

HOW PHYSICIANS CAN GET MORE PATIENTS



Proven Tips for Building Your
Practice in the Era of Obamacare

Vicki Rackner, MD

Foreword by Jeanie Olson, CPA, CMRM

FOREWORD

As owner of Vantage Point Executive Advisory Group, LLC, I help physicians like you stay in private practice and increase their revenue from both patients and payers.

Our company is a local affiliate of the nation's largest network of Certified Medical Revenue Managers and we process thousands of claims for hundreds of doctors from coast-to-coast every day.

We hear concerns from physicians about how the Affordable Care Act will impact their practices--and their incomes and we help them thrive and build their practices in any economy.

The information in this book by Dr. Vicki Rackner is intended to help you reap the personal, professional and financial rewards that drew you to a career in medicine.

Vicki is a former surgeon with a seat on the faculty at the University of Washington School of Medicine and a nationally noted expert in the doctor-patient relationship. I think you will find value in her ideas.

Whether you run your own private practice or you're employed by an academic institution, the advice in this book will help shape your practice by design rather than by default.

Feel welcome to pass it along to your physician colleagues and friends. I invite your comments.

Yours for Success,

**Jeanie Olson, CPA, CMRM
Vantage Point Executive Advisory Group, LLC
jeanie@vantagepointexec.com
vantagepointexec.com
443-459-9400**

Introduction

The purpose of this book is to help you develop a steady stream of new patients.

My goal is to:

- Help you understand more about the referral process
- Help you expand the way you measure your value
- Help you enhance your power of persuasion
- Help you develop a practice-building campaign that works for you
- Help you get your practice on sound financial footing.

Here's what people who run successful practices today know:

Your skill at caring for your patients determines your clinical outcomes.

Your skill at caring for people who send you patients determines your business outcomes.

You'll learn how to conduct yourself in a way that persuades more SENDERS (people who send patients your way) to make more referrals.

I don't know about you, but no one showed me how to do this in medical school or in residency.

The advice that I got from my mentors in the 80's went something like this: Take good care of patients and watch your practice grow. And when I opened my surgical practice, 100% of my SENDERS were physicians.

Then came Google. Today three out of four referrals are directly or indirectly influenced by patients and their families.

Using pre-Google practice-building strategies in the post-Google world is like trying to charge your laptop in Europe; you need an adapter to make it work.

The ideas in this book are the adapters that will help you generate more referrals in the post-Google world.

In Part 1, you'll learn about the psychology of the referral.

In Part 2 you'll get the formula for conducting a meaningful conversation with SENDERS.

In Part 3 you'll find the right questions to help you design your own custom practice- building campaign.

Why should you listen to me?

Both as a physician running a private practice and as an entrepreneur, I, like you, have asked, "How do I connect with the people who will benefit from my services?"

Very briefly, here's my story. I decided to be a doctor as I woke from my own lifesaving operation at age 23. Not surprisingly I became a surgeon, and worked in a private practice setting in Seattle.

I shifted from direct patient care to consulting in response to my experience reviewing over 100 medical malpractice cases. I saw how medical care got derailed, and I wanted to keep in on track.

With humility and gratitude, I'll share that I now have a national platform, delivering keynotes at national meetings and offering expert content for national organizations.

I'm not saying this to boast. I'm saying it because I faced the same problems you do, personally struggling with articulating my value and approaching the right people. I found strategies that work for me. You can too, and I can help you.

Some things never change

Practice-building has always been and will always be about relationship-building.

Technology helps you build relationships with more people in different ways. The way you work with patients (and with SENDERS) is different today than it was 20 years ago.

Practice-building is relationship building

Today information is ubiquitous; however, wisdom is scarce. Your ability to interpret information and then apply your skills, judgment and experience is more important now than ever.

You can build your practice with strategies that:

- **Maintain the highest level of professionalism.**
- **Make the most of your marketing dollars.**
- **Produce results.**

Who is your customer?

If you were selling washing machines or running a carpet cleaning business, you would know who your customer is. The person who consumes the products and services is usually the person making the purchasing choices.

Not so in medical practices. You weave a complex web of relationships in that the person you treat is often not the person who pays you or makes referrals.

If you want your practice to grow quickly, invest in relationships with the people who refer patients to you.

Think of your SENDERS as your customers. Understand them. Help them. Appreciate them.

Part 1: The Psychology of the Referral

Your goal is to persuade more people to send you more patients. This is surprisingly difficult because referral patterns become habits, and habits are hard to change.

When you work with human nature instead of fighting against it, you have the greatest chance of success.

Your persuasion tools

You have three basic tools to persuade others to act in the ways you want. These are the same tools you use whether you're trying to get patients to take their medication as prescribed, get your daughter to practice the piano or get SENDERS to make more referrals. Persuasion through authority

The words "Because I said so." had meaning in the Father-Knows-Best era. Mandates generally build walls between people instead of bridges. Effective practice building is bridge building, so this tactic is likely to drive people away from you instead of toward you.

