

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL UPDATE

Marketing Your Business



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Why should you promote your business?

Marketing a business is not just reserved for those podiatrists hoping to build a larger patient base. If your business is already busy or happily ticking over, it might seem counterintuitive to promote it. However, it's not just about getting new patients.

- Marketing your business should help you attract more patients, including more of the 'right' ones for your practice.
- It can give you the opportunity to raise your prices or hire new staff, grow your local presence and become a respected member of your community.
- It can give you a competitive advantage and make your practice more attractive to current and future employees as well as the people using your services.
- If you ever want to sell your business, the more successful, the better!

There are numerous ways in which you can market your practice. They require varying degrees of investment of time or money and not everything will be suitable for your circumstances. However, it is useful to have a basic understanding of your options and how the various things you can do to promote your business might work for you.

Ways to promote your business

- With a high-quality, user-friendly website
- Through social media channels
- Networking with other professionals
- Paying to advertise
- Adding value to your patients' lives and the community as a whole

1. HOW A WEBSITE CAN PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS

It is possible to run a business and depend on word of mouth and an advertisement in the parish magazine, or a Facebook page to give basic information about where you are and your opening hours. Many people think that if they're getting a decent amount of business there's no need for a website.

However, a website gives you opportunities to market and grow your business^[1]. Patients are paying for a service. They want to know they are dealing with a professional business that has their best interests at heart. They also need to be able to find you easily. Not everyone reads the parish magazine or has a Facebook account. Neither are always easily accessible or completely under your control. Social media channels are subject to algorithms and your account is ultimately dependent on the owner of the platform. As we've seen with X, formerly known as Twitter, things can change very quickly. If you contravene the rules – accidentally or intentionally – or are hacked, for example, it can be very difficult to keep or regain control of a social media account.

A well-designed, user-friendly website will help people find you online (through search engine optimisation, or SEO) and should demonstrate authority, credibility, and trustworthiness. A website that is poorly designed and written will make you look unprofessional and can send the wrong signals to potential patients. On the other hand, a good-quality website is more likely to inspire trust and help potential patients engage with your products and services. It needs to be easy to navigate, quick to load, secure, and optimised for mobile use too.

It is possible to build, design, and write your own website if you choose to, but it can be difficult and time consuming. Professional design, copy (written information), and photography will help you create the right first impression but does require an initial financial outlay. Any website will also require a certain amount of work to keep it fresh and up to date; but it should pay dividends.

Local SEO and a professional business

People searching for a podiatrist in their local area should be able to find you easily through a Google search. Google My Business allows you to optimise your business profile on Google and is an essential online element for local businesses. It can help with this process, but only allows for limited information and, again, the account can often be suspended for no apparent reason. 71% of businesses have a website and this number increased following the COVID-19 pandemic^[2]; as more and more businesses have websites it is important to not get left behind. A good website shows potential patients you

take your practice and your patients seriously: 81% of consumers use Google to evaluate local businesses^[3]. Patients don't just want to know your opening hours or address. They want to know how you work, what to expect, if they can trust you, and how you can help.

Blogs can drive website traffic

Providing additional information through blogs, for example, can educate your patients and provide greater insight into other aspects of podiatry, your business, and wellbeing in general. As well as providing a valuable service, blogs also help drive organic traffic to your website. Organic traffic is traffic - or visitors - you have not paid for. The more website traffic you get, the more opportunity you have to convert people to advocates and clients. Blogs are an example of what is often referred to as content marketing. 'Content' can include written material like blogs and articles, as well as videos and other media like infographics.

Visitors to your website should find sufficient information to make informed decisions and feel confident they will be visiting a trustworthy, competent business. Collecting and displaying testimonials from Google My Business, other online sources, and directly from your patients is an important way in which you can provide the social proof^[4] people are seeking. They are also free!

Adding a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section to your website can help pre-qualify patients and answer questions you might otherwise have to respond to directly. This can save valuable time, effort, and resources. Posting case studies can help potential patients understand how you might be able to help them too.

Key Point: A website helps you build an online presence that belongs to you and it can inspire trust and confidence and generate new leads or potential patients. However, there are time and financial costs associated with creating and maintaining a website.

2. FINDING AND USING THE RIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Social media can be a cost-effective way to reach a large audience and encourage engagement. However, you need to find the channel or channels where your target audience spends most of their time online as otherwise you risk wasting yours.

- Are your target patients more likely to be Facebook users or on TikTok?
- Is LinkedIn where you need to be, or Instagram?
- Should you have a YouTube channel or are your ideal patients unlikely to be clicking on YouTube content?

