


The community has responded positively to the marketing campaign as well, with residents taking notice of the new marketing efforts. Employees have a newfound pride in their hospital and have eagerly distributed brochures and materials to spread the hospital's message.

Back where it all started, the board of trustees is very pleased with the results. The trustees have committed to continuing their marketing efforts. They are determined not to lose the momentum that was started with the hospital's first coordinated marketing plan. 

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## Seven Ways to Connect with Customers on a Limited Budget

Do you find yourself in the difficult but not uncommon position of having to grow the business, attract and educate members of the community, and come up with innovative new marketing ideas—but without a budget to do it? What's a smart marketer to do? The first step is to optimize the tools you already have in place to make sure you are getting the most out of them. Let's take a look at a few marketing tools you may be using now:

- 1. Optimize your website.** For starters, make sure the basics are in place. Does your home page explicitly tell visitors where to go next? Is there one navigation bar, not several, so it's easy to find your way around? Do visitors have easy access to your service lines—perhaps a drop-down menu? Is it easy for visitors to get more information on a subject, and do you specifically tell them how to do it? Do you add or change content frequently, maybe even posting local events or news updates? Is there a strong call to action on every page? Does your hospital have clearly defined goals and objectives for the website?
  - 2. Use the press as much as possible.** Do you draft news releases regularly? An easy and inexpensive way to get your hospital's name in front of prospects and educate your community at the same time is to write educational articles that tie back to your hospital. Submit them to community publications such as your local paper, the chamber of commerce newsletter, and homeowners association newsletters. News releases can be used in both print and online publications, so don't limit yourself.
  - 3. Investigate teleseminars.** Telephone seminars, also called teleseminars, can be a great alternative to live seminars, which are a popular marketing tool for many hospitals and physicians. Adding teleseminars to your marketing mix allows for two things: It extends your reach to people who may not want to leave their homes or cannot easily do so, and it gives your prospects flexibility as to when to listen to your message. Many people like to download teleseminars to their MP3 players and listen to them while they are working out or doing laundry.
  - 4. Try podcasts.** Adding sound to sight is another way to connect with your community while maximizing limited dollars. For example, you can post photos of your medical staff on your website with links that visitors can click on to hear the doctors talk on clinical topics or simply introduce themselves. A video of the doctor can be used the same way. Podcasts are
- not expensive, and they are an easy way to communicate with your prospects in a different setting. And what a great idea for a news release: Local hospital is now marketing in the 21st century!
- 5. Think about blogging.** Blogging is another inexpensive alternative to keep visitors abreast of hospital news. You can post updates on new staff members and community events—even health topics can easily be posted and updated. Like podcasts, blogs can be absolutely free. Companies like Blogger and WordPress have basic systems that allow you to set up a blog for no charge. All you need to do is make sure the blog is posted to, updated, and disseminated to the community on a regular basis.
  - 6. Start an electronic newsletter.** Many hospitals do not regularly communicate with the community this way, but once up and running, a newsletter can be an easy and inexpensive way to remind both patients and physicians of the value you offer and the services you provide. An electronic newsletter doesn't have to be a time-consuming, laborious effort. It can be something as simple as a short educational article highlighting a service at your facility, e-mailed once a week. The beauty of electronic newsletters is that people sign up for them. Prospects give you their permission to communicate with them. Where else can you get that?
  - 7. Consider joint ventures.** Investigate how you can work with local businesses and physicians in your area. What small things can you do together to keep your names in the front of the public? Maybe you could collaborate on an ezine—an electronic magazine distributed by e-mail or posted on a website. Or consider cosponsoring community events—for example, combine a Halloween trick-or-treat at the doctor's office with a hospital tour. Be creative. Marketing is less expensive and often more effective when you can share expenses.

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