

The efficiency of marketing strategies in health care—using social vouchers and coupons

Radu Gabriel*, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania
Solomon Maria, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania
Hostiuc Marinela, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania
Bulescu I. Alexandru, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania
Purcarea Lorin Victor, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania

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Abstract

Marketing strategies in the field of health care represent the health care organisations' attitude towards the marketing environment which provides medical service to the patient. The purpose was to determine the efficiency of social vouchers and coupons for marketing strategies. We have conducted a retrospective study using two groups of patients. In group A were included 220 patients of a dental clinic who have received 330 vouchers with 25% discount with the purpose of promoting medical services, by four different marketing strategies (E-mail, websites, distribution of coupons in the dental office and office area, social media). In group B, 124 people were included, who have acquired vouchers through the Internet for a free consultation and dental scaling. One hundred and forty-two vouchers were sold and 124 patients turned up, with an average age of 32.1 years. The group A people were asked to complete a four-question survey to evaluate the effectiveness of the applied marketing strategies.

Keywords: Marketing strategies, dental clinic, coupons, vouchers, discount, patients.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Radu Gabriel**, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Carol Davila, Bucharest, Romania. E-mail address: gabriel.radu88@yahoo.com / Tel.: +40 21 318 0719.

1. Introduction

The evolution of the health system has led to a type of marketing specialised in this field. The health care marketing's role is to define the consumer categories aimed by the health care institutions and also the best way in which their needs concerning health care can be satisfied at a competitive level. For this purpose, the marketing departments in health care institutions apply a variety of strategies.

Marketing strategies in the field of health care represent in fact the health care organisations' attitude towards the marketing environment and also their conduct in relation to its components. In this case, the product being sold is the medical service provided to the patient. The marketing strategies include all the means that help to advertise and promote the health care service provided by the institution and also help to attract patients. A variety of media is used, including Internet, social media, radio, television or the written press. Banners, commercials, ads and flyers are all means that help to market a practice. Other marketing instruments include discounts or coupons.

The information passed on through all the advertising methods should be truthful and never misleading. The efficiency of these strategies is closely tied to how well the market is known, how well the needs and desires of the patients are known and also the way in which those needs are satisfied. Also, it is imperative to provide only services of high quality to ensure the satisfaction of the patients, taking into consideration that a satisfied patient will most likely recommend the health care facility to others.

When applying any marketing strategies, the cost–benefit analysis should be taken into consideration. The expenses needed for implementing the various promoting methods are justified if they bring benefits in the long term. In what a health care facility is concerned, such benefits include more patients, prestige and profit increase.

2. Materials and methods

We have conducted a retrospective study on two groups of patients. For the first batch, group A, we wanted to determine whether people are motivated by discounts to visit a health care facility, whether they were in search of health care or not and whether they would consider returning to the same clinic for further treatment. Also, we wanted to evaluate which media of advertising is most influential on prospect customers, in our case, patients. Group B underwent a different approach. In this case, we wanted to determine if people are motivated to return to a health care facility after they receive a free procedure.

2.1. Group A

Aiming to promote services, we distributed vouchers with 25% discount using different media: e-mail, websites, distribution in the dental office and office area, social media. The vouchers were distributed to active patients of the dental clinic and also to other people. We have given out 330 vouchers to 330 people, out of which 220 (66.6%) patients, with an average of 32 years, asked for the discount offered through this voucher for a treatment. In order for the discount to be applied, all patients needed to complete a questionnaire. After their treatment, 220 patients have filled in a survey with four questions:

1. Where did you first find out about this medical facility?
 - a. Promotional banner (in front of the office)
 - b. Another patient
 - c. Flyers
 - d. Internet

2. Do you consider that the discount voucher influenced you to go to the dentist?
 - a. No, I would have gone anyway
 - b. Yes, the voucher influenced me; I did not know which dentist to go to
 - c. I wasn't planning on going to see a dentist, the voucher influenced me
3. Knowing that the discount only applies to one treatment; will you keep going to the same medical practice?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I do not consider that the voucher will influence this call
4. Have you been a patient of this medical facility before?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No'

2.2. Group B

The second group included 124 patients that have acquired vouchers through the Internet for a free consultation and deep cleaning. The purpose of the study was to determine whether informing the patients about their oral health issues after the free consultation would determine them to seek care at the same dental practice.

3. Findings

Based on the answers given to the first question, we concluded that the most efficient advertising method was the banner in front of the practice that brought 71 (32%) patients into the clinic. With similar results, we can conclude that advertising by social media was also efficient in promoting the dental office. Even though only 16% (36 patients) decided to seek treatment in our clinic after receiving recommendations from previous patients, statistics show that this is one of the most efficient methods of promoting a health care facility, with an important marketing impact. Any satisfied patient is more likely to bring other patients to the clinic. Therefore, even though in our study, this method was the least efficient in bringing patients to the clinic, we believe that all patients should leave the office satisfied.