Over 200 million businesses have a Facebook page^[5], for example, and the figure is the same for business

accounts on Instagram^[6]. 18% of the world's internet users are on TikTok^[7] and according to a 2019 survey, 62% of businesses use YouTube^[8]. If connecting with other businesses and professionals is important to your business, however, a LinkedIn presence will be a must. You might need to concentrate on one or two key channels; it is better to do a few well than all of them poorly. Work out where your target audience hangs out and develop those. Do your research into the different media channels available if you need to so you can make informed decisions.

How does posting on social media help promote your business?

Regularly and consistently posting valuable content on your social media pages will keep you in front of your audience and help you increase your reach. Content marketing can increase your social proof and be cost-effective. Comments and likes can also help you keep on top of what your customers think, want, and need in real time. This enables you to react more quickly to changing circumstances and requirements.

Let's take Facebook as an example. A Facebook page helps you get found online and can provide details about your business and services. You can post updates, offers, advice, and other information on your page and interact in other Facebook community groups. You can collect testimonials and reviews on your Facebook page, and these should encourage others to feel confident you are a trustworthy and professional healthcare provider.

Most areas now have numerous Facebook groups where people seek and offer recommendations, particularly for local businesses. A personal recommendation is more compelling than an advertisement to potential customers. A survey by Neilsen^[9] found that "88% of respondents most trust recommendations from people they know". A business Facebook page makes it easy for advocates to tag your practice directly when people ask for recommendations. This makes it possible to find your business details immediately and check your business out; the less friction there is to finding the information, the better. If the person asking for information is given various recommendations and some require them to do an online search, these are likely to be lower on their list of potential solutions.

Most social media channels give you the opportunity to post diverse types of content. You can broadcast live sessions and Q&As, post reels, videos and so on. Paid advertising on social media platforms (see below) can also allow businesses to target specific demographics. The important thing with social media is to keep your content regular, interesting, and engaging. Consistency and high-quality content should help you grow your

client base, and it can drive traffic to your website too. Keeping up with posting on social media channels can be time consuming, but if necessary it can be outsourced to a social media manager or a digital marketing agency.

Key Point: Social media channels offer cost-effective marketing opportunities and can help grow your client base. However, creating content for them can require skill and be time consuming. This may need to be outsourced – at a cost – to have the desired impact.

3. NETWORKING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Networking is a useful resource when it comes to marketing your business. Building relationships and connections with other professionals can lead to new opportunities. It requires an investment of time and money and is a two-way process; the more you put in, the more you are likely to get out. As you get to know others and they get to know you, you are more likely to be willing and able to refer each other to friends, family, business contacts, and even strangers seeking advice and recommendations.

Different types of business networking

There are various networking groups and models^[10] that require varying degrees of commitment, both in time and money. It's important to think about how much you want to invest and what sort of return you expect to get out of networking, as well as what sort of networking model would suit you best. As you will be building relationships with others, it is vital that you feel comfortable in the groups you choose. For example, there are women-only, gay, specific sector, and small business networks, amongst others. Some are very results driven, others are much more relaxed. Many are run as franchises and groups will vary from place to place. They often also offer the option to 'visit' other groups within the same network (usually for a fee).

It can be helpful to visit a few different networking meetings in your local area and online before committing to a specific meeting and/or group. It is also possible to belong to various groups and you may wish to join more than one. There are too many to mention here and not all are countrywide. Ask around and get a feel for what is available in your area; most people who network will be delighted to introduce you to their groups if they can.

Networking meetings tend to be online, in person, or a combination of the two. Some meet monthly, others are weekly. Some meetings will take place before the typical workday begins, often for breakfast, or in the evening. Others will be during the working day or over lunch. The nature of online groups means that geographical location can be irrelevant; if you have a business that operates fully or partially online or remotely you could belong to a networking group anywhere in the world. Many

online groups still have a 'home' location so that those dependent on local clientele can network effectively within them too. It also enables people to meet up in person if they wish to which can often lead to stronger professional relationships.

In-person networking groups allow people to get to know each other more efficiently and effectively but will require more commitment; you will need to allow travel time and venue fees. Think about how you can stand out and be remembered as a professional and for what you do, particularly for visitors to these groups. It might be useful to wear your work uniform for in-person networking meetings, for example, especially if they have your name embroidered on them. This could make you more memorable; the next time someone mentions a podiatrist you are more likely to come to mind and be referred.