Persuasion through logic and reason

You can persuade through logic and reason. Here are some logical reasons SENDERS might refer patients to you:

You have unique access to resources. A primary care doctor cannot replace a mitral valve; only heart surgeons have privileges to do this procedure.

You use resources more effectively. Your experience translates to treatments with less time, less pain and/or less expense.

You get better results. Practice makes perfect.

A gentle reminder of the mandate imposed by law or practice guidelines. For example, Washington State recently passed legislation that imposes a mandate for pain clinic referral when patients exceed a set ceiling of opioid doses.

Your campaign to influence SENDERS may include logic-based sharing of facts and figures about your training, your experience and your outcomes.

Persuasion through emotion

Brain science suggests we make most of our choices with our feeling brain and justify them with our thinking brain. In other words, emotion drives motion.

Consider the possibility that most referral choices are driven by emotion. You are most influential when you help another person achieve their desired emotional state. This is the driving force behind most of our actions.

What do people want? They want to be seen, heard and valued. They want to know, "Somebody understands me."

You are in the best position to persuade when the thing that's important to the other person becomes important to you.

How to use emotional forces that drive human behavior.

You are most influential when you help another person achieve their desired emotional state.

Each of us has a temperamental affinity towards one of four emotional states: to be in control, to belong, to be admired or to be right. This affinity forms the basis of four personality types:

“The Director” thrives when getting results, wilts when losing control and likes feeling powerful. This is a common personality type for physicians.

“The Team Player” thrives when fitting in, wilts when standing out and likes a sense of belonging. This is a common personality type for nurses.

“The Accountant” thrives when he’s right, wilts when he’s wrong and likes feeling smart. This personality type responds to your outcomes data and logical arguments.

“The Actor” thrives on admiration, wilts with disapproval and likes feeling important.

These emotional factors can either slow or accelerate appropriate referrals. The Director, for example, may see a referral as an admission of defeat. You overcome his resistance by reminding him how much more he would like freeing up his time to see more of his best-fit patients.

Action Steps:

Define the primary emotional force that drives your actions:

Define the primary emotional force that drives the choices of people around you.:

Person

Driving emotion

Three factors serve as barriers to influencing SENDERS.

1. The “Eat your vegetables; they’re good for you” effect

We have a human aversion to things we find distasteful, whether it’s a child facing yucky vegetables or an adult facing a difficult conversation.

We have a universal human aversion to pain and death. If you’re involved with end-of-life care or the management of chronic pain, this factor makes it very difficult to engage SENDERS in conversation.

Further, most physicians have an aversion to problems they cannot solve and conditions they cannot control.

2. Competition for attention

In our crazy-busy world, it's more difficult than ever to grab someone's attention. We have developed attention spam filters to selectively ignore unwanted messages. Think of how you listen to the car radio. You tune out the ad and tune back in for the interview.

Customized messages that solve a SENDER's immediate problem are most likely to get through; other messages get trapped in the spam attention filters.

3. Medical beliefs

Potential SENDERS hold beliefs about the value you offer and how patients benefit from your care. Whether or not this belief reflects reality, imagine every person you meet wearing the t-shirt I saw on a toddler: "For argument's sake, let's assume I'm right."

Factors that accelerate referrals

1. Tell stories rather than quote facts

We physicians process logic and facts in our thinking brains to achieve medical goals. However, most patients and SENDERS process stories in their feeling brains to achieve personal goals.

Let's say you want to persuade SENDERS to refer more patients to your pain clinic or hospice. You could say, "Patients under our care experience a 30% reduction in overall pain scores." That would speak to the thinking brain. Or you could tell the story of a fractured family reconciling. You have a much better chance to persuade with the story.

Tell stories. Develop your skills. In general story-telling works better than fact-telling.

Action Steps:

- Listen to great storytellers. Watch TED videos www.TED.org . Hear great speakers.
- Write down your stories.
- Tell more stories at the dinner table, with your staff and with your SENDERS.
- Post a bulletin board where people can share stories.
- Create a "hero of the month" award and tell the story of their courage.

2. Say “I care.”

You more easily persuade people when they know you care about them.

There are five basic ways people complete this sentence, “I know they care because....”

- They tell me.
- They spend time with me.
- They give me gifts.
- They do nice things for me.
- They offer caring physical touches.

Each person—including yourself and your SENDER—has a temperamental affinity to one of the five. Deliver the “I care” message guided by the recipients’ preferences—not yours. Since each SENDER is different, consider ways you can say “I care” to each in a way that works for them and is comfortable for you.

Action Steps:

Invest in personalized notecards and get in the habit of dropping a 3 to 4 sentence quick note in the mail. 5 ideas:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Share favorite products, helpful information and time-saving tips.

