

5 Critical Mistakes Healthcare Marketers Make that Lose Sales and Plummet Profits

By Kelly Robbins

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Marketing your healthcare business doesn't have to be a stressful and time-consuming endeavor. We believe that marketing should, in fact, be fun – and we're not just saying that because we're marketers and think it is! Growth is a natural state for every living thing on this planet AND for your practice. Just like water and fertilizer stimulates growth for plants, marketing stimulates growth for your business. Each plant needs different types of soil and varying amounts of water and sunlight to flourish, your healthcare business also needs to discover which types of marketing and in what amounts cause you to thrive.

There is a Buddhist belief that everything in the universe is either expanding or contracting, everything from the grass on the ground to you and your business. We believe it is a fundamental truth that your business must be actively nurtured on a consistent basis, so that it is in its naturally expanding state of growth. We do this through marketing. If your business is NOT in its naturally expanding state it is contracting and dying.

Strategically systemizing your marketing efforts and believing the products and services you offer have true value; your healthcare business is destined to grow by leaps and bounds easily and effortlessly.

It's important that you don't look at marketing itself as a negative thing. As you trying to sell people something they don't want. For most of us that just feels wrong and puts off a negative vibration, which is not what we want. Marketing is simply you telling people how you can help them. It's not bad. Marketing is ethical and pure if come from an ethical and pure place. Know that what you do is your unique way of helping people live a healthier life – it's your way of giving and contributing to society. Look at marketing as your opportunity to teach the world how you can alleviate a pain they are experiencing, about making good choices, and overall how they can live a healthier, more fulfilling life. Marketing is simply you sharing with your community and the world how you serve others.

There are many ways for healthcare marketers to spread the news about how and what they do. From electronic newsletters to podcasts, from giving talks to groups to leveraging your presence on the internet, there are tons of sources of information to learn about these things in many ways, including our ezine, [The Healthcare Marketing Connection](#), which shares marketing techniques and best practices.

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Today we are going to examine five common healthcare marketing mistakes that are *detrimental* to attracting patients and creating a prosperous practice. It's important to recognize habits that are actually causing you to NOT attract patients rather than attract them easily and effortlessly. The key to stopping these mistakes is to first be aware of them!

Here are the five most common mistakes healthcare marketers make:

1. Not targeting a specific group of people, "a niche"
2. Failing to establish trust with people BEFORE they become patients
3. Not offering a variety of price points
4. Lack of energy on patient retention and communication
5. Spending too much time on marketing -- not systematizing

Let's dig into these one at a time and learn how to identify and then overcome these common healthcare marketing pitfalls...

Critical Mistake #1 – Not targeting a specific group of people in your marketing efforts

Marketing to everyone, rather than one specific type of person, is the number one mistake healthcare marketers and entrepreneurs make. Advertisements are bland and generic, blending in with the hundreds of thousands of other advertisements out there. Out of fear many healthcare marketers try to talk to “everyone” in the community, rather than connect with a specific, targeted audience that is more likely to purchase from them.

Targeting one specific group of people to work with is called a “target market” or a “niche” in most marketing circles. There are many reasons why healthcare marketers don’t choose a niche including:

- They don’t know how
- They are afraid to NOT get a client because they are not in the niche (by choosing to talk to one person they may feel they are eliminating talking to everyone else)
- The belief that they CAN help everyone and have an obligation to try to connect with them
- Fear of missing one sale because they are already struggling and need money any way they can get it in order to survive
- Concentrating on selling someone right now rather than spending energy on building relationships and a sustainable practice.

The list can go on and on.

Let’s look at a few reasons why choosing a niche is so important and how it benefits you in the long run...

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It all starts with basic human communication. For humans to communicate there needs to be an active listener (a receiver) as well as an active communicator (a sender). For communication to occur the listener must be listening and the communicator must be communicating, and a message goes between the two. Between these two there is often “noise” that intercepts the message being sent – the message being your practice and the healing you provide.



What is the “noise” surrounding your message? For starters, the average person is exposed to over 3,000 messages a day! All of those advertisements are struggling to grab the attention of your listener. On top of those 3,000 advertisements, your listener has kids screaming in the background, plans for dinner running through her head, and is running her kids to school – making her late for work. An acupuncture treatment is the last thing on her mind at the moment!

What can you do to effectively reach this listener? Your message has to break through ALL THAT NOISE and reach your prospect.

This is the challenge all of us face. We are all in this same place. Successful healthcare marketers are able to create consistent messaging that breaks through all that “noise” and connects with their ideal client.

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How can you do this?

The first step is talking to this listener in her language and saying something she wants to hear. The best and easiest way to do this is to know who she is – that’s how you talk to her and get her attention. That is where you start. Know your ideal client.

