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Marketing & Communications in Radiology - Why it is Necessary and How to Do it

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Do you provide the best clinical expertise, the most cuttingedge technology, or the shortest waiting times for patients? Do you have quality and patient safety programmes that make you stand out amongst your rivals? Then this is something that, if conveyed to industry partners, referring physicians and patients, can reap concrete benefits, increasing patient referrals and drawing consumers to prefer your centre. By promoting your services, you give the impression of transparency in your organisation's activities and signal that you are a reliable healthcare partner. In this article, we highlight how imaging departments can use these tools to make it work for them too.

Whether on a large or small scale, marketing is slowly growing in importance to many radiology departments in Europe. Prof. Henrik Thomsen, Head of the Department of Diagnostic Radiology at Copenhagen University Hospital Herlev in Denmark, relates his experience with a marketing project that has had satisfactory outcomes for his service.

DG: Why did You Decide to Develop a Marketing Strategy?

HT: We decided to create an annual report to raise awareness to our target groups that we actually existed! Other departments in our hospital were doing this already so we wanted to ensure we didn't lose visibility and to give the radiology department a platform to show how certain other events in the hospital were impacting our department. One reason was to recruit radiologists, as we did not have a very strong profile with young trainees at the University.

DG: Are there Any Special Members of Your Target Group?

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HT: Our target group also included politicians and patients, as we are operating in a socialised system rather than a private one and it allowed us to show where funding was being allocated. The report is distributed to around 700 national and international key contacts on a mailing list that is slowly growing. It is also distributed in our waiting room to reassure and inform patients and displayed at European events.

DG: How is the Report Produced?

HT: The report is a joint effort of all members of the department in suggesting stories, ideas and contributing to raising awareness of our activities. There are around five or six key people involved in the editorial and graphic side; it allows us to unify the department and give an overview of the efforts and achievements of all imaging services. The report is targeted at patients, colleagues, politicians, referring physicians and other key non-radiological staff. We therefore have to keep it in an easy-to-read format that is not too technical. The total print and distribution costs of developing the report are peanuts compared to other more significant budgets in the department – between 5 – 6,000 EUR in total is spent creating and distributing the report.

Another advocate of sound communications strategies is Prof. Gabriel Krestin, Chairman of the radiology department at Erasmus MC in the Netherlands. Here he gives us some insight into his own efforts to raise awareness of the activities of his department.

DG: Why did You Develop Your Marketing Strategy?

GK: We think of our activities in this area as a holistic communications strategy, to promote the image of our department by raising awareness of our activities. We do this to attract the best staff and researchers to our department and to develop our image with cooperation partners and industry and scientific collaborators.

DG: What Kind of Activities are Part of Your Communications Strategy?

GK: We have a variety of different activities under this scope divided into internal, semi-external and external categories. On an internal level, we produce two biweekly newsletters, the first an informal one for our internal staff that includes more personal information and the second which is more formal and includes information such as management decisions that will affect staff, and other departmental developments. The second internal tool is a bi-monthly journal called “Beeldspraak” or “Image Story”, which is produced six times per annum and includes information such as new staff in the department, new research developments and reports from national and international meetings attended by staff.

Our semi-external communication, for referring physicians in the hospital and the region, is part of a glossy hospital journal, called ‘Monitor’, produced every two months and including articles on activities in the radiology department.

Our external communications strategy consists of a scientific report booklet with all the highlights of the awards, grants and scientific output such as dissertations. The primary motive of this endeavour is that it allows us to demonstrate our appreciation for the hard work of our scientists and of industry support for our various projects. Around 800 – 1,000 copies are distributed of each edition to internal department heads, our Board of Trustees, our Board of Directors, all radiological employees, industry partners and around 150 colleagues who are involved with us in our international relations.

We also produce a booklet based on abstracts of our scientific presentations from the annual RSNA congress. We are one of Europe’s most active participants at the RSNA, with around 25 – 40 contributions from our department. We distribute around 150 copies of this both to presenters, to important industry partners and other relations.

DG: What Kind of Budget and Internal Resources are Allocated?

GK: We have an internal communications expert that works for us two days per week, and a graphic design unit consisting of two full-time employees who produce all scientific posters, electronic ones, do the layout of the different booklets, newsletters and journals and dissertation/thesis booklets each year. Including their salary and the relatively minor printing and distribution costs necessary to realise these projects, the average annual spend is in the region of EUR 150,000 per year.

How Can You Create a Strategy?

When drafting your marketing and communications plan, the following options give you some cost-effective ways to inform and attract your consumers.

Direct Marketing

Develop a clear and information-rich website with links to electronic versions of brochures and newsletters. In addition, contact information and physician names, offices, and locations should be clearly visible. It helps to include information about physician specialty areas, and photos, to create the impression of warmth and transparency.

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Also, consider printing brochures that include pictures and descriptions of procedures available in your department, or highlight quality and safety measures. Newsletters, whether internal or external provide a platform where current events that impact your department can be distributed to relevant colleagues or internally on staff intranets. Finally, an annual report highlights the achievements of your department will coordinate all this information. This should have the widest possible distribution list, including to the media and to relevant national and international associations.

Advertising & Public Relations

Advertising can be an excellent way to build brand awareness. Advertising in consumer newspapers and magazines allows you to target consumers in specific specialty areas. If your department works within the community in sponsoring related events or you have recently acquired new technology or started a screening programme, these types of “feel-good” stories are attractive to the media. Developing good contacts with media on an international, national or even local level gives you a better chance of disseminating your message.

Conclusion

Most medical institutions these days already have a website that ensures that the basic information is available to patients such as how many beds you have, a list of internal staff, and a list of services available. However, imaging services can get “lost” amidst a maze of information about other departments and it won't ensure that consumers will actually receive this information. Despite an increasingly web-literate culture, you may need to take a few extra steps to ensure that radiology is as well-represented to its peers in the field of medicine as other departments.

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