5 ideas:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5.

Invest in branded items (a book, fridge magnet or Vial of Life) and give them as gifts.

5 branding ideas:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

3. Focus on people who “get it” vs people who don’t

Some referring physicians simply cannot see the difference between treating patients themselves and referring them to you. Many frustrated staff ask, “How do we help them understand? They just don’t seem to get it.”

Your time is better invested in connecting with people who “get it” rather than converting people who don’t.

4. Market rather than advertise

Marketing and advertising are different. Advertising says with words and actions “Let me tell you all about me.” Marketing says with words and actions, “Let’s talk about you.”

Advertising worked in the pre-Google era. I built my practice with the “donut strategy.” I picked up donuts, visited practices and told them all about my training, my experience and my patients outcomes. I was shining the spotlight on me. Now physicians advertise on radio and on TV.

Today’s information overload means people have gotten better at ignoring unwanted messages. They pay closest attention to messages about them or about something important to them. You are much more likely to influence when turning the spotlight on SENDERS and making them the focus of your conversation.

Marketing accelerates practice growth more quickly than advertising in the post-Google era.

Marketing is harder than advertising.

When you advertise, you typically offer the same message to most audiences. One size fits all.

Not so with marketing. Effective marketing is like a key that perfectly fits the lock defined by any individual's unmet need. Your referring physicians, visiting nurses and web-savvy families all have different questions for you and different ideas about your value.

Marketing is cheaper and more effective than advertising. In the end, marketing is a better investment than advertising. Advertising is expensive; marketing can be free. Advertising gets trapped in a SENDER's spam attention filter; marketing messages are welcomed because they have intrinsic value.

Action Steps:

Review your web site and promotional material. How often does the spotlight shine on you, and how often does it shine on the people you serve?

Does your web site have patient stories, testimonials and pictures? Do you have SENDERS' stories? Do you showcase great results? Everyday heroes? If not, begin today.

Coach everyone in your organization so they are all skilled at communicating your value. Make sure every single person associated with your organization knows what to say when someone asks, "What do you do?"

The very best approach is to engage the listener with a problem. “Have you ever known someone who lives with chronic pain, and no one seems to listen or understand? We help these people have more good days and recapture joy.”

Write down 4 ideas about marketing:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Practice-building in the Pre-Google World	Practice-building in the Post-Google World
You advertise.	You market.
You invite primary care doctors to your open house.	You invite primary care doctors to your content-rich webinars.
You offer facts.	You tell stories.
You run ads in the newspaper.	You're quoted in the newspaper.
You buy radio air time and run ads.	You're the guest interviewed on the radio show.
You tell others about your credentials on your web site	You let others talk about you with testimonials.

Summary:

- Emotions drive motion.
- You persuade most effectively by helping others achieve their desired feeling state.
- Tell stories; they are the language of the feeling brain.
- The most effective way to get what you want is to help others get what they want.

Part 2: The Meaningful Conversation

It's Sunday night and you answer the ringing phone. It's your brother-in-law, who says, "Can I pick your brain for a minute?"

You listen. You ask questions. You share your expertise. Your brother-in-law hangs up feeling better than when he called.

You have just engaged in a meaningful conversation. You have improved the condition of another person through your act of listening, offering perspective and sharing your expertise.

The value you deliver positions you as the trusted expert and community leader you already are.

Meaningful conversations are exchanges through which another person comes to know you, like you and trust you.

You can build your practice by intentionally engaging in meaningful conversations with people who send you patients. It's sort of like the free sample at the grocery store.

Effective marketing is a series of meaningful conversations.

Effective marketing delivers the right message to the right person at the right time.

Why give out free samples of your smarts?

As one client observed, "I get paid to take care of patients; I don't get paid to talk to my brother-in-law."

This is true! The time, money and attention dedicated to practice-building represent investments in your business.

This “free sample” marketing strategy offers a greater return than advertising, with three advantages over conventional pre-Google practice-building approaches:

1. You make your marketing dollars go farther. Advertising is expensive; meaningful conversations are often free. You could buy radio air time and run your ad—or you could be a guest interviewed on the show at no cost to you.
2. You make your time go farther. You could take donuts to individual medical offices, or you could write an article, create a video or tape a presentation and reach more people with significantly less effort.
3. You have greater rewards. When the marketing message itself improves the conditions of others, you are serving.

The rest of the chapter offers the formula for meaningful conversations. Then, to get your creative juices flowing, I'll illustrate with a few examples.

The Formula for Meaningful Conversations

Here are the three elements of a successful meaningful conversation.

Step #1: Identify your conversation partner.

You have different kinds of conversations with different people. You talk to your partner differently than you talk to your patients or your children.

Similarly, you customize your meaningful conversation so it resonates with each SENDER.