Networking groups

Some networking groups operate lockout policies with professional exclusivity, whereby only one person from each profession can be a member at any one time. A lockout networking group would only allow one podiatrist in the group, for example. These groups will usually require you to make a formal application to join and you will be accepted if you are considered a good 'fit'. Groups with professional exclusivity tend to be more structured and require more time and financial commitment. You will be expected to positively contribute to the group by referring others and attend every meeting or send a substitute instead. This format can often lead to greater returns too.

Open networking meetings are, as the name suggests, open to anyone. These meetings tend to be pay as you go or subject to lower membership fees and a less formal commitment to attend or contribute.

Seeing returns from networking can take time. You need to build up the 'know, like, trust' elements in any relationship and networking is no different. People need to know that if they recommend you, you will make them look good; their reputation is at stake too. Networking is not just about receiving business, it is about passing on referrals and finding business for others too, so you must be prepared to take some time outside of your regular meetings to get to know others and their businesses. There are often synergies with natural referrers in a group. For example, a natural referrer for a podiatrist might be a nutritionist specialising in diabetes, a sports therapist, or a shoe shop owner. There might also be opportunities for collaborations such as joint Instagram 'live' sessions, for example.

Professional and personal support and guidance

A networking group can be a valuable source of

professional and personal support, especially for small business owners and entrepreneurs. Some networking groups offer business advice and other educational benefits that can be invaluable to small business owners. You should consider whether this sort of support might be beneficial to you when assessing the cost of different memberships. Networking can also give you access to a group of experts you trust and can call on when you need them; whether it's a plumber, accountant, or architect you need.

Each network has its own way of working but you will generally be required to introduce yourself and your business to the real or virtual room – often in 45 or 60 seconds. Some networks will give you the opportunity for five- or 10-minute deeper dives into what you do or the chance to present an educational topic to the room. While this can be daunting for many people to start with, it can also be a valuable way to build confidence and work on presenting skills in a supportive environment.

It also helps to belong to a professional podiatry or healthcare group and attend annual conferences and other events. This provides an opportunity to network with other members of the professional community and this can also be a valuable source of support and opportunities.

Key Point: *Networking can provide valuable personal, professional, and business support and help you grow your business. For it to be effective, however, you need to invest time, money, and energy into building and maintaining strong relationships.*

4. PAID ADVERTISING

A website, social media channels, and networking all increase your reach and get you in front of a larger audience. While they are 'free' they still come with a cost - and you cannot necessarily target specific groups. Various paid advertising opportunities are available as well, and do not all require significant investment. For them to be effective, however, you need to ensure your marketing is targeted at the right audience.

Examples of paid marketing initiatives:

- Advertising on social media
- Pay-Per-Click advertisements
- Printed matter including leaflets and adverts in magazines
- Email and direct mail campaigns
- Local radio and television advertising

Advertising on social media

Social media channels offer paid advertising opportunities, and the specifics will vary according to the

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Case Study



Pete Williams
Eclipse Foot Clinic,
Basingstoke & Winchester, Hampshire

eclipsefootclinic.co.uk

What's the background to Eclipse Foot Clinic?

Pete set up Eclipse Foot Clinic in 2011, when he realised he needed to create a job and an income that would support his life as a single parent. Having spent years working in private hospitals he had good relationships with many GPs, consultants, and physiotherapists and hoped to leverage this as part of his business strategy.

Pete set up a practice website when he started the business but initially most of his work came from referrals.

What marketing does Eclipse Foot Clinic undertake?

Pete has always recognised the importance of maintaining professional relationships with GPs and consultants and proving expertise and professionalism to patients. The practice writes to patients' GPs or consultants, with their consent, after an appointment; whether they have been referred by the doctor or consultant or not. This is to update them on any finding or treatment pathways so this can be added to the patient's notes. The letters are sent via email and post and the practice uses cream, branded envelopes and high-quality paper to highlight their attention to detail, quality, and professional approach.

Initially, Pete also used several marketing methods commonly used for businesses hoping to attract a local client base in 2011. As well as the website, he paid for Yellow Pages and tried advertising on screens in his local GP surgeries. While the website and Yellow Pages were useful tools, he found advertising in surgeries was expensive and brought in no business at all.

In 2015 Pete took on staff and recognised the need to

create a more cohesive marketing plan to continue to grow the business. In 2016 he upgraded the practice website to make it fit-for-purpose. He also began using search engine optimisation (SEO) tools and paid-advertising techniques more intentionally to target his ideal patients. He uses Google Ads to create targeted campaigns for specific treatments at certain times of the year.

The practice also posts on Instagram and Facebook, but these are not currently priorities for his marketing efforts.

How have these marketing techniques benefitted the business?