Imagine walking into a banquet room filled with people and not knowing who was in the room. You know it’s filled with people, but don’t know anything about what they do for a living or their family life. How can you start to have a meaningful conversation with total strangers about personal and private health information? It’s difficult isn’t it?

Imagine a different scenario where you walk into the same banquet room and you clearly know who is in the room. Working mothers with a couple kids that exercise often, care about feeding their families healthy foods, and are interested in learning more about bringing a sense of calmness and balance to their lives.

Would it be easier for you to communicate with these people in the banquet room about personal health information when you know something about them, and know they are interested (or at least somewhat interested) in what you do and how you can help them?

When you choose a niche and develop marketing and communications to speak directly to that niche, what you are really doing is filling up that banquet room with people that have a common interest. We’ll call them prospects. They are more likely to “listen” to or receive the messages you send them because you know about them, and know how to talk to them – you know what sorts of messages they’ll hear. The odds of you making “a connection” skyrocket when you have a clear picture of who they are and what their needs are.

In healthcare marketing it’s all about making a connection with people – A Healthcare Marketing Connection

This is just one reason why choosing a niche and having a specific market to target is a good thing for healthcare marketers. It makes it easier to connect. There are tons more reasons why marketing to a specific niche is important to your success and we won’t get into all of them here. If you’d like to learn more about how to choose a niche and what types of things

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you should know about your “target market” before you actually start marketing to them, contact us at info@amarketingconnection.com to find out which product/service will best fit your needs.

On to critical mistake #2...



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Critical Mistake #2 – Failing to establish trust

Let's start with the basic premise that patients want to learn about their health, be healed by and build a relationship with a person and not a large, cold corporation.

A person is someone you can confide in and share personal information with – a corporation is not. A person cares about your health and well-being – a corporation does not.

Establishing trust with patients and prospective patients is the first key to creating successful, long-term relationships. Establishing trust in a healthcare setting is more important than with other industries because people won't discuss personal, private information with a stranger.

They won't be open and honest with practitioners unless there is a strong sense of trust built. If a patient's PCP refers them to your practice, they will come to you because they trust their PCP. A friend recommended you – again, the trust is in the friend and their recommendation. It's your responsibility to transfer that trust to you.

An advertisement or brochure alone does not create a sense of trust.

How can you build trust with someone you don't even know?

By giving them tons and tons of opportunities to hear from you and learn about you in a risk-free way on their own time-frame. By making a connection with them. One easy way to do this is to have a robust website packed with educational articles and information, testimonials, and any other studies or information that relates to your industry or practice.

If you practice in the alternative healthcare field it is even more important you take time to build trust with prospects. Many consumers are not only unfamiliar with some aspects of the healing arts, but they may actually have some issues of distrust to overcome.

Offer free reports, both on your website and in your practice, that educate consumers with facts and statistics on your field. This helps to establish credibility both in a field they may be unfamiliar with and in yourself. For example, a chiropractor that specializes in treating patients specifically with bulging disks may offer a paper that discusses specific reasons why their method is a better option than surgery. They may demonstrate success rates, show industry statistics that prove the validity of their methods, etc. They may then have testimonials from specific patients they have treated discussing how great they feel, and the success of the treatment they received from the chiropractor.

Offering easily accessible, free information allows prospects to learn about what you do and how to better care for their health – as well as learn to trust you. An added benefit of having this type of unique information available is that it makes you “an expert” in your field. Experts are by nature highly regarded and trustworthy in the eyes of the public.



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Critical Mistake #3 – Not offering products/services at a variety of price points

In our [marketing coaching packages](#) we review the concept of “The Healthcare Marketing Funnel™” with clients. The idea behind The Healthcare Marketing Funnel™ is to attract our ideal patients by providing a variety of free and low cost services, and methodically building a sense of trust and understanding. As our connection strengthens with our clients, they naturally progress through our Healthcare Marketing Funnel™ to our higher priced services and packages.

Most of us will agree there is a big difference between purchasing a \$10 product or service and a \$2,500 product/service. People will spend \$10 with you without needing a deep relationship or strong sense of trust – but will they jump in and spend \$2,500? \$10,000? Before most of us will spend \$10,000 we do research on our purchase, we compare providers and services, we may interview several providers and see who we feel most comfortable with, and we may search for background and historical information online (think about the steps you take before you buy a car). The question for you is how much trust do you need to create before someone will make a purchase? How long does that take?

The answer is different for everyone.

However, understand that the connection between you and your client needs to be stronger than in other industries because we are dealing with people’s health, and often the topics we work with are very personal. Your practice may need to touch prospective patient’s several times to create trust and build a relationship before they purchase from you.

