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YOUR BRAND IS A REFLECTION OF YOUR PRACTICE

If you do not cultivate your practice's "brand," the marketplace will do it for you.

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Premium Practice Today is a monthly feature section in **CRST** providing articles and resources to assist surgeons and their staff in the pursuit of premium practice development to facilitate exceptional experiences for patients and business success.

Your Brand Is a Reflection of Your Practice

If you do not cultivate your practice's "brand," the marketplace will do it for you.

BY ROCHELLE NATALONI, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

In today's overbranded world, I offer two rules when it comes to branding the medical practice. Rule No. 1: A brand is a promise of an experience. Rule No. 2: Everything communicates.

Everything you do or say that a patient encounters is part of your brand, and everything in your brand will affect his or her perception of you and the overall experience. Do not be like the hotel chain that shows a beautiful advertisement in the magazine but leaves a guest following check-in saying, "I wish I could check into the room I saw in the ad." Branding is more than an exercise; it is a challenge to make every customer's experience and encounter live up to the promise implied by your branding, whatever form it may take. This is much easier said than done!

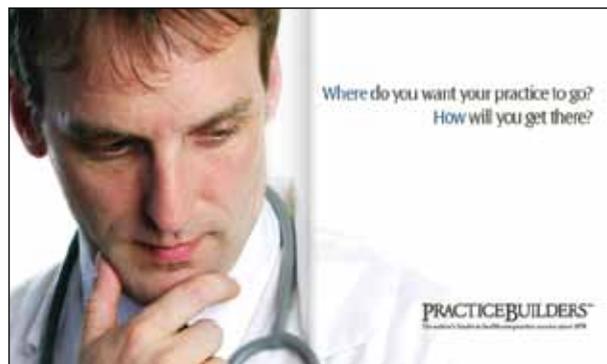
—Section Editor Shareef Mahdavi

It is not unusual to equate the term *brand* with the instantly recognizable logos of popular consumer goods and services. The term *branding*, however, actually represents quite a bit more, including consumers' feelings and perceptions regarding all manner of tangibles, including people, places, and things. Like it or not, experts say, your practice is a brand.

"Ultimately, your medical brand identity is about more than just your logo or the signage outside your office," says Parham Javaherian, the CEO of Practice Builders, LLC (📍 www.PracticeBuilders.com; e-brochure: 📍 <http://PracticeBuilders.ebrochurepb.com>). "It's the essence of who you are as a practitioner and what your practice is all about. It's the consistent use of colors, images, text, and messaging—as well as the mission and philosophy behind it—that defines your brand identity and your practice. It's what separates you from others in your marketplace."

Practice Builders has created brand identities for 15,000 health care practices in the United States and abroad, according to Mr. Javaherian. The goal, he says, is to help practices achieve success however they define it. "Practitioners always ask, 'What is branding and why do we need it?'" he says. "At the most fundamental

level, branding feeds our basic human need to distinguish one thing from another. At the business and consumer level, branding is the process of creating a unique image using a consistent theme to establish a differentiated presence that attracts and retains customers in your marketplace. You may not think of your practice as a business, but the simple fact is health care practices are businesses, too. You have employees, payroll, overhead, and competition just like every other small business. And, like every other small business, you need to set yourself apart or differentiate yourself from



all the competing practitioners in your community.”

Ophthalmologist David Khorram of Marianas Eye Institute in Saipan, the largest of the Marianas Islands is also the cofounder of the Thriving Ophthalmologist Program (📍 www.ThrivingOphthalmologist.com), a system that helps doctors move their practices to the next level. He says that branding begins with answering the question, what do we stand for? “You have to spend some time exploring your values and what unique position you want your practice to hold,” he says. “In our case, we pride ourselves on having highly qualified physicians and staff and advanced technologies. We also pride ourselves on providing outstanding care with love and kindness. So, we set our mission as ‘excellence with love’ and our tagline as ‘where technology meets talent.’ Then, we communicate this message to the population we serve. We use these phrases on all of our signage, business cards, advertising, etc., and people have come to recognize that Marianas Eye Institute stands for outstanding staff, advanced technologies, and compassionate service. This is our image within our community, and we work hard to constantly evaluate ourselves and make sure that the brand we’ve built continues to be reflected in our day-to-day activities.”

BRANDING VERSUS MARKETING

Dr. Khorram stresses the importance of distinguishing between branding and marketing. “There are many conservative ophthalmologists who don’t believe in heavy

WHAT CONSTITUTES A BRAND?

David Ogilvy, known in pop culture as the father of advertising, once said, “You now have to decide what ‘image’ you want for your brand. Image means personality. Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the marketplace.” By extension, your practice has a personality, and it can make it or break it in the marketplace.

