



Private Practice Marketing & Branding **Part Three**

A Guide to Building Trust in Your Practice Through Public Relations and Community Outreach.

Public relations and community outreach are critical in strengthening a private practice market position. This Learning Guide provides a structure for integrating relationship-building tactics into your practice in manageable ways, offering key definitions, step-by-step recommendations and best practice tips for long-term success.

NOTE: This content builds upon the information shared in our previous two segments, which addressed establishing a [unique marketing advantage](#) and [conducting research](#) for insights into your community and patients.

PART I: Defining Terms and Understanding Value

Public relations and community outreach go hand in hand to enhance your marketing efforts. They provide an opportunity to build and nurture long-term relationships with your community and patients in a way that benefits everyone.

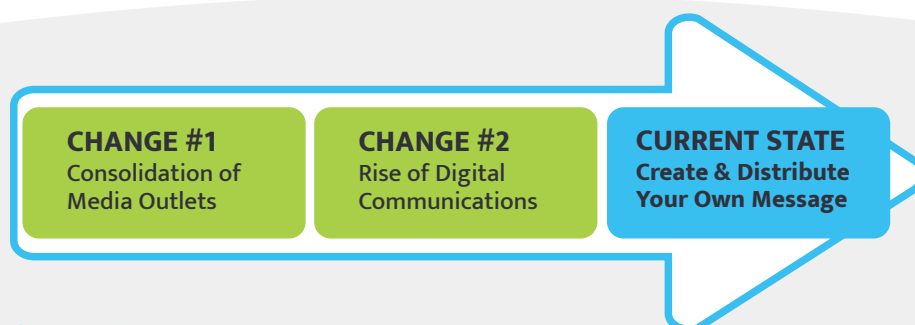
Public Relations (PR)

Public relations is the strategic communication that strengthens your reputation with critical audiences, establishes you as a valued resource and builds mutually beneficial relationships.

The Paradigm Shift from Media Relations to Content Development

Two Changes: PR has been affected by two major changes in how messages are disseminated. First, there has been a national consolidation of mainstream media outlets resulting in fewer message placement opportunities. At the same time, the second change has been the significant rise in digital communications outlets.

The Current State: As a result of these changes, particularly the second one, organizations now have more control over their messages. Rather than relying on an outside source to disseminate your information, you can create and promote your content and publish it via blogs, email newsletters and social media. With a strategic content plan, you can build relationships and position your practice as a trusted resource using readily accessible, manageable tools.



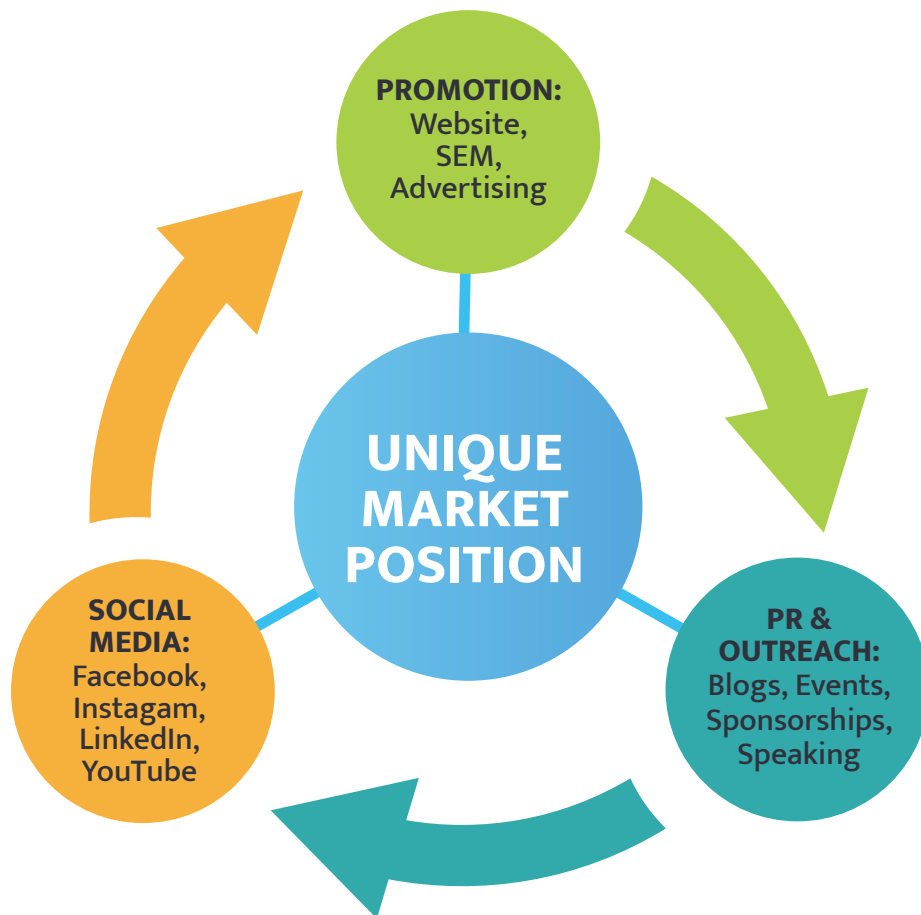
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Understanding the Value

Because trust is vital to successful patient–physician relationships, PR and outreach can go a long way toward positioning your practice as a trusted resource for health information and education. While marketing and advertising tactics can support your efforts to drive immediate and measurable results, PR and outreach are long-term investments in building trust among those you serve.