Imagine in your mind's eye an individual who may be a physician, a nurse, former patient, employee, family caregiver or somebody who works next door.

Step #2: Ask key questions.

As you think of a person with whom you want to connect, consider key questions:

What are their unmet needs?

What keeps them up at night?

What would you say to this person if they were a friend or relative?

Remember the main point from the psychology of persuasion: Emotions drive motion.

Identify the unwanted feeling state; that's like the arrow on a map that says, "You are here." Then discern the desired feeling state they seek.

Step #3: Craft the message.

Your message is the set of directions that help the SENDER get from where they are now to where they want to be.

Your conversation partner measures your value by your ability to help them get there. The more troubling the problem, the higher your value.

Examples of Meaningful Conversations

Meaningful conversations with referring physician SENDERS.

What do they want?

a. They want to be appreciated.

Launch a “growth through gratitude” campaign. Send one hand-written thank you note a day to individuals who send you patients. You build your practice for the cost of a postage stamp.

b. They want to experience mastery.

Translate your best practices into the primary care setting. Share simple tips. Overturn myths. Help them go to bed at night thinking, “I’m a good doctor.”

c. They want the answers to questions they think they should already know.

You could deliver an after-dinner talk at a medical meeting and address a soul-searching topic, like how you conduct yourself when a patient dies.

Meaningful conversations with former patient SENDERS

What do they want?

Patients want to be remembered.

Send a birthday greeting. This is a very easy way to cultivate an ongoing relationship.

Patients want you to hold them in high regard.

Most people are not mind readers; if you want patients to refer their friends, ask them! Say to them, “People we can help needlessly suffer before they find out about our services. Feel free to let others know about our services. We’re always happy to see new patients.”

Patients want a way to express their gratitude.

Give them the chance to give back. Ask if they’d be willing to talk to other patients. Invite them to write a testimonial or tell their story on video. You’re not troubling them; you may be delighting them. Think about how good you feel when you’re given the chance to give.

Meaningful conversations with nurse SENDERS

What do they want?

Nurses want to feel connected.

Nurses are team players by temperament; however, visiting nurses in particular often they feel alone managing complex problems. Let them know they can count on you. Ask them what they would like to learn about and offer a CME course.

Coach all staff and volunteers to respond to the question, “What do you do?”

The best way to engage someone is to find a way to relate what you do to how they would benefit. Ask, “have you ever faced this challenge?” Then you say, “We help (this group of people) do (tasks you make happen) so that (benefit)

Let’s say a one of your hospice nurses is at a social event, and someone asks, “What does your organization do?” She could say, “Have you ever known someone who cannot be cured from a chronic medical condition? We help these people and their families get the most joy out of every day.”

Meaningful conversations with family caregiver SENDERS

Family caregivers are important people. If family caregivers were paid market wages for the work they do as an act of love, their compensation would approximate the entire Medicare budget. HIPAA rules have marginalized caregivers; smart physicians engage them.

Family caregivers are your therapeutic allies to enhance medication compliance, decrease hospital readmissions and improve clinical outcomes. They also direct referrals from behind the scenes. They’re talking with their friends. They’re searching the Internet. They want the best care for their loved ones, but they don’t want to work with strangers. Give them a chance to get to know you.

They want information.

Write articles or create videos that answer questions family caregivers ask.

They want support.

Host a caregiver support group. You can either hold it in your office or let people join by phone or Skype.

They want to be included.

Ask how they're doing when they bring their loved ones in for appointments.

Meaningful conversations with local businesses

Small businesses are the engines that drive our economy. If you can help local businesses get new customers, everyone benefits.

They want more customers.

Ask local businesses about products or services your patients would want to know about.

Give businesses the chance to give your patients a discount.

They want to add value to their customer experience.

Offer special or discounted services to their customers.

Summary:

Engage in meaningful conversations in which you improve the condition of people who can send you patients.

The Formula for Meaningful Conversations

Step #1: Identify your conversation partner.

Step #2: Ask key questions.

- What are their unmet needs?
- What keeps them up at night?
- What would you say to this person if they were a friend or relative?

Step #3: Craft the message. Position yourself as the trusted expert and community leader you already are.

Part 3: Your Customized Marketing Campaigns: How to shine.

Just as no two patients have identical treatment plans, no two practices have identical marketing campaigns. Customized practice-building strategies work best.

Three basic questions will help you customize your plan:

1. Where are you now?
2. Where would you like to be?
3. How do you get there?

Practice-building Step 1: Where are you now?

Knowing how patients find you, how you're perceived and how well you understand the value you offer to others will accelerate your next steps.

How do your patients find you?

Identify the paths patients take to find you.