As a business owner and marketer in the healthcare industry one of your first and main roles is to create a relationship with prospects and build a sense of trust.

Understand that when advertising, the consumer may need to hear from you over and over again until they even recognize your name – *recent marketing studies show that, on average, people are exposed to an advertisement seven to nine times before it even registers subconsciously that they are seeing it.* This is partially due to the bombardment of exposures (remember the 3,000 advertising exposures a day from earlier?) consumers are exposed to each day.

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Think about that – seven to nine exposures before people even recognize your name. That’s not even getting into how many times they hear your information before they take an action and pick up the phone and call! What does this mean to you? Repetition in communications is the key to your success.

The great healthcare marketing challenge: Developing relationships built on trust. We do this by getting repeated exposure in front of your target market and systematically moving prospects through your healthcare marketing funnel, without spending tens of thousands of dollars.

You can do this inexpensively and easily by creating tons of free educational information for your clients, by getting *their permission* to continue talking to them on a consistent basis, by establishing a sense of trust and building a relationship with clients, by not pressuring prospects and giving them the TIME and space to get to know you in a risk-free way. In other words by forming a connection with prospects on a deeply personal level.

How can a busy healthcare entrepreneur and marketer do this easily and effortlessly?

By implementing marketing systems and communicating with prospects and clients on a consistent basis.

Here are a few examples of inexpensive marketing tools that work well in the healthcare industry:

- Electronic newsletter
- Print newsletter
- Consistent press releases
- Frequent blogging
- Podcasts
- Publishing short, educational articles throughout your community and on the internet
- Robust website
- Systematizing patient communications



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Critical mistake #4 – Lack of energy spent on patient retention and communication

It takes nine times as much money and energy to attract new patients as it does to keep the ones you've got.

Stop and think about that statement for a minute. When it comes to growing your business, where do you spend most of your time and money? Marketing and advertising for new patients! We develop this habit when we first start our business – and rightfully so. Prospecting for new healthcare clients IS what you do when you first start out. The problem lies when we don't change the habits and routines we develop around marketing as our business matures.

As our practice grows we fail to evolve with it. We often don't take that same time and energy to put systems in place to ensure our current patients stay happy. We don't always ensure our practice grows with THEIR needs. We just keep on doing what we started out doing because over time they've become habits – prospecting for new patients in the way we know how and that was proven to work when we first opened our practice.

You have to keep the connection you make with your client's as long as they are with you, and that connection may change as your client's needs change.

Creating a newsletter, both print and electronic, is a great way to keep in touch with patients AND keep your name in front of patients that haven't come in for a while. Newsletters (particularly online ezines) are inexpensive to produce, can easily be systematized so they don't take hours or days to assemble, and can be leveraged into several other marketing mediums to maximize exposure.

Patient retention and activating inactive patients can also be done by systemizing traditional marketing methods such as sending post cards, notifying your mailing list of clients of specials you're offering, happy birthday reminders, and updates of new offerings in your business.

Remember your current clients are the ones that refer you to others (other people like them)

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and create word-of-mouth growth for you, so it's important to find ways to deepen your relationship with patients – past treating them for the specific pain they initially came in for.

We call this “Building Depth” to your service offerings. Each time patients come in for treatment of a specific ailment (such as neck pain), teach them new ways to not only stop the pain they are in, but teach them about overall health maintenance and caring for their health. This doesn't mean you have to sell them on packages where they come in three days a week for the rest of their life, but maybe once a month is a good maintenance schedule, or you offer herbal supplements or coaching and health seminars.

Overall the idea is to be a well-rounded practitioner and have ways to help patients, even after you've alleviated the initial pain they first came in for.

Let me give you an example from an experience I had. I recently had my first acupuncture treatment. A friend had raved on about this acupuncturist in my area and I went in for a free first treatment and consultation. I'm pretty healthy and didn't go in for any specific health reason I wanted to try it. During the consultation I felt like I didn't have anything wrong with me and didn't have much to say to the acupuncturist. Of course, I didn't know much about acupuncture and frankly wasn't too sure that I'd even experience anything because there was nothing wrong with me to fix!

The treatment was pleasant and time passed quickly. The acupuncturist had asked me a couple questions during the initial consultation such as if my mind raced or I had trouble sleeping and I said no – I didn't experience any of those things. After the acupuncture treatment I went about my day feeling tired but still productive and functioning; driving kids around in the afternoon and cooking dinner, etc.