When to Use PR and Community Outreach

Selection is key. To be both valuable and sustainable for your practice, PR and outreach efforts should be strategically selected, planned, and implemented in complete alignment with the market position you identified using the information in [Primer One: A Guide to Identifying Your Practice’s Marketing Advantage](#). All PR and outreach initiatives should connect and support one another.



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PART II: **Public Relations in the Content Era** Developing and Promoting Content for Relationship-Building

Blogging: Long-Form Content Development

What should blog content include?

- Informational, educational material rather than promotional messaging
- Relevant messages for your target audiences
- Actionable insights that offer ways for your readers to use the information for better health
- Confirmed, accurate content with evidence-based health information.

Where does blog content “live”?

- On your website. WordPress and other similar platforms offer specific blog plug-ins for easy publishing.
- Explore long-form blog options offered by platforms such as LinkedIn, Medium, Post and others. Posting long-form content on platforms beyond your website can establish and reinforce thought leadership. (Be sure to link back to your website and other related content you may have.) Note: You can repurpose content for multiple platforms.
- Look into and stay up on new blogging features offered by digital platforms through such resources as LinkedIn newsletters.

How do you select topics?

- Align topics with your market position. For example, suppose the market advantage you identified lies within the specific services you offer to older patients or the health of young families in your area. In that case, your blog topics should reflect these areas of expertise.
 - Sample topics for older patients:
 - *Vaccines after 50: What you need, when you need it*
 - *Preventing falls: Toss the throw rugs and heels, keep the activity*
 - Sample topics for young families:
 - *Mental health: Five tips for communicating with kids in a disconnected world*
 - *Nutrition: Healthy eating and snacking for growing bones*
- Be relevant to your community’s and patients’ needs, as identified in primers one and two. Sample topics:
 - If you live in an area with a lot of snow, post a blog as winter approaches reminding people how to protect their back—and heart—when shoveling.
 - If your community has a high rate of smoking, offer smoking cessation tips during November—Smoking Cessation Month.
- Address “hot topics” when appropriate for your practice goals. For example, if a celebrity experiences a health challenge, leverage readers’ interest and write about it—but only if it aligns with your practice’s goals and areas of expertise. If not, leave it to others.
- Build on your areas of interest or the interests of your practice partners.
- Gather ideas from newsletters you subscribe to or from your patients.
 - What questions do your patients ask most often?
 - What are some health issues you would like your patients to understand better?
 - What are some essential steps patients can take to stay healthy?
- Leverage nationally designated health months or weeks to spur ideas for content. Visit [National Health Observances](#), a federal government site, for ideas.

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How long should blogs be?

- Ideally, at least 1,000 words. The longer and more substantive the blog, the more it helps with search engine optimization (SEO), ensuring that your blog appears at the top of Google search results on this topic. Blogs can be as long as 2,500 words, but that can be daunting. Keep it reasonable for you.

How often should you post blogs?

- This depends on your resources and overall goals.
- Strategic, quality information posted once weekly is better than non-strategic, hastily written blogs posted daily.
- Most importantly, commit to being predictable and consistent.

How do you promote your content?

- On social media. Share a key point or two from your blog to encourage readers to click to read the full article.
- Through the newsletter you email to patients and blog subscribers.
- Via posters or brochures in your office (with a QR code link to the blog).
- At your events and speaking engagements.
- In follow-up emails or text messages to patients. Your blog can be included in your practice's email signature.
- *Word of Caution:* Be sure to communicate only with patients who have agreed to receive your emails and texts.

What is a “content calendar”?

- A calendar of your topics, blog posts, and promotional strategy (see example, page 6).
- Use online calendar templates or any calendar plugins or widgets available through your website platform (i.e., WordPress). Even a tool you already use for scheduling or office management can help organize and plan your content and promotions.
- Review and discuss your proposed content and the calendar with your team regularly so that anyone on your team with an idea related to a planned topic can contribute ideas.
- Ensure that your calendar is one centralized hub that outlines what's planned both from a content editorial perspective and promotional perspective.
- Align your content calendar with your clinical calendar—any activities that you plan to engage in related to the health and wellness of your patients and community.

Where can you find help in writing and promoting our blog?