- Who refers patients to you? Here are the most common sources of referrals:
- Physicians

- Former patients
- Your peers
- Your employees and volunteers
- Family members of your patients
- Eldercare providers
- Visiting Nurses
- Clergy
- Internet searches
- In-patient consults
- Local businesses
- Media appearances (You're on TV, in the newspaper)
- Speaking engagements

If you're like most practices, about 80% of your referrals come from 20% of the SENDERS.

What triggers referrals?

Does a life cycle event trigger referrals? A cosmetic dentist or orthodontist may notice that she sees brides-to-be.

Does the experience of a friend or relative trigger a referral? Many women schedule their mammograms when someone they know gets a breast cancer diagnosis. A breast imaging suite could create branded postcards that say "I love you. Please get your mammogram." These postcards could be given to patients who want to reach out to their own friends and relatives.

Is there a time of year or month or week referrals are most likely to happen? A sports medicine practice could offer exercise tips in the new year.

Action plan:

For the next 30 days, ask each patient how and why they found their way to you. Get as specific as possible.

Ask your patients, “How did you get our name?”

If they say, “My doctor’s office,” ask “Who at the office gave you my name?”

If they say, “A friend,”, ask, “How did your friend know us? Did we treat them?”

If they say, “An Internet search”, ask, “What words did you type in the search bar?”

For new patients, ask, “What made you call us today rather than last week or last month?”

Create a database of referral sources so you can follow trends (Case manager vs visiting nurse vs assisted living) This is very important, because you want to develop ongoing relationships with existing SENDERS.

Build a referral map. Identify the paths patients take to find you. Get a piece of paper and draw a wheel with lots of spokes. Put yourself at the center; each spoke represents your relationship with a SENDER.

List 5 major SENDERS

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

How do patients, families and health care professional think of you?

Recruit “people mirrors.” Find out how others see you. You may know your strengths and weaknesses; however the way you’re perceived by others is even more important. Remember, their perception is reality.

Human nature leads people to overlook their gifts; when something comes easily, we often assume it’s easy for others.

Action plan:

Get feedback. As a matter of habit, ask at least one person a week, “How are we doing?” It could be your patient, a family caregiver, a SENDER, a colleague or a staff member.

Conduct exit surveys. Here are some questions you can ask:

- What has your experience with us been like?
- What do we do well?
- What could we do better?
- What services do you wish you had that were not there?

Free online tools make it easy to add a survey to your newsletter or on your web site. <http://www.surveymonkey.com/>

As you collect the feedback, make sure you note what “hat” the person wears: patient, family member, nurse, social worker.

If you’re worrying about imposing, remember that people LOVE being asked for their opinion.

Create a culture of caring at your facility

The way you treat your employees is often reflected in the way they treat patients. Be kind and respectful. Ask them what they want and need.

Ask your employees to treat every patient as if they were VIP's. Suggest that as they greet each patient they see the face of a president or a movie star or an admired athlete.

I once referred one of my patients to the best neurologist I knew. The patient came back to me very unhappy. The front office staff was downright rude. All of your employees are ambassadors of your brand.

What has worked for you?

Referral generation is not a precise science. Getting your name out there is a long-term effort. Some practice-building efforts work better than others. What has worked well for you?

Here are some activities that lead to reliable bumps in referrals:

- Host a CPR class
- Present at Grand Rounds
- Invite your patients to tell a friend about your clinic.
- Run a contest
- Launch a social media campaign.
- Start a blog
- Add testimonials on your web site.

- Post content-rich videos on your web site.
- Host a seminar, teleseminar, or webinar; invite your SENDERS to invite THEIR patients.

Action plan:

Look at your appointment calendar, and identify the peaks and valleys. How do you explain them?

Now look at your practice-building activities. Did you get the “bump” you expected?

Practice-Building Step 2: Where would you like to be?

You can create a balance of your top personal, professional and financial goals. Your calendar can reflect your priorities. You can spend your days doing things that you love, and delegate activities that drain you.

If you so choose, you’re invited into a set of exercises to imagine this ideal life.

What are your personal goals?

Your work supports your family, but your family supports your work.

Here are some questions for your consideration:

- How many times a week would you like to have family meals?
- How many of your kids’ events would you like to attend?

- How much time do you devote to exercise?
- How well prepared are you for life's emergencies?
- How much vacation time do you want each year?
- How many hours do you want to work each week?
- What are 10 wild, crazy things you have always wanted to do?

What are your professional goals?

A dream drew you to a career in medicine. Here are a few questions to help you clarify what your days might look like if you were living that dream.

- Do you like working with a certain kind of patient? Avoiding another kind?
- Do you have a special interest in a specific disease process?
- Are there procedures you love to do or problems you love to solve?
- Have you pioneered a new approach that works?
- Would you like to go on a medical mission? Do more outreach in your community? Reach out to the medically underserved?
- Are you a natural born leader? Comic? Musician? Artist? Writer? Inventor?
- When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up and why?
- What are your hobbies? Do you draw cartoons? Cook? Make people laugh?
- Would you like to hold an elected office and shape public policy?
- Are you passionate about a product or a system for health-promotion?
- Are you passionate about the healing power of animals?
- Do you like to write? Do you have a book in you?
- What are you doing when time stands still?

