

You Need a Prize Wheel: Effective Participation in Community Events

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Make no mistake about it: urgent care centers are in the business of “retail medicine.” This means that you, as an urgent care owner or operator, likely don’t have a stampede of patients marching through your doors on the strength of referrals from other physicians. Rather, the customers who are the lifeblood of your business are the ones you go out and attract through your own efforts. Therefore, to run a profitable urgent care center, you have to get out, get active, and aggressively market your services to the “everyday folks” in your community.

Participating in Community Events

One tried-and-true method for local businesses to get “front and center” before potential customers is by actively participating in community events—fairs, festivals, carnivals, athletic competitions and extravaganzas; typically scheduled around major holidays and season changes. The process itself is quite simple: you pay a sponsor or exhibitor fee, schedule staff and purchase “giveaways,” set up a booth at the event venue, and then tout your businesses’ services to the folks who stop by. Through your marketing efforts at the community event, you should trigger a sufficient number of new visits that the resulting revenue exceeds the event outlay.

Although adopting this strategy sounds like a surefire “win,” be forewarned that it’s not without its potential pitfalls. Your goal is to get your marketing message into the hands and heads of as many people as possible, which you accomplish when folks stop by your booth, read your literature, and discover the advantages your urgent care center offers. “Success” is “top of mind awareness”—should an attendee have an urgent care need in the future, that he or she will remember and choose your center. However, lacking a solid understanding of what works (and what doesn’t work) at getting event attendees to your booth, even the most ambitious campaigns can fail spectacularly. Planned haphazardly and executed carelessly, your community “coming out” can turn into a big dud. And the result? Even though you will have forked over good money to participate, there will be few new customers at your urgent care center to show for it.

Attracting Potential Patients to Your Booth

The key to a successful community event lies in understanding the mindset of attendees—your prospective patients. A community event may be bustling with activity and have dozens of booths, so attendees are being bombarded from every direction with competing sights, sounds, and messages. They have come to have a “good time” with friends and family, not seek out information on your urgent care, so when they wander by your booth, you have just seconds to capture their attention before their gaze is inevitably averted by the next attraction/distraction.

To stand above the fray, and generate a buzz at your booth, you’ll need to learn the essential features of an effective booth positioning and setup. You should also be aware of the potential mistakes in booth “presentation” that can cause event attendees to walk by your station without a second look. To start with an ineffective booth set-up, consider the example of a poorly executed booth in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Major Event Sponsor Receives Little Benefit

Greystar is an apartment management company, shown here exhibiting at a community “Oktoberfest” in Texas. Consider its booth, which has no visitors. Business cards, corporate literature and candy are displayed on the table; there is no table cloth and boxes are visible (creating a cluttered, unkept appearance); and staff has its backs turned to passers-by, engaged in conversation with one another. In short, there’s nothing interesting here to draw people to the booth. Few people attending this Oktoberfest will pay any future mind to Greystar based on its presence at this event.



Exhibit 1 reveals two problems—a booth that is “boring” and the staff is “engaged” in conversation with one another, but not with event attendees. When this marketing team “debriefed” after the event, they likely claimed a “good time” but they also returned to the office with boxes full of marketing materials. There were probably little to no new apartment leases signed as a direct result of the event participation. Therefore, the mistakes from this example urgent care operators should avoid are:

- **Minimal Engaging Features and Attractions:** Booths lacking interesting props and activities garner little interest from the patrons strolling by. In most cases, event attendees will be drawn to the more interactive and engaging booth setups nearby.
- **Overly Casual, Blasé, and/or Laid-Back Booth Staff:** Booth staff who behave in an aloof, disinterested, or standoffish manner (arms folded across chests, hands shoved in pockets, backs turned to the crowd) don’t project welcoming “vibes” to event attendees, and won’t draw many inquiries into your urgent care center’s services. Additionally, booth staff who are dressed too casually, who spend too much time sitting down, chatting amongst themselves, or positioned towards the rear of the booth serve to discourage meaningful customer interactions.

