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Marketing in radiology

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Due to the high latent competitiveness between the medical community product of demand and supply, it turns out to be imperative to implement marketing strategies that attract the biggest number of clients, motivated not only by the service provided, based on the ethics and specialists knowledge updating, but even for external factors as it can be that one is provided with parking lot for the future patients.

Type of strategies: Marketing strategies are divided into external and internal; the first

ones involve the demographic, psychological and market competition studies, aimed to know the type of clients searched, the specialists level and capacity, as well as the equipment with which the nearby hospitals or laboratories are provided. On the other hand, the internal strategies are targeted to optimize the doctor - patient relationship through the evaluation of all the involved ones in the above mentioned relationship (receptionists, nurses, technical staff and doctors), whose attitude towards the patient will have an effect in a pleasant stay of the patient and, hence, in the permanence

and especially the recommendation of the clients.

Conclusion: The market research in the medical environment is essential not only because it improves the doctor - patient relationship, but because it fosters a healthy competition between the hospitals.

Key words: Marketing, market research, strategies, doctor - patient relationship.

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Marketing is defined as the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for costumers, clients, partners, and society at large. It is a creative industry, which includes advertising, distribution and sales. It is also concerned with anticipating the costumer's future needs and wants, which are often discovered by market research.

Physicians often considered business marketing practice as antihetical to the values of proper medical care. Now a day there is an urgent need to learn more about marketing strategies to survive the trouble times we live in. Marketing strategies in medicine are not a new concept. It has been done throughout history. But it has been done without a structured plan an even without the knowledge of the physicians. At times when radiologist and physicians where in great demand marketing was done by itself. But at the present time the

pressure on our economy has transformed our environment into a more competitive hostile and aggressive setting. Forcing the image specialist into actively searching ways to win our clients. An increasing number of radiologists are competing for a diminishing number of private patients, a more restrictive medical insurance environment and a more complicated and demanding Government Health subrogated contracts. The competition has widened in the last decade, not only are we competing with other radiologist, but also with internist, gynecologist, neurologist and neurosurgeons. We should also include in this setting private investors, hospitals and clinics.

As in any logical process followed in any science, marketing has four basic areas. Analysis (market research), decisions (about the product), implementation (promotion) and evaluation (monitoring). Definitively, we radiologist go for promotion on our own practice and our imaging departments and overlook other important aspects of marketing. Like the need to recognize our strength and our weaknesses. Knowing our market and responding to their need instead of our preferences.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Debido a la alta competitividad latente entre la comunidad médica producto de la oferta-demanda, resulta imperativo implementar estrategias de mercadeo que atraigan el mayor número de clientes, motivados no sólo por el servicio proporcionado fundado en la ética y actualización de sus especialistas, sino incluso por factores externos como puede ser que se cuente con estacionamiento para los futuros pacientes.

Tipo de estrategias: Las estrategias de mercadeo se dividen en externas e internas; las primeras involucran el estudio demográfico, psicológico y de competencia del mercado, con el objetivo de conocer el tipo de clientes buscados, el nivel y capacidad de los especialistas, así como el equipo con el que cuentan los hospitales o laboratorios cercanos. Por su parte, las estrategias internas están orientadas a optimizar la relación médico-paciente a través de la evaluación de todos los involucrados en dicha relación (repcionistas, enfermeras, técnicos y doctores),

cuya actitud hacia el paciente repercutirá en una grata estadía y, por ende, en la permanencia y sobre todo recomendación por parte de los clientes.

Conclusión: El estudio de mercado en el ámbito médico es esencial no sólo porque optimiza la relación médico-paciente, sino porque impulsa una competencia sana entre los hospitales.

Palabras clave: Marketing, estudio de mercado, estrategias, relación médico-paciente.

When we know these elements we can direct our efforts to our objectives in a more structured way, with less effort and better achievements. We also tend to ignore the attitude of our fellow radiologist, technicians and nurses. Attitude which most certainly affects the outcome of any action or change we may introduce to our practice.

Market research

Marketing research includes a combined effort to make a change favorable too us in a target environment. This research includes a demographic, psychological and competitive investigation. The demographic research gives us a better knowledge of the facts and figures of our target population. Is the area of influence of our imaging service composed of old population, mixed or is it mainly pediatric, their group of age, habits and preferences. Is their medical status managed by social security, third party payers or direct payment? The psychological area of research will give us information on the type of physicians in our area, their preferences regarding what type of service they expect from their radiologist and radiology department. Are the physicians in our neighborhood general practitioners or specialist? Do they like to see their study in films or CD, or even maybe through the internet? Do they like having a call from us in every patient or just on special cases? What is their specialty, are they neurologist for example, do we have to increase our expertise in neurological sciences? All these and many other questions

can be answered by the psychological research studies. The competitive research is related with the knowledge of the number of imaging suites in our community both private, institutional or hospital based. The type of equipment and size of their practice. The fee being charged by our competitors for as many studies as possible. All these information gives us the possibility to perform strategic decisions on fees, which new equipments to buy or what population to target. It is not an easy task for a single radiologist to perform. These studies are done by specialized firms which perform the adequate investigations regarding our imaging departments. Physicians tend to under value the job done by marketing specialists. We also, in general consider the most important thing in the complex management of patients to be our diagnosis in any study we perform. But we will be surprised to learn that for many patients the only important item in their relationship with doctor and hospital is that they have a parking lot and the possibility of receiving their results over the counter as quickly as possible.