What are your financial goals?

You may find that you exchange time for money and money for time. True wealth is the ability to control your time.

How much money do you really need? What is the value of your time with family?

Are you prepared for retirement? Do you have disability insurance and long term care insurance? Is your will current?

What would your ideal practice look like?

There are many possibilities, and you decide what works best for you.

1. You can create a niche practice that reflects your own strengths and interests. Then you can leverage technology to reach the people who are interested in what you have to offer.
2. You can position yourself as the industry expert for journalists and peers. Journalists look for experts who can interpret breaking medical news. This could be you!
3. You can generate income through non-clinical activities. You may hold the belief that the only way to generate revenue is through direct patient care.

Consider this: Your expertise has value. Here are a few ways you can package it.

- Write a book

- Create an educational DVD or home study kit
- Offer a live workshop
- Become a paid speaker
- Create a coaching program
- Create a CME course
- Create and sell products that improve the quality of life.

You could either give away your products and services, or you could use them to generate passive revenue that can buy you time with your family or underwrite philanthropic activities.

Myth: It's unprofessional to talk about money.

Reality: Money is a common language spoken by insurance companies, the government, patients and health care professionals. Successful physicians overcome their discomfort.

Myth: It's unprofessional to sell products and services to patients.

Reality: Products and services can be a way to extend your impact, and create the financial security that can help you reach out to the medically underserved.

Myth: Patients will not pay out of pocket for medical services.

Reality: Patients spend money on things they value (concierge services, massage, supplements, cigarettes). Your job is to communicate the value of the product/service you sell.

A Week of Healthy Habits

Try doing this for 4 weeks--28 days. You can either take on these new habits as an individual, as clinic or as a family.

Measuring Monday

Look at your schedule for the upcoming week and notice which activities get you excited and which activities make you feel drained.

Talking Tuesday

Begin each conversation with something positive. Instead of beginning a patient encounter with what is the problem, ask, "What's the best thing that happened this week?"

Wakeup Wednesday

Pay attention to the things that are going right.

Thank you Thursday

Find at least one person to thank. It's especially fun if this person is normally unseen and unappreciated--the person who cleans your office, takes your money at the hospital cafeteria. Tell them specifically how they make your life better. Consider writing a thank you note to someone who referred a patient or served as a source of inspiration.

Feedback Friday

Ask one person, "How am I doing as your doctor/employer/partner/parent/child?" Then ask, "How could I do better?"

Saturday relief

Consider taking a break for the to do list. Turn off your computer and park your cell phone in a drawer. Be present with your family read a book. Do something that recharges you.

Dreaming Sunday

Spend 10 minutes thinking about the things you would love to do and have always wanted to do.

Practice-Building Step 3: How do you get there?

You have a picture of what you would like to do. The next question is how to get there.

Made-to-Order Medical Marketing Campaigns

Here's an easy way to create campaigns. It works like a deli sandwich order form. Choose one item from column A (the expert content you will deliver) , B (the audience to whom you speak) and C (content delivery vehicle) to create programs and products.

Here is an important message: you are about to meet a mountain of ideas. I recommend skimming through this section just to plant some ideas. Then go through it again with a highlighter and mark the ideas that call to you.

A. Content

- Disease management
- Colleague support and education
- Peer support and education
- Caregiver support and education
- Patient support and education
- Strategies/ products to enhance the quality of life.

B. Audiences

- Primary care practitioners and specialty practitioners
- Current and former patients
- Family caregivers

- Visiting nurses
- Eldercare providers
- Local businesses
- Professional organizations
- Peers beginning their careers
- Service organizations
- Religious groups
- Journalists
- Internet information seekers

C. Content delivery vehicles

- Written word (articles/brochures/books)
- Video
- Courses (live, self-study)
- Support groups
- A live experience/event
- Social media outreach
- Media exposure
- Teleseminar
- Webinar
- Audio CD

Instructions: Chose one from section A , one from section B and one from section C. There are hundreds of options.

There are so many choices. Where do you begin? You have three basic strategies:

1. **Cast your net wider.** Do more of what's already working. If you get referrals from the nail salon, approach more nail salons in your area.
2. **Dig deeper.** Maybe you want to become a specialty practice. I know a dentist who specializes in people who are afraid of dentists.
3. **Try something new.** Step out of your comfort zone. Make a radio appearance. Write a brochure. Take on a leadership position.

You do not have to do all the work yourself. You do not have to create all your own content; you can offer the content of others. There are people who can offer skills you need to take on new projects, like creating audio CDs, videos, reports, etc.

