keep patients, reward their trust.

PRINCIPLE 9 - CONTINUALLY REWARDED TRUST ENGENDERS LOYALTY.

As you continually reward the trust of your patients, you develop deeper loyalty and the deeper the loyalty you create, the more room for error you have. An important part of building loyalty is to understand the expectations your patients have so you can continue to reward their trust. Regularly gather feedback from your patients so you can continually improve your practice and continue to reward trust. The other advantage to patient feedback is that if a patient has a bad experience, you now have an opportunity to make things right and regain their trust. Without that feedback, you will most likely lose that patient.

PRINCIPLE 10 - LOYALTY IS NECESSARY FOR THE LONG TERM SUCCESS OF THE BUSINESS.

No business can survive without loyalty. The reason most small businesses don't last more than five years is that they are unable to create a loyal customer base. It is too expensive and too time consuming to continually attract new customers. Everyone knows referrals are the best way to find new patients. How likely is someone to refer your practice to a friend or family member if they don't trust your services? It is your loyal customer base that will drive referrals. Your goal in all of your efforts should be loyalty.

These last three principle demonstrate why marketing correct expectations is so important. If you make promises you can't keep, you might get patients in the door, but you won't get them back. Your marketing therefore should be an accurate reflection of the true experience that a patient will have. Anything more and you could be setting a patient up for unrewarded trust. Anything less and you might not get them in the door in the first place.

All of these principles lead us to branding. A brand is defined as the internal vision of your practice (How you see yourselves), and the external perception of your practice (How others see you). If your brand is defined correctly, it should drive all of your business decisions as well as your marketing.