Pete is very proactive with Google Ads and the SEO on his website. He has always had an interest in data and analytics and has continually tweaked his campaigns based on what search volumes and results are telling him. This allows him to maintain good click-through rates and organic search numbers. He gets 3.5-4K hits on the practice website a month which translates into 100-140 new patients per month. Approximately 95% of new business comes via Google Ads.

He handed over the responsibility for managing SEO and Google Ad campaigns in 2022 to a marketing agency with a strong track record who came via referral because he no longer had the time to do it properly himself. If you manage this yourself, Pete recommends you 'need to know what you're doing, niche it down, look at search volumes and manage it actively too'.

GPs and consultants continue to refer patients to Eclipse Foot Clinic and Pete has never had any negative feedback on his strategy of contacting them with patient updates. He gets around 5-6 new patients per month from professional referrals.

What else is there to know about these marketing strategies?

Over the years Pete has managed to grow the business from being just him to two practices with ten staff. While he spends more than average on marketing – approximately 2-3% of his monthly revenue goes on advertising – the return makes it worth it.

Pete puts this success down to being very intentional, specific, and data driven with his digital marketing, and promoting a professional and business-like image that represents his attitude to his practice. His efforts have meant he is well on track with his 10-year plan and he's already working towards semi-retirement.

platform. It can be cost effective and more targeted for small businesses than some other types of advertising. You can market to certain demographics or interests, for example, and define your target audience according to things like age, gender, location, interests, and online behaviour. You can create adverts yourself or with the help of a social media specialist or a digital marketing agency. They can be used to increase awareness of your business, drive traffic to your website (particularly for e-commerce businesses), generate leads, or to promote a specific product or service. All advertisements will need to comply with the policies of the channel you are using, however.

Pay-Per-Click Adverts

Pay-Per-Click ^[11], or PPC, allows you to advertise online but only pay when someone clicks on your link. It is a way of 'buying' visits to your website rather than getting them organically, or through search engine results. The two main platforms are Google Ads and Microsoft Advertising (formerly Bing).

For PPC you need to choose the keywords you wish to target and then bid on them; with those paying higher prices being featured more predominantly. Adverts can appear in search engine results pages or on other, relevant websites. One of the advantages of online advertising is the ease by which you can gauge how effective they are – and adapt quickly when necessary.

Print advertising

Printed advertising collateral used to be one of the main ways small businesses advertised, but this has changed with social media. It can be difficult to judge how effective a print advertising campaign has been, and the costs can be higher, but it can still be very useful for small businesses. Local businesses often advertise in printed newspapers and magazines (some may also be available online too) and distribute leaflets and flyers to their local area. The success of your marketing will depend on where your target market is and whether or not they read these publications or respond to leaflet marketing.

Email and direct mail campaigns

GDPR (general data protection regulation) has made it harder for companies to contact potential customers; but not impossible. You can collect the personal data of your customers with their consent and according to the regulations. It is also possible to buy marketing databases designed to target your ideal audience.

Physical promotional materials including letters, postcards, and flyers can be sent through the mail. Although it might seem like an out-dated approach, direct mail marketing is still effective. According to statistics collected by Marketreach ^[12], "31% of direct mail leads to commercial actions, whether that's purchasing,

going online or visiting a store". It can be useful to build relationships with existing patients as well as to increase awareness among potential new ones.

Email marketing campaigns can also be sent to targeted recipients and the results can be monitored in real time.

Local radio and television advertising

Advertising on local radio and television stations can help raise your business profile within your community and can add an air of credibility and trustworthiness. Adverts can include a strong call to action (CTA), encouraging viewers or listeners to visit your business, take advantage of a limited-time offer, or participate in a local event. This can drive an immediate response from your targeted audience.

Key Point: Paid advertising can help you increase your reach and create new opportunities if you target the right people by the right means. However, it requires a financial commitment that may or may not show tangible returns.

5. Adding value to your patients' lives and the community as a whole

There are many ways in which you can offer more to your patients and the community. This will increase awareness and reach, as well as positioning your business as trustworthy and professional. For example:

- Offering loyalty cards, exclusive offers, and customer discounts
- Sending regular newsletters to your patient base
- Providing webinars, workshops, podcasts, blogs, tutorials, and other educational content
- Sponsoring local teams or events
- Getting involved in community events and initiatives
- Taking on social responsibility and sustainability initiatives
- Collaborating with other businesses and healthcare professionals

Using your resources wisely

While it can be tempting to try everything possible to promote your practice, you will only have so much time and money to spend on marketing. Alternatively, you may feel like you are already way too busy to find either the time or the resources – or that it's just not necessary. If you feel overwhelmed, overworked, and underpaid, it might just be time to invest in some marketing. Getting the patients who are the right fit for you, increasing your prices, being able to hire staff, creating a more professional business; all these outcomes are possible.