If you're drawn to an idea, there are people who can help you make it happen

What is Your Brand?

Shoppers have different experiences at Nordstrom's than at Target. Buying salad ingredients is different at the farmer's market than at Safeway. A brand is a shorthand that captures the difference in the experience.

SENDERS, like shoppers, have choices. Your brand captures the reasons SENDERS refer to you rather than to the clinic across town.

Is your branding helping you or harming you?

Consider the possibility that your current branding is holding you back. Words like "pain", "hospice" "end of life care" can repel SENDERS rather than attract them.

Rebranding can create better business outcomes. Consider a few successful examples:

Prunes to Dried Plums

In 2000, California prune growers decided to rebrand the fruit as a "dried plum" in order to distance it from images of the elderly, laxatives, and nursing homes. Sales soared.

Rapeseed Oil to Canola Oil

In the 1970s Canadian scientists genetically engineered a strain of rapeseed plant that produced tasteless, odorless oil. Fearing no one would buy rapeseed oil, they named the product Canola oil: Can.-O.-L.A., for Canadian, oilseed, low-acid. Today it's the third most popular cooking oil in the United States.

Chinese Gooseberry to Kiwifruit

American importers in the 1960s decided that the Chinese gooseberry, imported from New Zealand, needed a makeover. They decided to rename it kiwifruit to honor the flightless national bird of New Zealand. Once the new name took hold, sales took off.

How are you different from other service providers? Think about your competition. Consider a mission statement that's positive. Be bold.

Maybe you let the other hospices brand themselves as the place to get end-of-life care, and you become the place for "most of life care." After all, you're the leaders in making the most of each day--even at the end of life.

MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

Leverage existing relationships

For your colleagues

- Offer an opt-in newsletter in which you deliver helpful tips for professionals.
- Send hand-written thank you notes and convey your appreciation for the opportunity to treat their patients.
- Launch a refer-a-friend campaign.
- Ask for testimonials. (“Other health care professionals want to know what they can expect when they refer patients to us. Would you be willing to share your experience? May we put this on our web site?”)

For your patients and their families (Let logic rule if you run a hospice program)

- Send birthday greetings
- Offer an opt-in newsletter in which you deliver helpful tips for patients and for their caregivers.
- Contact families a month after treatment ends to find out how they’re doing.
- Launch a refer a friend campaign.
- Offer a complementary initial consultation.
- Ask for testimonials. “We are honored to serve our patients. You have seen the results that are possible. Surprisingly, many people are not aware that this treatment is possible. If you know someone who would like to get the results that you have enjoyed, we invite you to pass our name along. “
- Call the evening of a difficult procedure to see how the patient is doing.

Enhance your web site

...with testimonials, before and after pictures and educational content.

Create short videos with the 10 questions your new patients most frequently ask.

Use strategic keywords in the title and description that optimize search engine stickiness.

Put them on your web site and on a YouTube Channel.

Build new strategic relationships

- Create a list of local businesses that offer resources your patients need-- where they purchase supplies, a list of companies like dry cleaners that will make home deliveries, contractors who will build wheelchair ramps, etc.. Ask whether customers referred through your clinic could get a discount.
- This both serves your patients and builds relationships with vendors who could refer patients to you.
- Offer to speak to disease-specific organizations.
- Join conversations in strategic Linked In groups
- Offer CME courses. Charge a fee that you could wave
- Respond to journalists' inquiries by joining PR Leads (fee) <http://www.prleads.com> or HARO (free) <http://www.helpareporter.com/>
- Send out articles and press releases Yearbook.com <http://www.expertclick.com/>.
- Pitch a great story to local radio programs or talk shows.
- Educate the community. Give a talk at your public library; people turn to librarians for medical resources. Give a talk at the Rotary Club. Every practice should have a few canned talks.

- Offer branded gifts for new patients. You can co-brand my Personal Health Journal.
- Offer other peoples' content. Did you see a terrific talk at TED? Read a great book? Let others know.
- Comment on breaking medical news. Journalists answer the question, "What does this news mean?; People want to know, "What does this mean to ME?" Answer that question. Better yet, become the expert the media goes to.
- Engage family caregivers. They have very different needs, and they can be your closest and best allies.
- Ask for testimonials I know how hard it is. You think you're asking them to do you a favor, and you hate to impose, right? Here's something you may not have considered: patients are grateful for what you do for them, and they appreciate the chance to give back to you. You are actually serving them.
- Ask your patients how you're doing. What do they most like about being your patient? What could you do differently?
- Choose your patients. You do not have an obligation to see every person who comes through the door. If you get a knot in the pit of your stomach when you see a patient for the first time, just say no. Talk with your medical malpractice carrier and make sure that you are doing it the right way. What do you say? "We both want you to get the best medical outcomes. I'll give your doctor a call and we can come up with some options for you."
- Go the extra mile. Offer "Nordstrom's" service. Ask your employees for ideas about how you offer concierge-type service. Sometimes it's the little touches, like offering tea or asking how the daughter's soccer game went that make all the difference.
- Empower front office staff to make customer service decisions.
- Create an engaging experience in the waiting room Put a screen with a "tip of the day." Post a bulletin board with patient success stories. Have a hero of the week and give an award.

