

Marketing Your Alternate Site Pharmacy

A Guide for Growth



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Today's competitive pharmacy environment makes retaining customers of the utmost importance, and continued growth essential. As a closed-door pharmacy, you are likely competing with other closed-door pharmacies, local independent retailers, national and regional chains, and potentially even mail order businesses. Have you thought about the right elements to make your pharmacy stand out and break through the noise surrounding your target customers? A coordinated marketing plan can help you identify your differentiating strengths and capabilities, increase your visibility, find and cultivate the right relationships, and ultimately, grow your business. Think of a marketing plan as a blueprint that outlines all of your pharmacy's marketing efforts. Keeping your end-objectives in mind, the right plan can help you reach your business goals.

Here are five steps to help get you started:

1. Define your goals and target clients
2. Develop your marketing strategy
3. Determine your marketing tactics
4. Implement your plan
5. Measure and optimize

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Define your goals and target clients

In this discovery phase, it's all about asking a lot of questions and outlining the parameters of your marketing environment:

- **What are your objectives?** Where do you feel there are areas of opportunity for a marketing plan to provide value to your business? For instance, do you need to increase awareness, grow your business or better retain current customers? Build your reputation? Launch a new service or program? Respond to competitive marketing pressure? It may be one, or all, of these things.
- **What is your value proposition?** Why should a customer choose you over another pharmacy? Assess your unique differentiators — is it a special offering like home infusion? Is it industry expertise? Superior customer service? Try to think past the words to how your differentiation is actually demonstrated — for example, you may say “we’re innovative” but what does that mean in a tangible way? How does what you’re offering impact your customers or patients? It could mean you’ve invested in cutting-edge technology that enhances the patient experience, improves compliance or increases accuracy. Take heart; this can be the most challenging part of developing a marketing plan.
- **What do your current customers value?** Not sure? Ask them by sending out a simple survey. What pain points are you addressing for them? What builds loyalty with your current customers holds a key to what may attract future customers. Such surveys can also provide you with important feedback on how to improve your offerings to further differentiate your business going forward.
- **What are your competitors doing?** Identify elements where they are falling short or pulling ahead. Make note of where you think they’re focusing their visibility and marketing efforts. Some marketing experts call this a SWOT analysis, which involves charting your pharmacy’s strengths and weaknesses, along with market opportunities and threats. This can help crystallize areas of opportunity for your pharmacy to differentiate itself.
- **Finally, what would success look like?** Set metrics based on your defined objectives, such as an increase in prescriptions filled per month, a higher profile in the community, etc. Metrics should be clear (unambiguous), quantified and realistic. If you’re unsure about what to expect from a particular marketing activity, you may just set a goal of obtaining a “benchmark” to measure future activities against.

Targeting clients is an important part of answering the questions above, because the answers may be different based on the customer profiles you're seeking to attract — skilled nursing or assisted-living facilities, correctional and behavioral facilities, or home healthcare, etc. Thus, you may want to do the discovery phase for each specific demographic so you can target your marketing appropriately.

Here are some questions to think about as you're evaluating your target audience:

- **What are their specific needs, e.g., rush delivery, specialty drugs, customized support, consulting, etc.?** Does your unique value proposition allow you to deliver on these needs, and where can you go above and beyond what competitors provide?
- **What are characteristics of the ideal customer?** What are they like, what is important to them? Some marketing experts create “personas” to create a mental picture of each distinct prospect type. For example, a home infusion provider may care about different things than a skilled nursing facility leader as it relates to their alternate site pharmacy partner. This can be especially helpful if you're developing your marketing plan within a team to help ensure participants are on the same page.
- **What relationships do your customers and prospects have with other healthcare providers (physicians, specialists, etc.)?** There may be some common relationships you can build upon to get referrals.
- **How do your current customers search for information and stay up on the latest industry trends?** Is there a particular publication, such as McKnight's, that the majority of customers read, or local networking events that they attend? This will help you as you get into developing tactics and prioritizing your marketing spend.
- **What is the geographic territory you're willing to service?** If you're looking to expand, that will add another element to your strategy and tactics.

“It's important to remember that your unique attributes can be your greatest strength, even as you are faced with an increasingly competitive environment. Focus on what sets you apart, communicate it clearly and consistently, and deliver on your uniqueness. By reaching out to your target customers and explaining how you can service their needs, your pharmacy will remain top-of-mind.”

