



Inbox Inspiration: A Podiatrist's Guide to Email Marketing

If there is one marketing solution worth your time and money,
it's Email Marketing.

BY SHAUN ZAKEN

As the owner of a digital marketing agency for podiatrists, I recognize how overwhelming it can be to try to understand—let alone pay for—the many marketing services available today. *What's worth it? What's not? What worked for the last ten years, but might not be effective anymore...?* It reminds me of the Paradox of Choice, where an abundance of options can be so overwhelming that you're left feeling unsatisfied or even unable to make a decision. That's why I'm here to help cut through the clutter and offer a simple suggestion: *If there is one marketing solution worth your time and money, it's Email Marketing.*

Despite the rise of newer communication channels like Threads and TikTok, and buzzwords like Search Engine Optimization (SEO), geofencing and retargeting (all of which can be beneficial, by the way), I believe Email Marketing is the most cost-effective and impactful strategy for any podiatrist with a healthy database.

In the paragraphs below, I will break down and demystify the world of Email Marketing, sharing road-tested insights to improve results and identifying opportunities to make it even more affordable if you have the bandwidth and inclination. So, whether you prefer to

use DIY tools, such as Mail Chimp and ChatGPT, or turn to a marketing agency for professional strategy and implementation, I encourage you to read on and consider how Email Marketing can benefit your practice.

What is Email Marketing, and How Does it Work for Podiatrists?

In simplest terms, Email Marketing refers to any communication you send via email to patients or

likely to return and even potentially grow your referral network. Without that level of care and consideration, however, you may leave your practice vulnerable to the hotshot new podiatrist who opens a modern practice across the street.

To get started, think about dividing your practice audience into three categories: active patients, “inactive”/former patients, and future patients. Since reaching and communicating with each of these audi-

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even referring physicians. But beyond the tactical benefits of, “You have a podiatry appointment in an hour”, I like to think of email marketing as a relationship-building tool. Practitioners go to great lengths to ensure their patients are comfortable and enjoy a pleasant experience while in the office, but may not realize that level of commitment can and should continue outside of the practice. In fact, if you establish a rapport with your patients, keeping them informed and demonstrating how to make their life easier, they'll be far more

ences requires a different approach and detail, I find it's helpful when considering strategy and execution.

1) Active Patients

Active patients are always going to be the most critical to the success of a practice. These are your dependable, satisfied, recurring revenue-streamers, who know you, appreciate your service, and on occasion refer a friend or family member. But as important as active patients are to the health and longevity of any practice, the temp-

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tation may be to prioritize new patients or prospects as a means for growth over prioritizing active patient maintenance and support. Instead, every exchange you have with an active patient is an opportunity to deepen that connection and ensure brand loyalty for the future. Now imagine increasing the number of times you can communicate with those patients throughout the year, even when they're not in your office. That's where Email Marketing can deliver significant value for your practice.

Send Personalized EGreetings

Since any trusted EMR already tracks each patient's DOB, consider using that data to your advantage. While handwritten birthday cards are always a nice gesture, cardstock and postage prices are on the rise, and your front office staff likely has more pressing matters to address. Instead, craft a personalized email

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birthday message and send it to each of your patients. For even more impact, send your eCard just after midnight, and yours could be the first birthday wish a patient receives in the morning. Of course, this can be painfully time-consuming without an agency partner or an automated tool, but you'd be surprised how effective a warm and fuzzy message like this can be. If you prefer texts (or have more mobile numbers than email addresses), consider sending your message to your patients' phone instead.

There are plenty of other worthwhile opportunities to reach your active patient base, including marking special occasions, such as Mother's Day, Memorial Day, or New Years, and/or less traditional holidays, such as National I Love My Feet Day (August 15) or Fall Prevention Awareness Month (September). By taking the opportunity to wish your patients well, you let them know you're thinking of them without asking for anything in return. As long as the name of your practice is prominently featured in your email, your patient will think of you when opening it, which is not exactly easy to do unless their foot is bothering them!

Bear in mind, these eGreetings can be as hokey or clever and modern as you make them. Some practices even record a new video message every year, so their patients look forward to each creative installment. Regardless, find "gentle touch points" throughout the year, and remain top of mind all year long.

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Share Helpful Information

Beyond holiday well-wishes, your practice should consider sending monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly emails to active patients offering prevention tips and insights to keep your patients healthy. Some practices include links to new foot care products, quality nail salons or medspas in the area, or even a curated list of foot-focused TikToks for educational and entertainment value. These mass emails are also known as eBlasts, or email campaigns, when short and singularly-focused, or eNewsletters when including multiple articles or features in a single communication. For best results, include video content in some of your emails to boost opens and click-through rates. Attachments or links that lead the reader away from your email (e.g., to YouTube) are not nearly as effective as embedded videos that play right in the body of your email.