The next morning I woke up and felt like something was wrong. It took me a few minutes to realize my mind was not doing its usual 100 mile an hour chatter. In fact, I was freaking out because my thoughts were happening in slow motion! Over the next few days I was very aware of the change I had experienced – much to my amazement, I learned that my mind does race a million miles an hour! It was a very peaceful feeling when it slowed down. I didn't know that about myself because I had never experienced the slowness before. The acupuncturist had obviously seen something about me that I didn't recognize.

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About once a month I find myself not sleeping well and my mind starts racing, I know it's time for me to get my acupuncture treatment. My point is I didn't realize my mind raced and how disturbing that feeling is until the acupuncturist taught me about these aspects of my health. He spoke to me about things "I may notice" after the treatments that were particular to me and my health. I came in to see him for a very different reason than why I continue going now.

YOUR goal is to treat patients for the reason they come in, and then teach them about the other ways you can help them live healthier lives – so they STAY happy patients, improve their health, and continue to see you to maintain optimum wellness.



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Critical mistake #5 – Making your marketing time-consuming by not systemizing

Most of us don't like to, or want to, spend our days marketing our healthcare business. We'd rather be doing a million other things; such as treating patients, hiking, or reading. Unless you're a healthcare marketer like we are, marketing may not fall into your top ten things to do list. And that's ok. Understand that about yourself and realize the reality of owning your own practice is that marketing is part of running a business and must be done.

Smart healthcare marketers understand there are some things that you can do to spend less time and money marketing. These are techniques you can utilize that ultimately make marketing more effective and less expensive than simply doing traditional advertising.

The secret to saving time and money on marketing is creating “Healthcare Marketing Systems™”. The folks at A Marketing Connection have this literally down to a science.

What do we mean by Healthcare Marketing Systems™? It's your company and we believe you should set up your marketing the way you want it. You run your business your way. Each practice and each community are different; marketing is not a one-size fits all process. The idea behind *creating systems* for your practice is to design your marketing they way you like it and that produces the most for your business and then automate it so someone else can do it for you. “Someone else” may be a computer, your CA or practice manager, an intern, or you can hire a virtual assistant to do it for you.

There are several inexpensive ways to market your business that don't cost an arm and a leg and can be easily systematized. Mailing post cards to patients and inactive patients on their birthdays is one. Methodically updating your website is another. Producing an ezine or newsletter, providing easy-to-read educational handouts and health information in your office, sending press releases, distributing and publishing articles on the internet, blogging – there's tons more!

You simply need someone with experience and expertise to show you how.

And that's where the marketing and coaching experts at A Marketing Connection can help. We've customized a variety of the most common and highly effective marketing systems

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we've seen healthcare practitioners implement in their practice and can teach you how to implement them.

You choose the size and level of marketing promotions you want to do, we develop the materials and help you discover how to implement the system in your practice.

To learn more about our customized healthcare patient attraction packages, visit our web page at www.AMarketingConnection.com/CAMmarketingpackages.htm or call 303-460-0285 to speak to one of our healthcare marketing coaches.



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About the author:



Kelly Robbins, author of, [Powerful Interviewing Techniques for Healthcare Marketers](#) and [The Healthcare Copywriters Toolkit](#), is an award winning healthcare copywriter and marketing coach/consultant with more than 15 years marketing experience.

Kelly's experience in both writing and marketing began at UPS when she was just 18 years old. From driving a big brown truck and delivering packages to managing the revenue management department in the tri-state Rocky Mountain region, Kelly's corporate experience is varied and unique.

In 2004 Kelly was the recipient of the "40 under 40" award given annually by the Denver Business Journal, which recognized her as a leader in the Denver business community for her contributions to business, her entrepreneurship, and her dedication to the community.

Kelly also publishes, [The Healthcare Marketing Connection](#), a weekly e-zine that discusses marketing topics specific to the healthcare industry. Kelly's articles have been published in many places, both print and online, including the book "101 Ways to Improve Your Life", with authors such as Jack Canfield (Chicken Soup for the Soul), Dr. John Gray (Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus), and Richard Carlson (Don't Sweat the Small Stuff).

Kelly holds a Masters in Applied Communication with an emphasis in Marketing and Public Relations from the University of Denver.

Kelly was the home-based business columnist for the Denver Business Journal for four years. Her column was very popular and was often picked up by other business journals across the country, in such places as Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Louisville, and Seattle.

Kelly also teaches classes on marketing and copywriting to professionals across the world. In addition, Kelly founded The Copywriting Institute www.TheCopywritingInstitute.com, a training and resource center for copywriters.

Kelly often speaks and conducts interactive workshops on copywriting, marketing, and business building techniques across the nation as well as does personal coaching and consulting. She can be reached at 303-460-0285 or www.AMarketingConnection.com

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