A radiology group has to develop a corporate image in its community. That is, it has to provide an image of reliability, knowledge and quality between other things. If it is the only group or not it has to gain a leadership that negates the growth of other imaging groups. To do so it has to give the medical group reliability in its diagnosis, quality assurance and service to its patients, low costs to its third payers and government providers.

Direct marketing

There are no magical formulas to make direct marketing with our physicians, patients or other providers. To do this first we must position our brand name or the name of the imaging group we want to position. But we must remember a brand name, by the way a very vague concept is not a slogan, an icon or a mission statement, it is a promise. A promise of quality, kindness, and reliability we can keep to our patients. It is a promise that the staff that works with us (technicians, radiologist, nurses and staff) can increase with their daily work. Building these brand awareness takes time, time that we do not always have. Marketing can shorten the time we need to acquire these brand awareness. Direct marketing is one of the tools marketing provides us with.

Direct marketing is a strategy designed not to reach a large number of possible clients but a much lesser number more times. Either by mail, telemarketing or e-mail. It is better to send five letters to the same 600 clients than to send 3,000 letters to a general population. Health care issues are important to people, so you can be sure your advertisement is going to be read at least half the time. And also mailing advertisement does not imply big expenses. If you can get hold of reliable list of possible candidates this is the way to go. Advertising through TV or radio can be more expensive, but necessary. The idea is to advertise the whole of your practice but to focus on certain target areas like; breast cancer, lung cancer or arthritis. That way you implicitly promote your practice and your brand name. We also have to be present on special events in our community, like grand openings. This gives us the opportunity to be present with our brand name and to advertise our services. We also have to consider certification of our radiology departments. In the near future, private practices whether it is inside a hospital facility or in an office building will have to be appropriately certificated. Patients, insurance companies and government patients will turn you down if you are not. We have to advertise our staff radiologists and their abilities, within the general population and within our medical environment. Part of the job is administrative, but the radiologist must also take an active role in advertising its image. He must call back the referring physicians with important cases. At least once every two months, make a house call and interact with the medical community, should it be in their office or favorite golf club. Or through medical conferences or lectures at social clubs.

Calling our mammography patients before their scheduled appointments is also a good strategy. Remembering our daily patients of their appointments is mandatory, it saves you, time and money on a daily basis. It makes you optimize your day by day patient program.

Internal marketing

This is also one of the most important factors that contribute to the success of an imaging department. It refers to the personal selling of our own image with our peers. To the good relations that have to exist between the different persons working in a department. All these, to give the best service possible to the patients referred to our practice. To obtain this we need leadership in the radiologist. He has to make the working personal feel as part of a team. Not only in words but with its own example. Turf battles for power or position are not permitted inside a radiology department. These affect our image and the image we give to our clients. The personal involved in the radiology department clearly affects the outcome of any venture we propose, so it's important that all personal are involved in the marketing process of the department.

- **Reception.** The receptionist is our first line of contact with our patients or referring physicians whether face to face or by phone. In many instances we can win an appointment or lose it in this stage. A pleasant and professional approach to a patient or physicians may well define the tone for the rest of the time the patient will spend in our department. So it's of utmost importance that the receptionist are capable, professional, caring personal who can listen to the first line of needs of patients, whether in doubt about a procedure or time of appointments. Unfortunately the receptionist must be well versed in quick change of the phone lines. Not all patients will wait more than a couple of minutes for an answer.
- **Parking.** Now a days parking is one of the most important aspects of the hospital patient relationship. And that includes a radiology department. It is of the utmost importance to have adequate and accessible parking at or near our facilities. And if we do not have them, find them. And if possible make them free of charge.
- **Technologist.** The technologist sets the tone for the interaction between the patient and the radiologist. When we don't see the patient is the technologist which who represent us. So the technologist has to be a courteous, educated caring person. With whom the patient feels comfortable. The technologist is the personal which makes the first interrogation on the patient. He passes the information to the radiologist which directs evolution of the study to perform.
- **The nurses.** Radiology nurses interact with most of the ill patients. The image she gives is to the patient is our image. So we have to look for a professional concerned and caring nurse to represent us.
- **Radiologist.** An imaging specialist has to be proactive in its work. Introduce itself to the patient by name, explain the procedure if necessary to reas-

sure the patient. It is important not to discuss findings with the patient especially if they are potentially grave ones. We should communicate important findings directly to the referring physicians. Report, which will be followed by a written one shortly after.

Conclusion

The objectives of a marketing project on an imaging department can only be achieved, no matter how simple or sophisticated it is, if the personal involved have a commitment to do it.

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Colegio Nacional de Médicos Especialistas en Radiología e Imagen, A.C.

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¿Sabes cuál es su propósito?

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Coadyuvar a la vigilancia y superación del ejercicio profesional, para proteger a la sociedad de malas prácticas profesionales. Incluir en sus actividades la consultoría, la actualización profesional y la vinculación con el sector educativo. Considerar a la vigilancia como una actividad integral que garantice el compromiso con la profesión. La vinculación de los Colegios con las instituciones de educación superior que es benéfica para ambas instancias, ofreciendo: actualizar y adecuar planes y programas de estudio, realizar el servicio social, crear nuevas carreras, según las necesidades actuales y desarrollar nuevas líneas de investigación.

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