Compare the booths in Exhibit 2 to that of Exhibit 1. In Exhibit 2, people have started lining up. They all may not understand exactly what they’re lining up for—but they see people and activity and it captures their interest. The booths in Exhibit 2 have attracted a crowd.

Exhibit 2: People Line Up to a Prize Wheel



Factors for Successful Event Participation

The booths in Exhibit 2—photos taken at the Dublin, Ohio Irish Festival—all have one thing in common: interested people! What can be learned from these exhibitors?

- **Location, Location, Location:** A booth at a community event is “real estate” and as with any “retail” selling space, you need to make sure that your booth is in a high-visibility, high-traffic location. The more people who pass by your booth, the greater your likelihood of drawing them in. Locating near an entrance, refreshment vendors, entertainment, restrooms, or queues for other attractions can increase the likelihood of attendees noticing and stopping by your booth.
- **Well-Stocked With Treats:** Event-goers who have spent hours walking from booth to booth may be tired, hungry, or thirsty. A great way to gain booth traffic is to feature a prominently displayed table stocked with assorted treats, salty snacks, and bottled water. Branded items that end up in attendees bags can be a reminder of your business later on. Weary passers-by will be grateful for the nourishing reprieve, and serve as ideal candidates to receive your marketing pitch.
- **Mascot Appealing to Children:** Use of a friendly mascot—a life-sized costume of an animal or caricature—is effective in drawing families with children to a booth. Particularly if the mascot interacts with the crowd, is available for photos with attendees, and somehow relates to the urgent care center brand. Consider the examples of mascots in Exhibits 5 and 6. If a center is active in grassroots marketing it may consider buying a costume for around \$3,500, but otherwise mascots are readily available for rental from most costume shops. Rather than using its own mascot, a center could always invite the mascot from a local high school or college. To facilitate interactions and prevent the mascot from falling or tripping when kids run up to it, the mascot should be accompanied by a uniformed “helper” who can likewise talk about the center and its services.
- **Game to Engage Attendees:** By far, the most effective thing you can do to get a throng of event-goers flocking to your booth is have some sort of interactive party-style game set up near the front of your display. Quite simply, people love games, people love winning, and people love “prizes.” Since attendees have likely been inundated with marketing talk and sales pitches all day, the prospective of some good ole’ fashioned fun via an entertaining game is a welcome diversion. As Exhibit 2 illustrates, people will form long lines for the opportunity to try their hand at a community event game, even if they don’t quite know what they stand to win. If you’re giving away marketing materials anyway—bags, pens, magnets, t-shirts—you can give away the same quantity of materials using the game but customers feel a greater affinity when they’ve “won” something.

Prize Wheel Equals Guaranteed Buzz

Raffle drums, Plinko (Exhibit 3), and Toss ‘N Win (also called “Cornhole” and “Bean Bag Toss”) are all reliable standbys and ready attention-grabbers, but they fall short in terms of the sheer excitement generated by a Prize Wheel (sometimes called a “Wheel of Chance”). Exceedingly inexpensive and versatile, there’s just something about the motion, sounds, and dazzling colors of a prize wheel that never fails to lure people in. Folks also love the element of chance they contain, and will often line up two or three deep for the opportunity to take a spin. Combining an element of excitement with the key aspects of your marketing message, you virtually assure that folks will remember the details of your urgent care center. How could they forget? Particularly those that win a “good” prize like a branded t-shirt, water bottle, or canvas bag that will remind them of your center on an ongoing future basis.

In short, a prize wheel can make your urgent care center booth a “hit” at the community event. Nothing builds brand recognition and word of mouth buzz like your booth actively engaging community members, handing out cool prizes, and flat-out offering some excitement. The success and growth of your urgent care center depends on actively courting new customers, and community events are prime opportunities to do just that, while at the same time leaving a lasting impression. So go on, get out your prize wheel, and take a spin!

Exhibit 3: MedExpress Plinko Game



Exhibit 4: Concentra Urgent Care Prize Wheel



Exhibit 5: HealthCARE Express Mascot: Klondike



Exhibit 6: Fast Med Urgent Care Mascot: Dr. Kyle

