

Marketing Your Urgent Care Center to New Movers

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The 30 million households in the United States that will be “New Movers” this year can become loyal new patients of urgent care centers that are ready to greet them.

Each year about 14 percent of the United States population moves into a new home or apartment. When a household relocates, it typically establishes 71 new business relationships within its first two months. As a result, new movers actively look for marketing offers and information on where to conduct business. Given that those new to a community likely do not have established primary care relationships and need to know where to go if an illness or injury suddenly occurs, urgent care operators can benefit by being where the new movers are and by presenting them with memorable information.

When moving, people deal immediately with apartment leasing offices, realtors, home builders, van lines, mini-storage facilities, hotels/motels, and truck rental agencies. Urgent care operators who connect with these businesses can capture new patients by being included in these businesses’ “welcome” packets or by displaying literature promoting their centers. The first step is to identify businesses that new movers might use, articulate a “pitch” that describes how the urgent care can *help them* better serve their customers, and develop a professional-looking flyer or brochure to leave behind. While many businesses will agree to display an urgent care center’s literature without reciprocation, if an exchange is expected, the urgent care center could likewise display “partner” flyers in its waiting room. And although the thought of approaching other businesses can be daunting, consider that these service providers require occupational health services for their employees so it’s likely some business relationships are already in place or could be forged for other reasons.

While becoming settled in a community, new residents also tend to check out city departments, schools, recreation leagues, churches and clubs, so urgent care operators who have created civic bonds through participation in networking organizations and community events have an inside path to new patients. For example:

- Many municipalities have a marketing department that produces maps and community guide books that an urgent care center can advertise in.
- Chambers of commerce frequently mail out “welcome” packages to new residents profiling member businesses.
- Visitors’ bureaus and economic development agencies host “newcomers” websites with information on taxes, utilities, drivers licenses, and school registration—as well as local businesses.
- Neighborhood associations and houses of worship coordinate block parties, health fairs, and fundraisers where an urgent care center can rent a booth and introduce itself to residents.
- Rotary and other service organizations seek to expand their membership to new employers and provide networking opportunities for entrepreneurs and rising executives.

Getting involved with schools—by cultivating relationships with school nurses and by including sports physical and flu shot promotions in parent information packages—is another great way to capture patients who do not

yet have a primary care relationship. When parents bring their children to urgent care for preventive services, it orients the family to the center's providers/staff, facility, and processes—making it more likely parents will use the center when a future injury/illness occurs. The center can foster trust by helping parents find a pediatrician and by coordinating referrals for longitudinal care.

While grassroots activities are probably the most effective way to develop lasting relationships in the community—they can also be the most time consuming. That's why many centers turn to paid advertising. Examples include commercially-produced relocation guides—typically distributed through realtors, banks and food/drug/mass retailers—as well as commercial newcomers services like Welcome Wagon International. The limitation to paid advertising, however, is that the center can't control the distribution, placement, or competition and has only limited insight as to whether a campaign has reached the intended audience.

An alternative to utilizing marketing channels controlled by others is for the urgent care center to send (or contract a direct mail house to send) its own marketing packages directly to potential customers moving near the center. This entails purchasing mailing or lead lists and developing:

- A welcome letter from the urgent care center's medical director, written by a professional copywriter.
- A map to the center, preferably customized with directions from the mover's new home. Mass customization can be accomplished in using vendor geo-match services.
- A branded gift, like a magnet, notepad, new movers checklist, or keychain.
- An invitation to receive a first aid kit, digital thermometer, water bottle, Starbucks gift card, or another "token" by returning an information survey or by presenting a coupon at the center.
- A coupon for an introductory service, such as a back-to-school physical or flu shot at a reduced price.
- Information on the center's website, social media presence, and mobile applications.

When sending direct mail, the carrier envelope can attract attention and make a strong first impression—assuring that the package is opened and doesn't end up in the recycling bin right away. The thicker the package—and the more valuable the "gift" included—the more effective it will be in registering the center in consumer's minds. A magnet stuck immediately on the refrigerator, for instance, often remains there for years.

To be effective in reaching new movers, an urgent care center must present itself in such a way that the center becomes "top of mind," meaning the consumer establishes a habit of utilizing the center whenever an urgent care need occurs. Marketing messages that resonate with consumers typically:

- Depict the center's "core" business—no-appointment, walk-in care for "unexpected" injury or illness
- Provide examples of the types of conditions treated—rashes, sprains/strains, flu symptoms, etc.
- List the center's operating hours, emphasizing evening/weekend/holiday availability
- Describe the center's location including a map and nearby landmarks
- Include photos of the center's exterior, interior and/or providers/staff
- Promote the center as a quick and low-cost solution for school vaccinations and physicals
- Promote availability of compliance physicals and other screenings for employment
- Indicate cash pricing or cash discounts for those transitioning between insurance plans

Because new residents in many communities are culturally diverse, the center should also consider bi-lingual or multi-lingual copy. This can be particularly important as many patients who do not speak English as a first language often have difficulty finding a regular family doctor and rely on urgent care centers for their health care needs.

A new mover program can be a relatively low cost tactic, but a center should conduct a pilot to evaluate its effectiveness prior to making a significant investment. According to the Direct Marketing Association the average response rate for a piece of direct mail is 4.4%, but some hospitals using new movers programs have reported response rates as high as 12%. In addition, using technology, it's possible to get a more precise measurement of a recipient's interest. For example, providing a personalized URL for the center's website and then measuring "hits" will provide a measure of campaign effectiveness. Centers may also "follow-up" on sent packages by email, telephone, or personalized direct mail. After "testing the waters" an operator can assess whether the program warrants further investment.

As Table 1 demonstrates, in order for a new mover program to be successful, it must be ongoing and the center must maintain contact with prospective patients after they have settled. New movers are still a tiny percentage of the population in most communities and as new residents integrate into the community, they should become more aware of the center's recurring marketing tactics—from billboards to radio to grassroots promotion. Thus, it's very important that the new movers program **not** be the urgent care center's only marketing tactic. Rather, new movers should be viewed as a way to "springboard" a relationship with one of many potentially desirable segments—in this case by being "present" the ***first time*** they have urgent care needs.

Table 1: New Movers Program Objectives and Success Factors

<p>New Movers Program Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate awareness among consumers who do not have primary care provider relationships or loyalties • Maintain "top of mind" with prospective patients until urgent care services are needed • Acquire new patients cost effectively through highly targeted campaigns • Convert "trial" of the center through physicals and vaccinations into long-term, profitable patient relationships 	<p>New Movers Program Keys to Success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting consumers in demographic segments with a high propensity to utilize urgent care • Providing potential patients a glimpse inside the center using testimonials, links to Web site videos, invitations from staff, and promotional incentives to visit the center • Mailing a new movers package within the first month of residence and following up with email or phone call to help the new mover feel welcome • Assuring marketing lists of new movers are current—and updating lists and running multiple waves of the campaign throughout the year • Articulating the center's services in terms of new movers' needs—such as making referrals to pediatricians or providing school enrollment physicals • Tracking response rates using various mechanisms including reply mail, website clicks to personalized URLs, coupons redeemed, and by comparing mailing lists to patient registrations (by address)
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