



Editor's note: Wayne Glowac is the marketing columnist for America's Pharmacist®. Wayne is taking a break this month to go in-depth about doctor detailing strategies. His monthly pharmacy marketing column will return in the June issue.



It's all in the DETAILS

Establishing relationships with physicians can be a great way to grow your business

by Wayne Glowac

One of my favorite movies is *Field of Dreams*. One night while walking through his cornfield, Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner, hears a voice that whispers, "If you build it, he will come." Ray eventually gives in to the voice and turns part of his valuable cropland into a baseball diamond.

Years ago, your industry was a field of dreams. If you had a good location in a solid community and took care of your patients (like you do now) you were basically assured success. I don't need to tell you how the times have changed and how challenging your business can be today.

If you are like many of the pharmacists we know, at one point you decided to begin a doctor detailing program. You started with good intentions. Maybe you got tired of the challenges, however, and your "urgent" work got in the way of your "important" work and the program was neglected.

Still, maybe you have read other articles on doctor detailing and are considering doing so yourself. With that in mind, I wanted to start this with a question: Why is this important to you and is it worth a sustainable and consistent effort?



VALUE

To get a reality check and another objective opinion on the value of doctor detailing, I spoke with Owen BonDurant, partner and founder of Independent Rx Consulting in Centerville, Ohio.

“This is one of the most important activities a pharmacy can do to help build their revenue. Pharmacies are in the relationship business, and building lasting relationships with doctors can be the most important component of their success,” BonDurant says. He further elaborates that advertising, when effective, will bring in a few new patients. But when you build and nurture a relationship with a physician’s office, it will continue to refer patients, who in turn will refer their friends and family. When successful, you have created a valuable referral multiplier which will continue to support your business.

The most successful pharmacy owners I talk with are not using “hope” as a strategy. They are trying new ideas and getting out of their comfort zone to not only increase revenue but fulfill their vision and mission. If you are ready to take a bit more control of your destiny, please read on.

KEY STEPS

Now that it appears that we have more freedom to meet people in person, this is a perfect time to begin a new program. The following should give you the necessary information to plan and implement a doctor detailing program and a pathway to build new, important relationships and continue to fulfill your vision and grow your business.

What are the action steps involved in creating a successful program? The first is to develop a database of opportunities.

Action No. 1: Look at your current patient base. If there are prescribers already referring to you, create a list and make it as complete as

possible. Next, make a list of all the providers’ offices within a radius around your pharmacy.

Action No. 2: Map out a schedule. Your community may be different, but most physician’s offices are the least busy before 10 a.m. and after 2 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays, so this is a way to be respectful and mindful of their time. Get out your calendar and schedule visits during a couple of hours a day as many days per month as your schedule will allow.

Please remember your goal is to build ongoing relationships with the entire staff. The key to getting your pharmacy referred is to build top-of-mind awareness, which is accomplished with a consistent and sincere effort.

When you have an opportunity to meet any of the staff in person, introduce yourself, share a bit about your pharmacy and ask if they have any challenges around prescriptions, affordability of medications, or patient compliance.

To help you prepare and feel more comfortable, think about visiting each office three times. Do a bit of online research to learn about the offices you will visit. See if they have a specialty or concentrate on a unique type of patient. Is this an area you can provide specific advice or support?

Action No. 3: Create your own plan and a budget. For example, the initial visit includes introducing yourself to the front desk attendant. Let that person know you are an owner of the local community pharmacy and you would like to drop off a few brochures to outline the services you provide. State that you would like to return at a convenient time in the future to meet the physicians and the staff beyond the front desk. Let them know that your goal is to see if any of their patients have special needs where you can help. Get a few names of physicians or staff the receptionist can suggest for you to talk with at some point.

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Thuy Cao says Soleil Pharmacy in Glen Burnie, Md., has helped grow its business by taking the time to build relationships and establish trust with physicians.

The second visit can include some treats for the staff. If safety is a concern, choose locally made, individually wrapped treats. Otherwise, a box of donuts or muffins will work. Include a new flyer that outlines the special services you offer, including medication synchronization, free delivery, free medication therapy reviews, compliance packaging, and any other wellness programs.

Flowers with a note or treats on specific health care appreciation days are also effective. Here is a list of events coming up: May is Nurses Month, Nurses Week is May 6-12, National RN Day is May 6, National Receptionists Day is May 12, and National Nursing Assistant Week is June 17-24.

The third visit can include some inexpensive promotional items. Pens and pads with your logo, for example. Ask if anyone would be available to briefly meet with you. A good idea would be to call ahead and ask for 15 minutes. Especially if there is an objective such as addressing patients that have special needs, as referenced earlier.

If you have other ideas, please use them. The more you plan, the easier it will be for you to make it happen.

Action No. 4: After you have completed your first three visits, pare down your list. Be sure to continue to visit an office that provides referrals but begin focusing on the offices where you felt welcome,

where you were able to meet a staff member. Next, begin planning your follow-up visits.

After your program is active, be sure you keep an eye out for any new provider offices that open. New offices usually have more time and are more open to meet with you and learn how you can help them. Also, if you offer a new program, it is a perfect time to spread the news with all the offices you have on your list.

PERSEVERANCE

It's important to recognize that establishing a program will not happen overnight, but, if you persevere, it will be worthwhile. To get a first-hand perspective, I talked with Thuy Cao from Soleil Pharmacy in Glen Burnie, Md.

"At first I got a lot of rejection and it was not easy. Keep your expectation low to start; it takes time to gain trust," he says. "But, once you get the lines of communication open, you will naturally begin to build relationships. You can't stay in your four walls and just make calls. You need to go out and build relationships."

Aside from making valuable relationships, you can also learn about the most prevalent health concerns in your community.

"I was surprised to learn how much our community struggled with opioid and other addictions and I joined a weekly meeting with our county health department," Cao says. "As a result of attending those meetings,

we secured the business from a new treatment center, which has been great for our business and also allows us to help improve the health of our community."

BE MINDFUL OF REGULATIONS

Here's a note of caution to keep in mind. There are a variety of federal and state regulations regarding gifts and kickbacks to providers, so keep any gifts to a minimum. What has been described in this article are common practices among other pharmacies; I am not aware of any enforcement action dealing with semi-annual small gifts of food or promotional products. Jeffrey S. Baird, chairman of the Health Care Group at Brown & Fortunato, P.C., a law firm based in Amarillo, Texas (www.bf-law.com), and a contributor to *America's Pharmacist*[®], has provided me with a series of articles and white papers on this topic and I would be happy to share them with you.

Doctor detailing is a valuable way for you to build relationships with local physicians and their staff while generating awareness and referrals for your pharmacy. Additionally, by helping people with the quality services provided by a locally owned neighborhood pharmacy, you are also helping to build a healthier community. ■

Wayne Glowac is a sales and marketing professional serving as a consultant, ad agency owner, teacher, and author. Glowac is a marketing consultant with Pharm Fresh Media and is dedicated to helping independent pharmacies grow and prosper. He can be reached at wayne@pharmfreshmedia.com.