- Share stories. Ask patients to tell you their stories, Recruit them to talk with new patients. Create a Chicken Soup ® type of book with collected stories. Capture stories on video. A webcam on a laptop works fine, or you can purchase a very inexpensive camera and set it up permanently in your office; creating a “testimonial corner” with a plant in the background, for example. You can set up a small filming studio for a few hundred dollars
- Get involved in your community. Become a philanthropist. Support a cause. Volunteer with the medically underserved.
- Offer support groups for family caregivers. Really get into their heads and figure out what they need.
- Offer services and education for family caregivers and promote that fact as part of your value proposition. Few practices put their caregiver services front-and-center.

Summary:

Create effective marketing campaigns that work for you.

Made-to-Order Medical Marketing Campaigns

- Choose the content
- Chose the audience
- Choose the content delivery vehicles
- Build on your strengths.
- Consider niche practices
- Consider generating revenue through non-clinical activities.

May I help you?

While you can implement each and every one of these projects, you can often accelerate your growth with a helping hand. Here are some services available to you.

Consulting

You get support as you develop and implement your practice-building campaign.

Done-for-you marketing

You get turn-key marketing campaigns that will minimize your staff time while maximizing your impact.

Web content

We provide content that you plug into your web site. Topic areas include health-promotion, stress-relief, pain management and caregiver support.

Tip-of-the-day campaign

We provide a sign-up form and distribute video tips to smart phones/emails each day.

Newsletter

We provide newsletter articles, or provide a sign-up form and create and distribute the newsletter for you.

Done-for-you webinar

We conduct the event, send press releases, provide invitations and follow-up with your staff.

Support groups

We conduct support groups for your patients, caregivers or staff by telephone or Skype.

Media campaigns

We help you reach out to local journalists and offer you ideas about stories to pitch.

Video production

We help you create videos that answer frequently asked questions in your practice.

Interviews

We interview you and/or your staff to create custom audio or video products that position you as an expert. These can be uploaded to your web site or social media.

Speaking services

Dr. Rackner would be happy to speak at your special events. See contact info on last page.

Resources

Books:

The New Thriving Medical Practice by Patrick Phillips and Vicki Rackner, M.D.

Made to Stick by the Heath Brothers

The Purple Cow and everything else ever written by Seth Godin

The Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell

Services

PR Leads

<http://www.PRLeadsPlus.com/>

Want to be quoted in publications? Dan Janal created this amazing service in which you're sent journalists' queries.

Expertclick

https://www.ExpertClick.com/Discount/Vicki_Rackner

Distribute articles and press releases in an economical way.

PR Secrets

www.PRSecrets.com

Susan Harrow coaches people how to talk so people on the radio/TV will listen.

About Dr. Vicki Rackner

Her Books

- CAREGIVING *without* REGRETS
- PERSONAL HEALTH JOURNAL
- Chicken Soup for the Soul *Heart Disease*
- Women's Wisdom *The Biggest Skeleton*
- Rescue a Parent in Pain Without Losing Yourself

Chapters in

- COLLABORATION Across the Divide in HEALTH CARE
- Chicken Soup for the Soul *Breast Cancer*
- The 10 Best Questions for Recovering from a Heart Attack
- ULTIMATE HEALING

Quoted in

- AARP strength
- CNN
- npr
- THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
- The Washington Post
- USA TODAY
- TIME
- Health.com
- More.com
- MarketWatch
- revolutionhealth
- bizjournals
- balance
- Reader's Digest
- UPI.com
- Witality
- Creighton University Medical Center
- Thrivent magazine
- amednews.com
- Woman's Day
- GLAMOUR
- The National Underwriter Company
- REAL SIMPLE
- ULTIMATE HEALING
- careerbuilder.com
- About.com
- iParenting

Drawing on personal experiences on all sides of health care -- as a patient, a physician, a family caregiver, a business owner and an entrepreneur -- Dr. Vicki Rackner helps her clients improve their clinical and business outcomes.

Dr. Rackner is a best-selling author, speaker and consultant to physicians and business owners from coast-to-coast. She is regularly quoted in the national media including CNN, NPR, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today, The Washington Post, Reader's Digest, Bottom Line Health, Woman's Day, Real Simple and many others.

Dr. Rackner can be reached at (425) 451-3777 or by email at vicki@ThrivingDoctors.com to schedule a free consultation.