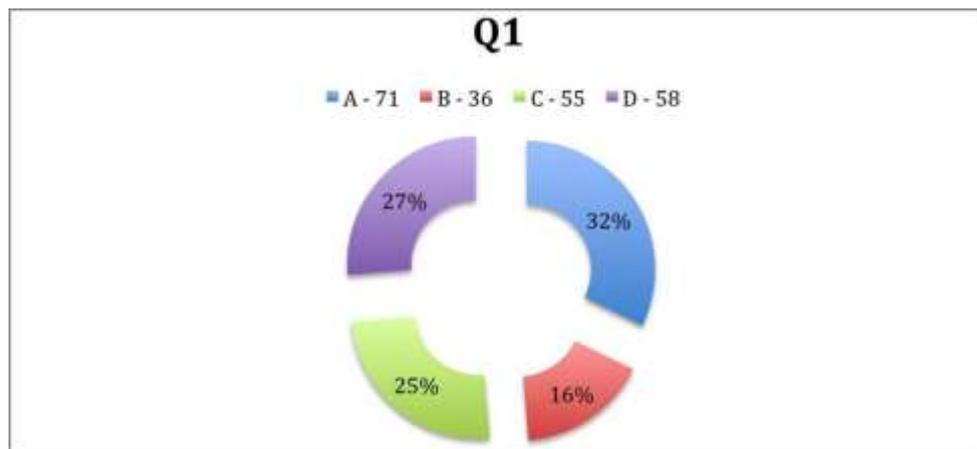


Figure 1. Answers given to question 1

The answers to the second question show the important role the vouchers played in motivating patients who were already seeking treatment but were not decided on which practice to attend. Not to be overlooked is also the percent of patients who were motivated by the discount to book an appointment at the dental office (31.36%) even though they weren't seeking medical care.

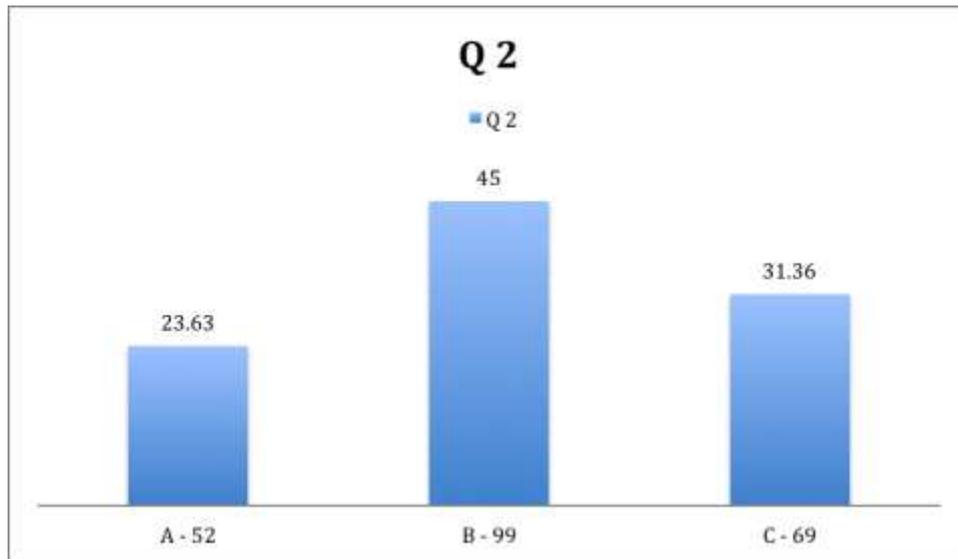


Figure 2. Answers given to question 2

With the high percentage of patients who are considering returning to the clinic for further health care service; we appreciate this marketing strategy to be extremely efficient. 58.18% of questioned patients believe that they will return to this practice for medical treatment.