— Kevin Kettler, Senior Vice President,
McKesson Pharmaceutical Marketing

2 Develop your marketing strategy

Simply put, this is how you get potential customers interested in your pharmacy's products or services. It includes how you will position your pharmacy as a brand, create messaging and establish your pharmacy's points of differentiation in the market. It should also ladder up to your overall business goals.

For example, one of your business goals might be to expand into the home infusion market as a new revenue stream. One marketing strategy may be to establish your credibility by taking an educational approach to position your pharmacy as a local expert in this area. Tactics could include activities like: (a) establishing a regular blog or a collection of articles on conditions that require home infusion therapy to be posted on your website and as part of an email campaign to local home health entities or specialty clinics, and (b) finding local groups that would provide speaking or networking opportunities for you to establish your expertise on a more personal level.

Tips for Writing a Press Release

Be sure to include:

- **Release date** — Typically the day you send the press release out, but it can have a future date as well — just be clear to the press contacts if it needs to be released on a specific date. Be sure to include your phone and email address in case your contact has follow-up questions.
- **Answers to these questions** — Who, what, when, where and why it is newsworthy. The most relevant information should be at the top of the news release.
- **The boilerplate** — Briefly describe your pharmacy operations, what you do, and who you are. You can also include a link to your website or social media properties.

The tone of your press release will need to change depending on who you pitch the press release to. People who know a lot about the long-term care or pharmacy industry will want different information than the community at large.

Identify editors and relevant journalists who would be most interested in what you have to say. This could include local news outlets or long-term care niche publications. Choose your media list carefully. See if they have press release submission guidelines. If email is not noted, call first and ask if the editors accept press releases via email; sending unsolicited email, even press releases, is spam.

Don't forget to add your press releases to your own website or blog. On top of putting the news out to your regular readers, customers, or visitors, it allows you to archive your releases for journalists who visit the site wanting to learn more about your company or site history.

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Determine your marketing tactics

After you establish your marketing goals and strategy — as well as your budget — you're ready to determine the potential marketing tactics to most efficiently reach your target audience(s). Some relevant examples for pharmacy include:

- **Referrals** — One of the best ways to market your pharmacy is to build personal relationships with target facilities and care providers, by emphasizing your ability to manage patient medication regimes or to provide the products, supplies and superior customer service they require. Look for appropriate contacts in your area such as new facilities, home health providers, or 340B entities. Learn more about McKesson's Physician Outreach Program, which is a great tool to help you identify new referral streams in your market.
- **Content marketing (e.g., insulin for diabetes management)** — Content can be repurposed in your website, newsletters, social media, email or direct mail campaigns, etc. You may want to consider using a freelance writer, as this may not be an area that you have time or passion for, to ensure the pieces are as impactful as they can be.
- **Events** — If you're a closed-door pharmacy, open your doors and hold an open house for customers and potential customers. You can also seek local events where your target audience is present — it can be industry-specific or some type of community event — to increase your visibility and demonstrate your connection to the community.
- **Sponsorships** — There may be opportunities to promote your pharmacy through paid avenues, by sponsoring local senior service events or groups that your customers and potential customers attend.
- **Public relations** — If you're launching a new service or your pharmacy obtains an award or new certification, consider a local press release. Before you write a release, think through your story's newsworthiness — its relevance to the community, effects/benefits to the audience, and importance and timeliness of the information. Your release should include the rational points (facts and data/evidence where appropriate) but also emotional nuances, such as testimonials, personal anecdotes or images. Finally, your press release is a great place to get people to act. Don't use the press release as an advertising tool, but do offer value to your audience with a free eBook or white paper to get them to visit your website.
- **Social media** — This space changes rapidly and is different for various industries; it's best to treat this as a "test and learn" tactic, but it is another way to open that "closed door" and make your pharmacy more personal. Social media is a more contemporary way to connect with people through photos, videos or even polls such as "Does your nursing home have a pet therapy program?" It is not an avenue for a hard-hitting sales approach — it's about establishing engagement and dialogue with customers and prospects.
- **Advertising** — Typically mass advertising (television, radio, etc.) is more effective for consumer-driven businesses; however, there may be opportunities for online banner ads on relevant websites (think about the sites your customers frequent), print ads in targeted publications, or outdoor signage near hospitals. It is important to prioritize your spend and ensure you're placing ads in places that will get you the greatest return on your investment. If your budget permits, you may consider leveraging a local advertising or media agency to help you assess the most cost-effective options in your market.

