

**BUSINESS & MARKETING CORNER****A Global Perspective: Growing a MDT Clinic Against the Odds**

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Early in 2010, due to New Zealand-wide health funding changes, I had the unexpected privilege of suddenly having to open my own physiotherapy clinic without any preparation or forward planning. It was a great challenge and opportunity to establish a practice in a city that was already over-supplied by physiotherapy clinics and in a country that was beginning to feel the reality of the global financial crisis. There was also an attitude in the local patient population that physiotherapy was ineffective and was not the first treatment option when someone was experiencing any pain from an injury. This attitude had arisen from several years of free physiotherapy treatments being offered by the main funding source, and many were people being over-treated with poor results.

The first step I took to face the challenge was to write a business plan. This process was a fantastic opportunity to sit down and put the emerging dream on paper, looking at what my competitors were doing, researching the local demographics to enable effective marketing strategies to be put in place, and to formulating a plan of how the clinic was going to function on a daily basis. As I had absolutely no experience in writing a business plan, I turned to Google and found some great resources, making the process painless and helpful.

The next important step was to develop a marketing plan. This included identifying my unique points of difference from the other seven physiotherapy clinics that were within a 3km radius of my clinic. MDT featured strongly in this, especially as I offer effective treatment requiring a low number of appointments, which is opposite to the expectations and experiences for the local patient population. Word of mouth has been a very powerful tool and has ensured that my clinic has grown steadily, even in spite of the challenges faced by our city due to the earthquake events of 2010 and 2011 and the associated ongoing issues. As a result, I have to ensure that every single contact a patient has with my clinic is positive, from the first contact via phone or face-to-face, right through to all forms of communication and treatment.

One of the most helpful pieces of marketing advice I was given was to calculate how many patients I would have to treat to pay for each marketing strategy. This was calculated by dividing the price of the marketing strategy by the monetary figure that treating a patient 3.5 times (my average number of treatments for patients) would generate. I then tracked each marketing strategy over the next year to see which ones were the most cost effective. Out of all the many strategies I used, including newspaper advertising, mail box drops, sports teams sponsorship, Google advertising, website development and patient email newsletters to name a few, the most effective ones were my website and online communication via patient newsletter, blogs, and utilisation of social media. I therefore invested time and money into those strategies only.

Another important step was gathering a support team around myself. I meet regularly with my accountant/financial advisor, and have monthly meetings with another local physiotherapist who is facing similar issues. I also have a business advisory team involving four of my closest friends who are able to ask me the hard questions and offer new ideas and fresh initiatives. Without all this support, it would have been tempting to lose sight of the overall dream and goals, and my business would not have grown to the extent it has.