When you are considering the best course of action for promoting your business, remember to think about:

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Case Study



Sarah Carroll
The Foot Room,
Broughton & Longridge, Lancashire

www.thefootroom.co.uk

What's the background to The Foot Room?

Sarah Carroll set up The Foot Room in 2010 with her business partner, Jen Royle, having always intended to start her own podiatry business. Sarah had worked primarily in private practices and Jen had experience in the NHS before they joined forces.

They set up a website immediately as they knew how important an online profile would be and they also invested in local advertising.

What marketing does The Foot Room undertake?

Although the pair had an established client base they could tap into, Sarah wanted people to be able to find their website online and see they were dealing with a professional business. She found putting flyers through people's doors in the local area was a very successful strategy and advertised in local magazines and newspapers too.

Sarah writes an editorial article every month for a local magazine offering information and advice and pays for an advertisement too. The editorial is free and has helped establish them in the community and build their brand.

The practice website has always been one of The Foot Room's biggest marketing tools and Sarah publishes regular blogs on relevant subjects. She has a social media plan for each month, and everything ties in across her different marketing initiatives; the

staff are encouraged to discuss the monthly focus with patients too.

Sarah and Jen have recognised that networking is a real asset and Jen attends BNI (Business Networking International) meetings every week. Sarah does networking and takes business courses too.

How have these marketing techniques benefitted the business?

Sarah recognises the practice website is the most valuable source of new business. As well as helping them get found online, it showcases how The Foot Room is a professional and trustworthy practice. Sarah knows a lot of their business comes from word-of-mouth referrals, but people want to make sure they are making the right decisions for themselves; they check the website. While the practice also posts on its Facebook page, 'the website is what really matters'.

The Foot Room have now outsourced their digital marketing to an agency, and they help with keywords and SEO.

Networking is currently more about business support and the chances of future collaborations with other businesses as it takes a while to build the relationships that will lead to referrals.

What else is there to know about these marketing strategies?

Sarah and Jen have already built their practice up to two locations and a team of eight podiatrists. Sarah now only works in practice one day a week and concentrates more on marketing and building the business. She believes in focusing on what you're great at, knowing what you are marketing, and establishing who you are marketing to.

Sarah is passionate about the world of podiatry and knows there is a lack of awareness for the profession; both from the general public and for future generations of podiatrists. Blogs, editorials, networking, and general marketing all help raise the profile of podiatry in a positive way - as well as creating new business.

'Business is business, you can learn from anyone.'

What can you do yourself and what would be better outsourced?

Small business owners in particular often feel the need to do everything themselves. This might be because they worry about spending money or think they can do it better themselves.

Think about where your time might be better used

Is it seeing more patients/spending time with family or doing the accounts and social media marketing? You might be able to earn more by seeing patients in the time you spend doing the accounts or writing Facebook posts than it would cost to pay a bookkeeper or social media specialist.

Would a professional website bring in more business than one you've cobbled together in your evenings?

A high-quality, well-written, user-friendly and search-engine-optimised website might pay for itself in the new patients it brings in. It might make you seem more professional and your business more desirable - and justify the new, higher prices you now feel able to command.

Should you go to networking meetings yourself or would a trusted member of staff make better connections for your business?

It might benefit you professionally and personally to network with other businesses, but it might also be something a senior member of staff would be great at.

Where do you want to spend your time, money, and resources?

Think about what would most benefit your business and your life in general. If you would like to grow your business by building a supportive, professional network

around you and access business advice too, networking might be for you. You may simply want to increase awareness of your business or your patient base so you can fill more appointments or put your prices up. In this case, concentrating on growing the traffic to your website, social media marketing campaigns, or paid advertising might be more useful and use up less of your time.

How will you measure the impact of your marketing efforts?

Remember to keep track of which marketing initiatives are worth the effort and what could be ditched or replaced by another approach. You can track the amount of referred business you bring in through each specific networking group you belong to, or how effective a radio advertising campaign has been, for example. If you find you are spending more time and money on something than it is bringing in, it could be time for a rethink. Remember not all marketing efforts will show an immediate return. For example, blogs on your website will grow your traffic over time, as will your social media presence. Regularity and consistency are vital. It also takes time to build meaningful relationships in networking; so measure its value over at least six months or a year.

Remember testimonials and reviews are very powerful and they are free

If you do a good job for your patients, they will refer you to others. Collecting and sharing testimonials and reviews will show potential new patients what your business can do for them. They can make the difference between new patients choosing you over a competitor. ■

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