- Start internally: Are people in your practice interested in being part of the blog and social media strategy?
- Ask your local hospital's marketing team for recommendations for trusted freelance writers, digital marketing specialists, and content developers.
- Ask noncompetitive colleagues for recommendations.
- Also consider asking referring physicians to contribute to your blog if they have an area of expertise of interest to your patients.
- Other possible resources include:
 - Upwork and Fiverr (online marketplaces for freelance talent)
 - American Medical Writers Association (offering a nationwide directory)
 - Your connections on LinkedIn
 - Nearby colleges or universities; consider offering internships to students majoring in public relations, communications, or marketing

SPECIAL NOTES:

Be sure that the physician owner is the one who controls access to the practice's website, blog and social media accounts. The physician owner can grant access to employees or contractors as appropriate or as needed, but there should be one account owner—the physician.

The physician owner should review and approve any blog prior to publication.

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Thought Leadership: Positioning Your Practice as a Resource

Thought leadership is a form of PR focused on a critical issue or topic about which you have a unique expertise or passion. Through blogs, OpEd columns, social media posts, guest slots on a podcast, and speaking engagements, you establish your practice as a leader who can be trusted for the latest information or perspective about your selected issue.

Is a thought leadership strategy right for your practice?

- If you have identified a topic or issue of great interest to your team, and it aligns with the needs of your community and patients, building your reputation as a leading resource on this topic could be beneficial in reinforcing your market advantage.
- If your name or a team member's name repeatedly appears when this topic or issue is featured in local news, in your communications, and at events, your community, and patients will begin to recognize and appreciate your expertise. This kind of single-issue leadership strategy can be highly effective in support of a broader marketing campaign.

How can you build your reputation on this topic?

- Leverage your blog, social media posts, and community outreach activities to reinforce your main messages about this topic and establish your expertise.
- Share your blog posts with the following:
 - Area reporters who cover health
 - Local legislators (if the topic is connected to any legislative activity)
 - Relevant organization leaders (i.e., executive directors of local or regional nonprofits)
 - Public relations leaders at your local hospital or hospitals
- Schedule speaking engagements on this topic by connecting with local groups or leaders involved in the issue; consider nonprofits, churches and community civic organizations, among others.

PART III: Community Outreach

Participating in and Sponsoring Events to Build Community Connections

An extension of public relations, community outreach is a visible expression of your efforts to build relationships, demonstrated through the events or local initiatives you support—in person, as an organizational sponsor, or both.

How can you identify and select event and sponsorship opportunities in your area?

- Start with your goals and your market advantage.
- Research events in your area that align with this position and collaborate with organizations or businesses in your community that are popular in your market.
 - If you've committed to lung cancer awareness and early detection, research events sponsored by the Lung Association or the American Cancer Society.
 - Eventbrite, Facebook, and your area's "Next Door" app are also valuable resources for finding local events.

Tips for outreach and sponsorship success

- Prioritize and select only those events that will:
 - Allow you to reach people in your target audience
 - Require minimal resources for maximum impact
 - Allow some results measurement
- Establish a budget for your outreach efforts each year and stick to it.
- Link your outreach efforts to your blog strategy/topics, social media posts, and calendar.
- Develop reusable resources—everything from informational handouts to simple practice ads for community event programs or online promotions.

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PART IV: Content Calendar Example

Content Calendar: Blog & Social Media

October: Lung Health Awareness Month

Deadline	Publish Date	Theme	Working Title	Channel	Status	Author	Key Elements
10/10/20XX	10/12/20XX	Smoking cessation	Breathe Easier: Quit Smoking	Blog	Published	Smith	Share local data Mention new classes available
10/10/20XX	10/13/20XX	Smoking cessation	Breathe Easier: Quit Smoking	Facebook Instagram	Scheduled	Jones	Share local data Mention new classes available Click to learn more
10/17/20XX	10/19/20XX	Early detection	Get Screened: 30 Seconds Could Save Your Life	Blog	In progress	Smith	Ease of screening (30 seconds) Early ID increases long-term health

PART V: Event and Sponsorship Assessment Example

Event	Alignment with Practice Goals	Reach	Requirements & Cost	Benefits	Potential Results
Community-Wide Health Fair	Promote lung health, early detection and screening—one of your practice goals Promote new smoking cessation classes offered by practice	Attendance last year: 5,000 from targeted geographic region 25% over 50 (lung screening age) 35% between 35 and 49 (target for smoking cessation)	Staff a 10'x10' booth for 4 hours, 9 am to 1 pm, Saturday \$1,000 sponsorship level includes booth space & signage, speaking time, recognition as only physician practice sponsor Can use existing pop-up display, branded tablecloth and smoking cessation	Can speak at event in break-out room; can register attendees via social media promotions; health fair organizers will also promote Recognized in all event promotions as exclusive physician practice sponsor Opportunity to be interviewed by media in pre-event publicity	New blog subscribers Registrants for new smoking cessation class Expand new patient pool with screening and smoking information

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