If we have learned anything over the past few months, it is the importance of community. The power of people coming together to help and support each other is an amazing thing to witness. This same concept, building a community around your pharmacy, can have the same powerful results for you. People value being a part of a community. Customers don’t leave a business they identify with; instead, engaged and loyal customers will sell your pharmacy for you.

What do I mean by building a community? This is even bigger than building your brand and honestly may be simpler for small businesses with more limited resources to promote themselves. When you build a community around your pharmacy, patients and customers will feel like they are involved and are a part of what you do. When you emphasize shared values, such as working toward good health, solutions without judgment, or plans for better living, you bring in people who believe in who you are. People will, in turn, promote your pharmacy to other people, which is incredibly effective. A recent Nielsen report says that 92 percent of customers trust reviews from their peers more than any other advertising. Think of this as expanding your “Refer a Friend” program.

Building a community should start with your staff. Do your employees understand and live your values? This is not a time to keep a weak link around. If you have an employee who does not represent your core values, it is time to find someone else. When you have an engaged staff, it is easy to implement the following ways to build a community around your pharmacy.

1. Create a loyalty or “habit-forming” program. Med sync jumps to mind first as a powerful and simple way to engage with your patients. You can certainly use loyalty cards, but I think med sync does a better job of providing a service to all community members.

2. Emphasize shared values through mission-driven work. For example, if good health is your core value, you may decide to donate a bottle of kids’ vitamins to a school or clinic every time someone purchases vitamins for themselves. Simple and inexpensive. You could also choose to sponsor events in your community that mirror your values. Sponsor a sports team or a community walk for a cause. Find other organizations to partner with that share your values. Perhaps you team with a podiatrist’s office to offer educational seminars to seniors on foot and heart health. I know of a pharmacy that partnered with an environmental group and moved to biodegradable prescription bottles as well as an expanded take-back program. He greatly increased his community this way.

3. Build your social media community. The best way is to provide good content along with fun posts that help people get to know you better. People are looking for good content, whether it be about ways to avoid viruses or gestational diabetes. Position your pharmacy as a place to go to, online or in person, to get honest and reliable information. Keep your website updated with links to blogs and health information. And yes, you should make your posts human but include a mix of fun and informative.

Pharmacy has gained increased respect with its response to COVID-19. There are new people ready to become a part of your community. Start with a plan today.

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