

Four Lessons from Lockdown

While the pandemic has left its mark on businesses across Australia and the world, it has also provided insight into the way marketing and business is conducted. **Jason Borody** discusses the marketing lessons the healthcare sector can draw from pandemic activity as we head into the new year.



**Jason Borody is the
Director of Vividus
Medical Marketing.**



It would be fitting of the current time to begin with an acknowledgement of the operational changes that 2020 has brought us. It has brought about the disease which has restricted our movements both locally and internationally, killed over one million people worldwide (including hundreds in Australia), and drastically altered the way business is conducted.

However, the drastic changes to our everyday lives have also brought insight into the way we can do business. With 2020 now as hindsight, we can use the lessons gathered to prepare for the potential opportunities in 2021.

LESSON 1: CLARITY IS KEY

During the pandemic lockdown – especially in the earlier days – we saw two main types of private practice responses. The first type pulled all marketing spend and closed their doors, while the second type re-evaluated and adjusted their spend according to their current capabilities instead of cutting it completely.

Although it helped cut immediate losses, practices who cut their marketing communication often neglected to provide essential communications to their patients and referrers. By leaving people confused as to their business operations under restrictions – whether their appointments were still scheduled as normal, if procedures could take place, or even if the practice was open – these businesses alienated their clients and impeded their post-lockdown recovery.

On the other hand, businesses who kept referrers and patients up-to-date on their current capabilities, the current lockdown conditions affecting them, and when they could start to reschedule appointments and procedures, had a much easier return to business. Their patients were aware of the next steps to take

and ready to act when the time came.

Heading into 2021, we can keep in mind that clear, relevant communication is key – not just for managing appointments, but for maintaining engagement, and building trust with referrers and patients alike.

LESSON 2: CONSUMERS CRAVE CONSISTENCY

In 2020, change has been swift and constant. The introduction of telehealth in the healthcare sector is a key example of this: within the space of a few weeks, many practices cut down on or completely switched away from face-to-face communications.

Although the resulting changes have brought about a great deal of accessibility, they have also created uncertainty, and left many craving the consistency of pre-pandemic life. While a state of pre-pandemic normalcy may not be possible (at least at this time), it is critical for practices to ensure they stay true their brand values and positioning.

In 2021, practices can create consistency by upholding their brand values and positioning, even if the way they conduct business is not the same. While consultations and procedures may be different, seeing the professionalism of a practitioner or feeling the warm attitude of a genuinely caring and dedicated practice can still provide welcome relief. Practices can provide this level of service by setting clear expectations regarding basic practice procedures, including how to refer patients, what to expect at appointments, how to prepare for surgery, and providing information about post-operative consultations. Ensure the information you share is clear, easy to access, and consistent with the brand you have set for your practice.

LESSON 3: ADAPTABILITY MAKES BETTER BUSINESS

In 2020, many practices quickly switched from the ‘growth’ mindset to one of ‘survival’, setting aside planned marketing campaigns for messages about COVID-19 safety. While these communications certainly weren’t in their original marketing plans, they proved invaluable in reassuring and informing patients and referrers, while thoroughly clarifying business intent. Practices who were quick to pivot their original plans were able to seize a new, unexpected opportunity by choosing a course of action more suited to the situation at hand.

The lesson to draw here is that adaptability is essential, both in your business and for your marketing. Having and adhering to a clear marketing plan is always best; however, when the trajectory becomes unfeasible or potentially harmful to your business, pro-active businesses will continuously re-evaluate and evolve as circumstances change around them.

This does not necessarily mean trying to plan for the unpredictable. Instead, it involves building a robust marketing plan that allows for the moving, removing, deferring, or prioritising of campaigns and ideas. Your marketing plan should serve as a guide, not a rulebook: successful businesses will pivot to respond to changing circumstances. At Vividus, we saw this at different levels with some practices moving to telehealth appointments, and others implementing video consults.

LESSON 4: NETWORKING IS ALL-IMPORTANT.

As many of us are beginning to tire of online events (‘webinarred out’ and ‘zoomed out’ are phrases we are using more and more), there can be no doubt

that these windows of communication, interaction, and education have played a vital role in keeping us connected. Likewise, video-communication platforms such as Zoom, have become commonplace in the face of social distancing.

Despite giving many businesses a better degree of functionality during the pandemic period, technology cannot easily replicate the feeling of true in-person networking and interaction. While businesses and patients have managed to stay connected through webinars and zoom calls, meeting on digital platforms is simply not the same as a friendly handshake or an in-person conversation.

Effective communication comes from the ability to connect with other people and ensure there is a clear understanding of the message you are trying to deliver. While businesses have a greater ability and capacity to communicate digitally, it is important to ensure that the channel of communication you use is appropriate for the message you need to deliver. For example, a confirmation of an appointment is a simple information exchange that can be easily delivered via phone, software or SMS, whereas consultations that require a higher level of engagement require more visual cues and are best delivered face-to-face, or by video call.

As lockdowns gradually lift and in-person interaction becomes more feasible once again, networking with patients and referrers will become all the more important. Going forward into 2021, it's important to focus on ways to create and innovate professional relationships: make the effort to reach out, support, and interact with your referring community in a way that is meaningful (but respectful of current restrictions). There is likely a 'back-log' of personal interaction to be made, so be strategic about who you reach out to, and how. Vividus can help with effective referral marketing and outreach.

THE BIG TAKEAWAY: CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

The truth of business on all fronts is that we never really know when change will suddenly take place. Whether it's a natural disaster such the tragic bushfires at the beginning of this year, the global pandemic which has dominated the news throughout 2020, or simply changes in legislation, or even the market conditions in your local area. There will always be something with the potential to derail business operations. In order to be successful as a private practice, adjusting to meet the new demands of our time is essential. ©

It's worth taking action

Vividus is available to help with your post-lockdown recovery and return to marketing. Whether your marketing was temporarily cut back, or you are looking to commence marketing for the first time, or even if you are looking for innovative ways to manage your existing customer experience and marketing, we have the knowledge and industry experience to put you on the fast track to business success. For more information please **contact us** for an introduction to **Jason Borody**.

This article has been prepared by Vividus Pty Ltd for the education and benefit of healthcare professionals. While the information in this article is from sources which are considered reliable at the time of writing, Vividus and its employees, independent bloggers, consultants, and officers do not guarantee, warrant, or represent, expressly or impliedly, that the information contained in this article is complete or accurate. Vividus does not accept responsibility to inform you of any matter that subsequently comes to its notice which may affect any information contained within this document. To the extent permitted by law, Vividus excludes any liability, including any liability for negligence, for any loss, including indirect or consequential damages arising from or in relation to the use of any of the information in this document or associated materials.



Grow your practice *through...* Medical Marketing

We're Vividus — your full service marketing agency leading the way in medical marketing and communications across Australia and New Zealand.

We know the ethics, laws and codes that regulate medical marketing, and have over a decade's experience in helping medical practices grow.

**Whether marketing
to doctors or patients,
here's how we can help:**

STRATEGIC MARKETING
REFERRER MARKETING
DIGITAL MARKETING
CONTENT MARKETING
PRACTICE BRANDING
WEBSITES
WEBINARS AND EDUCATION
PRACTICE PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY
AHPRA COMPLIANT PATIENT REVIEWS



Marketing Health Check



*Book your complimentary
marketing health checkup at
healthcaremarketing.com.au*

***vividus**
healthcare marketing

Say Hello **1300 VIVIDUS**