



# Finding focus



James Butler is Director of Painless Practice, providing assistance to osteopaths who want to develop their practice to meet current challenges - through one-to-one support, CPD training and published materials. James co-authored the BOA's Business Development Handbook and speaks widely on practice building techniques. Throughout 2010 he will be using his regular column to recount the progress of our competition winner.

THE MOST RECENT business coaching call with Paula\* started well: "We've just had the best month in the last six months in terms of treatment numbers", she told me. "That's great" I replied, "what do you think caused that?"



Kyle Lunn [TM2]



Leo Meyer [Ideal Receptionist]

Paula replied in the way I suspect many of you would - "No idea", and that is the problem with marketing a business - we don't always know what works, or when. And that is how we fall into the trap of floundering from one idea to the next, striving just to be doing something. So part of the task for Paula and I in recent weeks has been to avoid that trap and be a bit more proactive.

The first step was to try and collate what the sources of patients were. Like many osteopaths we work with at Painless Practice, Paula had a gut feel that a few came from networking, a few from referrals and a few from walk-ins. But there were no hard statistics. Luckily, the BOA competition includes the practice management software that will start to give her that data at the touch of a button. Within a few weeks, Paula will be able to report with ease on her patient sources, without having to dig through each patient's file. Then we will have a clearer idea of what is working.

In the meantime, how do we focus Paula's efforts - given she has the usual limited resource of time and money - to ensure she makes the most of her marketing effort? My mantra with clients is always to develop a plan. I accept that it often falls on deaf ears, but I repeat it anyway. I routinely see that those who have a plan fare better with more co-ordinated marketing. (No, I don't have any researched evidence or randomised controlled trials to prove it, it's just what I see).

Through our discussion, Paula looked at what she was doing now, and what seemed effective. We also discussed what might be 'fertile ground' in terms of gaining new patients, and we looked at what might give the best return for the time and money invested.

Henry Ford is often quoted as saying that he knew 50% of his advertising worked, he just couldn't know which 50%. The same may be said for marketing, but in the years I have been working with the profession, a few truths have emerged. I have given talks at the BOA convention before about the top sources of patients, and this is where Paula has decided to focus. It would be unfair to give you her marketing plan, but here are the main areas she is focussing on:

- Her own network - the range of people she knows can refer to her - other local therapists, networking contacts through a networking group, sports clubs etc.
- Existing patients - staying in touch with the people she or her associate have already treated - what might prompt them to come in for another treatment? It is 90% more expensive to market to someone new than someone who knows you already.
- Her patients' network - stimulating referrals from the patients she sees - creating a culture where patients refer regularly.
- Advertising locally - for Paula, local parish and town magazines have worked, especially when combined with editorial. The plan includes focussing on those known to work, not on those pushed by advertising salesman.

Would your four areas of focus be the same? What are you currently doing in these areas, and what could you do more of? Paula's current homework is to develop a monthly plan for activity in these areas until the end of the year - would such a plan help you stay focussed on what you need to do in the coming months?

## A word on focus

I have used the word focus a fair bit in this article - not just in the title. In the years of working with osteopaths, and other businesses, this is one of the key challenges. It is especially hard for osteopaths, because the nature of your work is that your time for thinking about promoting your practice can be bitty and interrupted with other practice matters. A key formula for success is to create chunks of time where you can concentrate (focus?) purely on your marketing, as we discussed in the article last month. What then makes the real difference is having a plan which sets out what you will focus on in a given month - perhaps a newsletter in May, networking in June and generating referrals in July. Paula is seeing the benefit of focussing her mind only on the important things to hand - could you?

\*Paula Collier-Ward, winner of a recent BOA/PainlessPractice/TM2/Ideal Receptionist competition

To see how you can benefit from modern practice management software, first class virtual receptionists, or practice development coaching, keep an eye out for James' regular column in OT during 2010, or visit [www.insideTM2.com](http://www.insideTM2.com), [www.idealreceptionist.co.uk](http://www.idealreceptionist.co.uk) or [www.painlesspractice.com](http://www.painlesspractice.com)

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