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## PP It ain't what you do

James Butler

When a chiropractor sells their practice, often the most valuable asset is the list of patients – the so-called goodwill amongst the people you have treated in the past. Yet when most chiropractors consider a marketing initiative to boost patient numbers, that list of happy customers is often the last place they think to look.

In my workings with chiropractic clients, we use the term 'dormant patients' for this body of people who have been before, but are not currently active

in terms of treatment. Typically, this will be people who attended at least six months ago, and haven't yet returned.

One way of stimulating patient numbers is to re-engage these dormant patients, and stop them being dormant! This can be done by sending letters/newsletters, and the success or otherwise of this marketing technique is often hotly debated when I raise it at training days and conferences.

It's fair to say that some in the audience are usually resistant to the whole idea of sending letters – describing them as cheesy, pushy, salesy and off-putting for patients. And they may be right. But I am reminded of that early-Eighties Ska track by Fun Boy Three and Bananarama – "It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it, that's what gets results."

Before I return to that, it's worth noting that in my discussions with chiropractors and others, we have often easily listed over 50 different ways you could promote your clinic. So, if you really don't want to send letters to dormant patients, don't – but please do something else off that list of 50 instead. Anyhow, returning to Bananarama (a schoolboy dream of mine, I must confess), is there a way to do it that does get results? There must be, because I regularly talk to clients who have written to patients and seen an increase in patients directly afterwards.

you will need to consider:

- **What format will work best for you? ...**  
If you have a long list, a printed newsletter and postage can run into thousands of pounds. Email newsletters can be far more economical – if you have email addresses!
- **Who will you write to? ...**  
One way to manage the cost is to target your mailing – perhaps to patients who last visited within a certain timescale, or only the first half of the alphabet, to manage the numbers.
- **How will you get the data? ...**  
Most practice management software will be able to produce a list, but if you have paper records, there may be a task of digging out files and collating addresses (Do you have a son / daughter / nephew / neighbour at a loose end?).
- **What would be appropriate to your practice? ...**  
Most chiropractors will not want a 'hard-sell' letter, and I agree with them – so what sort of tone, and what sort of information would be appropriate to your clinic's values?

One trap that often catches people out is the "100% Perfect, 0% Done" trap. Practitioners will spend hours agonising over the content, days ruminating on the wording they will use and then weeks deliberating over what will be the best design – because they want their marketing piece to be 100% perfect before it is sent.

I admire that pride in a Practice's image, but a perfect newsletter never sent is far less effective than a 90% perfect one that gets to your patients! If you find the process is dragging, either compromise quality for delivery, or get some help. For my clients, the winning combination seems to be a chat with me about the right tone and content for their practice, and then getting a professional to write and design it (not as expensive as you might think).

Of course, the content is important – that's the key piece in the "way to do it" jigsaw. What would your patients want to receive? Your letter/newsletter needs to offer easy-to-read, punchy, interesting and valuable content about you, your practice, your associates and chiropractic in general.

It does not need to read like a copy of the BMJ, or be selling treatment in every sentence (in fact, quite the opposite). As the cliché goes, "Keep It Simple, Stupid". Patients will join the dots themselves, and call you if they need to, as long as you provide them with entertaining and useful content. And to paraphrase Bananarama again, "That's really saying something".

If you want more ideas on how to promote your practice, including newsletters to dormant patients and some of the other 50 ways mentioned above, consider a Painless Practice CPD Day – guaranteed to give your practice a boost. Email [james@painlesspractice.com](mailto:james@painlesspractice.com) or telephone 01491 659073 for details of courses coming in November. I also produce a monthly email newsletter giving further examples and you can read back issues at [www.painlesspractice.com/newsletters](http://www.painlesspractice.com/newsletters).