A brand basically differentiates one health care practice from another. Some of the factors that play a part in the branding process include

- patients’ experiences with the practitioners
- practitioners’ bedside manner
- size of the practice
- age of the practice
- location of the practice
- capabilities of the practice
- reputation among patients and referral sources
- credentials, including special or advanced training
- atmosphere (friendly, helpful, casual, formal)
- technology (high, low, or no tech)
- leading-edge procedures
- accessibility
- innovation
- outcomes

Source: Practice Builders, LLC, 📍 www.PracticeBuilders.com

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FROM: David Khorram

Dear Colleagues,

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- ✗ Are you unsure of what to do next?
- ✗ Are you overwhelmed by paperwork and administrative duties?
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marketing—meaning advertising—and maybe they don’t want to acknowledge the usefulness of branding because they feel it’s part of marketing. But the truth is, whether you give it attention or not, there is a perception of your practice within the community you serve, and if you don’t take the time to brand yourself, the public will do it for you. If you don’t set yourself apart, then your brand, by default, is an average practice. So, whether you want to advertise or not, it is worth taking some time to think about what you stand for and how you want to convey that to the people you serve. In the Thriving Ophthalmologist Program, we help physicians answer these questions and identify their brand, because branding is one of the seven key differences between thriving practices and average ones. We explain these seven differences in our introductory video at 📍 www.ThrivingOphthalmologist.com.”

Dr. Khorram points out that branding is not just for practices that offer a heavy mix of elective procedures.

“Our practice is not ordinary in that it is located on an island serving a population of 40,000,” he explains. “We provide comprehensive care with a focus on cataract surgery and medical retina, particularly diabetic retinopathy. Our population does not have much disposable income, yet branding remains an important part of our practice. It’s not just for practices involved in elective procedures. It can help any practice move into a better position within their market.”

Orthopedic surgeon David Geier Jr agrees (www.drdauidgeier.com). His personal interest is in sports medicine, and his target patient is the active young adult. In addition to being team physician for many high school and recreational sports teams in Charleston, South Carolina, Dr. Geier has served as the orthopedic consultant to the US Women’s Soccer and the Eagles USA Rugby National teams

Dr. Geier said his first step was to build relationships in the community. He talked to schools and professional organizations about sports injuries and began writing a column in the local newspaper. (Dr. Geier also has a podcast: www.drdauidgeier.com/category/podcast.) “I became a brand,” says the director of Medical University of South Carolina Sports Medicine in Charleston. He adds that 25% to 50% of his patients choose him because of his column, blog, and other marketing tools.



BRANDING AND ELECTIVE CARE

Kenneth T. Hertz, principal, MGMA Health Care Consulting Group (www.mgma.com/consulting/hertz), points out that branding is even more important in practices that rely on “out-of-pocket payment” for elective procedures.

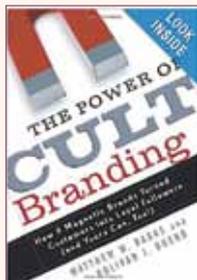
“One of the key issues to understand is that branding is about more than an attractive office, logo, business card, and signage,” he says. “Branding really represents the total patient experience. Elective medicine

CULT BRANDING

The Power of Cult Branding: How 9 Magnetic Brands Turned Customers Into Loyal Followers (and Yours Can, Too!)
by Matthew W. Ragas and Bolivar J. Bueno

Like religious cults that can attract thousands of devoted disciples, is it possible for company or practice brands to build legions of loyal followers? Can your practice harness the power of cult branding without blowing a fortune on advertising?

According to authors Matthew W. Ragas and Bolivar J. Bueno, the answer is yes. They say you need not look much further than a Harley-Davidson rally, a Star Trek convention, or a Jimmy Buffett concert to see the cult-branding phenomenon at work. Not all brands have the dash of edginess, the devoted fan base, or the niche posi-



tioning to be cult brands, but those that do tend to share characteristics that make them successful. This is what the authors call “the seven golden rules of cult branding.” In their book, Ragas and Bueno share the remarkable stories behind nine very successful cult brands:

- Star Trek
- Harley-Davidson
- Oprah Winfrey
- World Wrestling Entertainment (formerly WWF)
- Apple
- Volkswagen Beetle
- Jimmy Buffett
- Vans Shoes
- Linux

These nine brands follow the seven golden rules and have millions of fans and billions of dollars in revenue to show for it. *The Power of Cult Branding* is a fascinating guide to creating a loyal core of repeat customers and winning the positioning battle.

is all about the patient experience: access, timeliness, personal attention, availability, etc., and branding provides a description of what one practice provides over another. The ideal and optimal patient experience creates strong word of mouth, and word of mouth is one of the most direct and effective testimonials.”