Regardless of length or cadence, your goal should always be to add value as a trusted resource to strengthen your practice-patient relationship. And to the skeptics wondering, “Do my patients really care about what I have to say?!” , any patient who doesn’t can simply delete your email and unsubscribe from

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future communications. (Note: be sure to include an unsubscribe link at the bottom of all mass emails, a feature any credible DIY platform should include automatically). Furthermore, don’t stress if/when a patient unsubscribes from your emails, since it’s generally not an indication of a dissatisfied patient, but rather someone who is simply less interested in your email content. You can, however, learn a lot from patient responses to your emails. Be sure to take note of how many patients open, click-through, and unsubscribe from each email to evaluate the effectiveness of this communication channel for your practice. According to a recent study by MailerLite, the average open rate, or percentage of the total recipients who open an email, for the healthcare industry is ~41%, and the average unsubscribe rate is 0.36%, but results can vary based on subject line, subject matter, and even time of send. So, be sure to experiment to achieve optimal results. Naturally, the more campaigns you send out, the more data you’ll have to analyze and opportunities for improvement.

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2) Inactive Patients

Inactive patients are contacts who visited your practice in the past or at least shared their contact information but lost touch for any number of reasons. This particular segment of patients seemingly taking up space in your EMR is actually an often-overlooked but important part of any practice database, because you already have their contact information and you know, at least

can be more costly than sending email-only recalls, it's likely you can recover the ~\$1-\$1.50/print recall letter based on your patient visit value. Before you commit to sending recalls to your entire former patient list, consider trying this out on a sample of your higher value recall patients (e.g., diabetes or orthotics patients), but it can be highly effective to recall an inactive patient, especially when you consider the lifetime value of that patient.

It's important to keep in mind, due to HIPAA guidelines, a practice cannot specify a patient's medical condition in email. You can, however, be specific in a letter sent to the patient's home.

at one point, they understood the value of a good foot doctor. As a result, there is a built-in incentive and opportunity to reintroduce your practice (highlighting new services, upgraded facilities, technology, etc.) to these patients, since each contact could easily return and rejoin your active base for years to come. This, too, can be done personally and inexpensively using the power of Email Marketing.

The easiest way to identify your former patients in your EMR is to sort by LVD (Last Visit Date), and compile a list of patients to recall, beginning with patients who have not returned to the practice in 16+ months. For best results, filter by condition/ICD code and tailor your message to the specifics of each inactive patient. If you're not confident in your writing skills, you may want to finesse your recall letters using an AI bot, such as ChatGPT. You can even automate these emails using various DIY platforms if a digital agency seems cost-prohibitive at the moment.

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For best results, I recommend sending the first recall as a diagnosis-specific letter in the mail, followed by 2-3 generic (no mention of diagnosis, but still unique and informative) monthly emails for patients with an email address on file. It's likely after 4 attempts at recalling a patient, they're no longer interested in being recalled, but successful recall campaigns can add thousands of dollars to your bottom line on a monthly basis, so do not overlook this opportunity. In addition to growing your active base, this can also be a great way to get an extra boost in revenue before retirement. (Once you decide to retire, you'll also want to use Email Marketing to send one final eBlast and hardcopy letter notifying your patients of your plans and recommending a colleague for future podiatry needs.)

3) Future Patients

There's no question Email Marketing is most effective for mature practices with plenty of email addresses, which should be the goal of any podiatry practice. However, until then, building a practice can be frustrating and overwhelming.

I'm often asked by newer practices whether purchasing lists of email addresses is a worthwhile en-

deavor, and I don't recommend it, since sending cold emails to unsuspecting recipients can actually cause a negative effect and even result in your inability to send future mass emails if the majority of your emails are marked as Spam.

It may be slightly more fruitful to email a contact list of referring physicians in your area if you're hoping to introduce yourself and your new practice to the local community, but do so sparingly and move on if you don't receive a response. In this case, consider how you as a medical professional might react to a similar email and craft your message accordingly.

How Can a Podiatry Practice Reach New Patients?

Hopefully you have a newfound respect for how Email Marketing can help you improve patient retention and deepen your relationship, but I realize it's likely you also want to expand. Like William S. Burroughs suggested, if you're not growing, you're dying.

And while there are many marketing solutions to help podiatrists establish credibility and promote their services online, from a well-functioning website (Yes, you need a website, it's 2023!), up to date local directory listings, a process to solicit positive reviews from patients (Reputation Management), and social media posts and blogs, in my experience, Google Ads are the most consistent, effective, revenue-generating marketing solution to connect with new patients in your market. Of course, that's a subject for another article. **PM**



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