

## **To Survive New Competition, First you Must Find Yourself**

By Elisha Andrews

It was inevitable; sooner or later competition would come. I knew, my Physician owner knew. We had discussed the possibility multiple times. So when we heard rumblings throughout our small rural area that a new dermatologist was coming, we were in a way expecting it. It didn't blind side us, but we needed a plan. Having been in a dermatology practice for almost 30 years our Physician owner had a well established reputation. It was now my job to quantify and verbalize it to protect our patient base. With a limited advertising budget, and a broad demographic base, I had some challenges ahead.

### **Define it: Who are you really?**

I needed to better define and explore our strengths.

I knew that we were great; I just needed to write down the reasons why so that I could visualize it. This process didn't take me very long. I immediately identified 12 of our strong points; they were things like quality, experienced providers, community involvement and compassion. During this time I also wrote down some things that I knew that we needed to improve.

### **Teamwork: Make sure you are all speaking the same language.**

A consistent patient experience is very important and often, administrators lose track of what a visit to their office feels like from the patients' perspective. A few things that I worked on included taking the opportunity to read through common forms to make sure that there weren't any redundant questions. I worked diligently on phone scripts with the front office staff. We remodeled a portion of our front office. The nursing supervisor met with the nurses to make sure they were all entering information into the EHR in the same order. We then watched the Healthcare Literacy training video from the AMA that is available on YouTube to help us better communicate with our patients. These steps can feel tiresome, but they are vital. We needed to make sure that our 'house' was in order to provide the best experience to our patients.

### **Advertise: Don't give an impression of something that you are not.**

To me, this is the number one rule in advertising. If you over promise then you are setting yourself up to have a disappointed patient, with expectations that you cannot fulfil. By defining our strengths I know how to focus our advertising. For example, using the strength 'experienced providers', I was able to create one of the most successful advertising campaigns to date. It was very simple, a current headshot of our owning Physician with a list of his credentials and accomplishments. The concept is one of many that were presented at a marketing seminar that I attended in Chicago. It was held by Dr. Steven Dayan and his IF Marketing staff. Credentialing a provider helps instill confidence to a patient that is difficult to convey in traditional advertising.

### **Deliver: Continue to do great, at the things that you are great at.**

I will admit that I frequently look through that list of strengths to make sure that we are still hitting the mark. However, by setting our own high standards I don't need to spend time worrying about what the competition is doing. We are being true to ourselves, our values and our mission to provide high quality care to our rural patient base. We do occasionally lose patients to the 'new guy', but we have gained some as well. It is a balance that we have come accept in our growing community.

For the record, I am pleased to say that it has been over a year, and my Physician has extended a hand of friendship to the new dermatologist. He is a nice gentleman, and we will gladly share this rural patient base with him. It is evident that my Physician has his own unique set of strengths, and I will continue to

do my job and deliver the message about us, and how we set our selves apart. Come to find out, competition is healthy. It forced me to take a good look at who we are as a team. The end result, we are stronger and better suited for the challenges that lie ahead in the uncertain field of medicine. Oh, and as for the list of things that we needed to improve upon, they are next.

Originally in March/April 2014

Tag: Marketing/Branding