

OPERATIONS & GROWTH



DRIVING IN AND IMPROVING PATIENT RETURNS TO YOUR URGENT CARE CENTER

Written by [Richard Romero](#) | Jul 27, 2015 |  0 Comments



Foot traffic to your urgent care center is extremely important to the success of your center or centers. According to Alan Ayers, vice president of Corporate Development for Concentra, there are several ways to drive visits to your door, keep your center at the top of their mind and helping the patient feel wanted. Read on for tips on bringing new patients in and improving patient returns to your urgent care center.

Driving Visits Through the Doors

If you open an urgent care center, and you are in network you are going to see insurance referrals, you have signage visibility, people see your center and will make a mental note every time they drive by, repeat visits and word of mouth. According to Ayers, these are all forms of organic growth that a new center can come to expect.

“When it comes to signage, one of the easiest areas to form a marketing stance, Ayers says it is possible that a center may not have the adequate space to advertise the most efficient sign,” Ayers says.

“You can certainly augment signage and there are different standards as far as what kind of a permit you can get for temporary signage. One example of this could be flags out by the road that simply say “Urgent Care” on them. There could also be use of a “sign flipper.” Some communities view a sign flipper as something almost protected by the First Amendment, so if you can’t get any other signage, you can certainly have somebody expressing their view for you.”

There is also opportunity to leverage local municipality.

Ayers says he has seen in some communities that there is some direction signage, though it is a rare occurrence. If that is something you are not seeing in your community, it is encouraged that you go to your local city departments to attempt to make municipal signage for urgent care available.

Top of Mind Awareness

Depending on how a product is used, reflects how a product is marketed, Ayers says.

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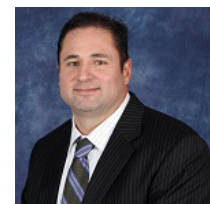
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"The challenge with urgent care is it is not a planned purchase. You don't plan on getting the flu this fall and therefore need to plan a product to deal with that situation. It's also not a daily consumable. We find on average that frequent users of urgent care, typically use the center about twice a year. This means that urgent care is not "direct response," meaning that in the case of urgent care, consumers may intend to use a center but the need has not arisen," he says.

When looking at what urgent care marketing is going to accomplish, urgent care marketing is not like conventional retail marketing that will run an ad and draw people into the store the next weekend. Urgent care marketing is intended to educate consumers and correct their misconceptions.

Ayers says some of the misconceptions are that there are people who think urgent care is expensive, that it is for emergencies only, that there is no doctor in the center, and that "urgent" means "zero wait." So, urgent care marketing is to educate the patient as to what the facility does, why they would go there, and the correct perceptions of what is commonly mistaken.

"All of that must be from a patient perspective. Using vague terms like "convenient, high quality, affordable medical care," describes any number of healthcare options. That is not really educating patients, and it's not really correcting any misconceptions," Ayers says.

In order for advertising to be effective, you have to reach the right people, and the right people meaning those that would use your center should a need occur. Then you must get your message in front of those people the right number of times for it to register and then build that top of mind awareness.

Ayers says an example of proper audience reach, is that if you are in Waco, TX, and a television station pulls from a 30 mile radius and that 30 mile radius always goes to Waco for their services, it may be more reasonable for you to invest in television advertisements.

"The point is, if you spend money to advertise to people who will never use your center, that is inefficient marketing. If you want the reach, you need to reach the right segment for your specific center," Ayers says.

Keep the Patients Coming

One of the things that Ayers did at Conentra, was we came up with the idea of The Orange Book. Ayers says that Conentra needed to transform the culture from one that was based on efficiency, processing patients, and moving patients through our occupational medical facility, to really creating an experience that patients can relate to and want to return and tell others.

"We developed the orange book. The Orange Book really outlines the customer service expectations through illustrations and stories. One of the things in building our culture: Language, Legends, Stories and Heroes, we asked the field to evangelize great customer care stories. We would then evangelize these stories so people could start to learn from a practical basis what good service is, what it looks like, what are some examples of good service," Ayers says.

One example from the Orange Book developed by Conentra is a picture that plays on the idea of how a patient should be called back into the waiting room.

Ayers says he would notice early on, the Medical Assistant would go to the door of the waiting room, open the door, and say "John? John?" Then he would see about three patients look up and it takes them about ten seconds to figure out which John it is before the right one goes back.

"Instead of that example, walk out to the patient, say "Hello Mr. Smith. I am Amanda, we would like to welcome you to the center," then bring the patient back personally. It takes no extra time and it doesn't interfere with flow. The perception of the patients is dramatically improved by showing that kind of personal attention," Ayers says.

If attempting this type of interaction and you don't know what to say, Ayers advises to simply tell the patient what you are doing. That can take place where the Medical Assistant really doesn't have to say anything. For example, during a drug screening, the MAs could narrate the steps they are performing.

"I am writing this information on here, this is the reason why I do this. On this tube, I am writing this, etc." are things to say.

According to Ayers, as the MA describes what they are doing, they are building a rapport with patients. In the past, when this method was used Ayers says that at the end of the day, the customer service scores just shot up because patients felt like they were a part of the process, they understood what was going on, and they felt cared about. This method is one of the ways that patients are encouraged to return to your business when faced with the need for urgent care the next time the need arises.

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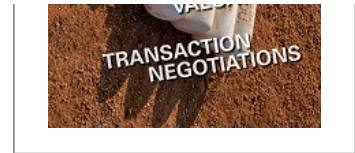
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