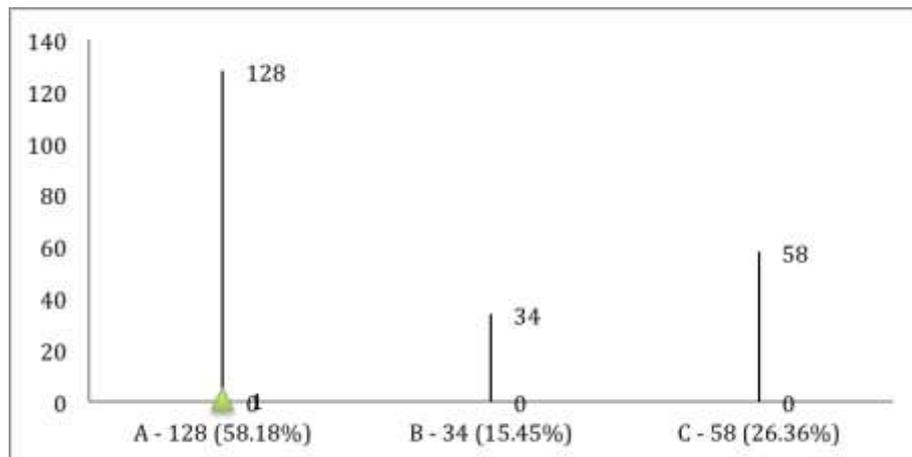


Figure 3. Answers given to question 3

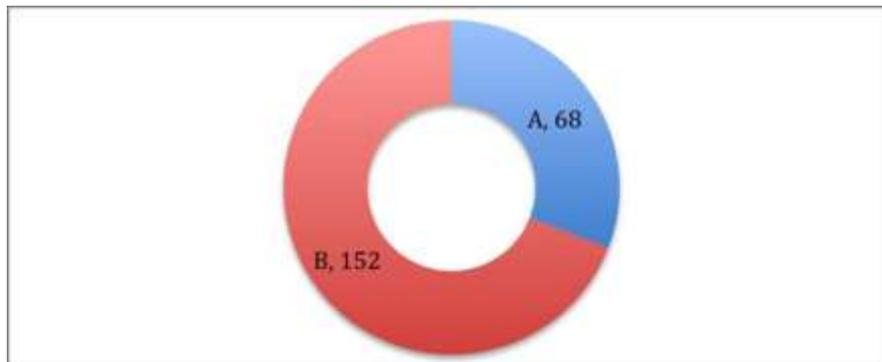


Figure 4. Answers given to question 4

We believe that the vouchers played an important role in convincing the patients who were seeking dental care and did not know where to go, to become patients of our practice. We also believe that by this method, we have determined the patients to become regular ones.

The expenses for the consultation and dental scaling procedure of the patients included in the second group were covered in 45% by the voucher cost. The marketing strategy aimed in this case to increase the number of procedures performed at the clinic by bringing in new patients by means of the vouchers, thus having the opportunity to convince them to further book appointments at our dental office for treating their oral health issues, in case such treatment is needed. The cost–benefit analysis determined that any profit increase over 25% in the next 6 months due to new patients coming in for complex procedures would justify the clinic’s expenses for the free consultations and oral hygiene procedures. If such profit increase were to happen, the marketing strategy would be considered a success.

Initially, 142 vouchers were sold but only 124 patients with an average age of 32.1 years presented themselves at the dental office. After the dental appointment, 97 patients were informed they require further treatment. The treatments varied from single-visit procedures to more complex ones that would require more than one appointment. Out of these 97 patients, 54 (55%) returned during the next 3 months for dental treatment. The profit of the clinic increased during this trimester by 37%, which leads to the conclusion that the marketing campaign was efficient, by increasing the profit more than anticipated. Not only has the profit been increased but also was the number of patients seeking care at the dental practice, which will in long-term also lead to profit benefits. A satisfied patient will keep returning to the same health facility whenever health issues require him to do so and is likely to also convince other prospect patients to seek care there.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study show the need for health care marketing, as a distinct branch of marketing, specialised in the characteristics of this field. A strategic way of thinking, in this case, implies attracting new patients and offering them quality health care services, which ensures their satisfaction and the probability for them to recommend the health facility further.

All marketing strategies applied in both cases in our study were a success, by bringing in new patients to the clinic and ensuring a profit increase. Giving out discount vouchers and offering free consultations and dental hygiene procedures are both ways to attract patients to the dental practice and the studies have shown that a percent of them will return for further treatment. The vouchers ensure the opportunity for them to get to know the dental office and the type of health service it provides. Also, they get to find out about oral health issues they were not aware of, which can determine them to seek care in the same place. Not only will they return to the same health facility but also they will recommend the clinic to other people, which can only be beneficial on long term.

The questionnaire applied to the first group in the study goes to show the importance of advertising in the success of any business, even a health care institution. The answers show that patients are influenced by visual advertisements, like the banner in front of the clinic, or by social media when deciding where to seek care. Also, we discovered that the discount voucher motivated patients to visit the dental practice, even though they were not seeking care.

The second marketing campaign, in which patients received a free consultation and a deep cleaning in exchange for the voucher they purchased, also had a positive outcome. The goal was to increase the profit by 25% within 6 months but instead, the profit was increased by 37% in 3 months. Not only did the profit increase more than expected but also some of the patients returned for further treatment. Considering both the fact that the voucher covered 45% of the deep cleaning procedure and the achievement of increasing the number of patients and the profit, we can conclude that the expenses were justified with a positive outcome of the cost–benefit analysis.

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