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Implement your plan

Once your marketing plan is ready to execute, you're not quite done! Ensure that you're ready to respond to leads and inquiries with the right materials. Your website should be professional and as current as possible. Make sure you have relevant collateral (brochures or pamphlets) that tells a compelling story about your services and what makes you uniquely qualified to gain their prospect's business. And finally, hone your elevator pitch so it's crisp and memorable as you're out in the community visiting with people one-on-one.

Other considerations for your website:

- **FAQs** — If you get similar questions frequently, consider adding this to your site.
- **Social media icons** — If you're active on a social channel, include a link for visitors to follow you. For instance, Twitter can be a good way to promote the news content or expertise on your site and prompts visitors to return.
- **Ensure keywords and phrases that a prospect might type into a search query are prevalent**, so your website will organically rise closer to the top of the list on search results. Search engine optimization (SEO) is a whole marketing art in itself. Take the Google test — search for your pharmacy and see what shows up. Do the same search on your competitors.
- **Privacy policy** — It's important to outline how any personal information collected will be used. To help ensure compliance with SPAM¹ regulations, you also need to provide an opt-out mechanism if you'll be sending respondents marketing pieces such as a newsletter.
- **Don't forget to ensure your website displays and operates well on mobiles devices.** Experts² predict that in 2015, mobile Internet users will outnumber those accessing the Internet on a PC.

Your Website — It's Today's Business Card

Having a website is not optional these days, and in fact, having a poorly designed site can negatively affect your marketing efforts. Here are a few tips for ensuring your website is creating a professional and positive impression for your pharmacy.

- **Home page** — This is the place to grab attention and provide critical information site visitors are seeking. Succinctly state who you are, what services you offer, and what makes your pharmacy unique without getting too text-heavy. This page is very important because it can be a deciding factor of whether or not visitors will continue to browse your site. Consider including customer testimonials or other compelling information to engage the audience.
- **Site navigation** — Visitors don't typically like to scroll too far down, so ideally most of your content should be "above the fold" or within the area that appears on screen when you open a website. Most site architecture today uses content tabs to intuitively arrange the material.
- **Services** — You should attempt to make this content simple and easy to navigate. If you offer a lot of services, consider creating sub-categories for visitors to easily locate what interests them. On the Web, less is more; if you need to expand into great detail, consider developing a flyer or article available for download instead. People tend to scan sites, so bulleted or numbered lists are good ways to break up copy.
- **Contact information** — This section should highlight hours of operation, phone numbers and an active email link. Consider including pictures of your staff to make it more personal.
- **News and information** — This area can include articles, blogs or links to other relevant industry information. This site feature can help you connect with a larger repeat visitor base that may come back for new content, and can also establish your credibility and expertise.
- **Design** — Pick a few colors and one font that are easy to read, and use these design elements consistently across all pages of your site and all printed materials (along with your pharmacy logo, of course). By simplifying — don't overuse features like bold, underline and italics — and using the same elements across all marketing pieces, you'll start to establish a recognizable brand.

¹ Federal Trade Commission, CAN SPAM Act, http://www.ftc.gov/video-library/index.php/for-businesses/complying-with-the-can-spam-act/1402334882001?sort_by=start_date

² O'Dell, Jolie, *New Study Shows Mobile Web Will Rule by 2015*, Mashable.com, April 13, 2010. <http://mashable.com/2010/04/13/mobile-web-stats>

5 Measure and optimize

Whether you're new to marketing or it's old hat, today's healthcare industry and market dynamics are constantly changing and evolving, as should your marketing plan. Monitor the metrics that you set and determine what tactics are most successful.

Metrics will vary depending on your marketing tactics. Here are a few examples of basic metrics to track:

- **Website** — Unique visitors, number of visits overall, page views, page depth, average time spent on site, exit pages, bounce rate (users who arrive at your site but leave immediately), feed subscribers (if you have an RSS news feed), top search words.
- **Email** — Open rate, click-through rate (on any links within your email), return or bounce rate (undelivered email).
- **Print advertising** — You'll want to know coverage, or how many subscribers have the potential to see your ad.
- **Social media** — It's good to track "likes" and "fans," but engagement is more meaningful (shares or comments) as it means your content was relevant and interesting.

Revisit your marketing plan every six months or annually to continually hone your activities as you obtain new knowledge or as your competitive environment changes.

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For information on McKesson's alternate site pharmacy solutions that can help you discover new revenue streams, grow your business and increase your community presence, visit www.McKessonAlternateSiteRx.com. Or, get in touch with us today at alternatesite@mckesson.com.

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