When presenting your brand to the public, Mr. Hertz says, “The thought process here must focus on the patient and on the marketplace. It’s not so much about how the practice wants to be perceived as much as it is what the patient wants and needs, what his or her expectations are, and how the practice can not only meet those expectations but exceed them. The practice’s focus must be from the outside in, not the inside out.”

Ditto, says Mr. Javaherian. “Your brand identifies you as the solution to the consumer’s health care problem,” he asserts. “Your brand sets you apart from competition. It helps you attract patients, referral relationships, revenue, and income and builds stability and trust over time.” Branding, he points out, benefits your practice



most when you understand what is truly different about your practice, not just from your own perspective, but from your patients’ perspectives. “Think about what sets you apart from direct competitors in your market area,” says Mr. Javaherian. “What will it take to get you noticed in your unique geographic marketplace and in the virtual online community by the kinds of

STANDING OUT IN THE CROWD

With so much at stake, including your online reputation and the future of your practice, it is critical that you stand out from your competitors in a positive way. You must distinguish yourself to be noticed. The way you do that is through branding.

1. **Who are you?** You may know who you are and what your practice stands for, but who are you in the context of your market, your community, and your competitors? What makes you different? What helps you stand out? Is it a procedure no one else in your area performs? A patient-focused style of care? Better credentials? Higher patient satisfaction? Better outcomes? Whatever it is, it should be part of your brand. If you can build a 10-words-or-less tagline or slogan around it, all the better.
2. **Different but the same.** Everything you do, from your practice’s letterhead and business cards to your educational materials for patients, collateral, and website, should have the same look and feel. They should have the same logo, colors, images, fonts, and styles. In addition, every communication should have consistent messaging that reflects the vision and mission of your practice.
3. **Patient speak.** Help patients (your customers) relate

to you more readily by speaking their language. If you hand out printed information or care instructions, make sure they are written in simple language. You want patients to “get it,” and they will not if it is presented in the voice of the clinician.

4. **Walk the walk.** Ensure that your staff is aligned around your brand. Your external branding will not mean much if your staff delivers an unsatisfactory patient experience, which is essentially the core of your internal brand. Once your external branding is established, train your staff to “talk the talk and walk the walk,” and your internal branding will follow.
5. **Stick with it.** Do not ever change the look and feel of your marketing materials or your messaging on a whim. The longer you remain consistent with your branding, the stronger your brand will become, and the more identifiable your practice will be in your community. By making each of the aforementioned part of your brand, you will stand out in a positive way among patients and referring colleagues. You will give potential patients and referral sources good reasons to choose you and remember you rather than your competitors.

Source: Practice Builders, LLC, www.PracticeBuilders.com

PREMIUM PRACTICE TODAY

patients you really want? Good branding gives potential patients and referral sources good reasons to choose you rather than your competitors.”

Scott Deming (www.scottdeming.com), a branding and customer service expert, recently addressed the American Academy of Ophthalmic Executives on the topic of branding. In his presentation, he stressed that an ophthalmology practice, no matter how large or small, is a brand and that its patients are customers. He says the primary question that drives the creation of a practice’s brand is what these patients/customers think of when they see or hear your name or your practice’s name.

To strengthen your brand, Mr. Deming says that it is imperative to connect with your patients and to meet their emotional needs. By putting yourself in your patients’ shoes, you can change your offering and how you offer it and ultimately make every interaction and transaction a sincerely meaningful one. In this video, he discusses connecting with your patients, meeting their emotional needs, and influencing their behavior so they become an extension of your brand (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWnn7kikZUY).

Mr. Javaherian says there has never been a time like now when potential patients and professional referral sources—your consumers—can scrutinize your practice so closely and so quickly. There has also never been a



time when your practice’s success relied so heavily on patients’ perceptions of you and the results of their Internet searches, online reviews, and social media interactions.

He explains that health care practitioners would be well advised to look at their practices through the patients’ eyes and to consider what’s most important to them. “This may well be very different from what’s most important to you,” says Mr. Javaherian. “For example, you may think that your fellowship training or some piece of new technology is crucial, but a potential patient is more likely to think that your bedside manner or keeping on-time appointments is more so. Your brand must address what’s most important to them, not you.”

He adds, “Branding requires introspection, analysis, and understanding of what’s of value to your patients. If you don’t have the necessary time or resources to analyze your practice and develop your own brand, consider working with an objective third party—an experienced branding and marketing partner.”

Dr. Geier says, “Branding really comes down to relationship building. It’s key to create relationships with people who will ultimately become patients.” ■

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