



Community relations and sponsorship

Keeping your name in the public eye, while giving something back

BY SARAH ARNOLD

Marketing your practice doesn't always mean shelling out yet more hard-earned dollars. And it doesn't necessarily mean getting an immediate return for your investment, in whatever form it may take.

Community relations and sponsorship are essential components of many organisations' marketing and communication strategies. Consider Telstra's community awareness/public safety initiatives. Or Golden Circle's sponsorship of the surf lifesavers.

It's all about keeping your name in the public eye, while giving something back to your community. It's good marketing and good corporate citizenship. However, it's crucial to choose the right event and environment for your market. Obviously, different events appeal to and attract different markets.

To promote your practice in general, you may choose to be involved with an event that appeals to the general public and families - such as a local school carnival or sporting event.

To promote a particular service or product, you may choose to be involved with a more specialised forum - such as a health and lifestyle supplement in the local media.

Following are some examples of community relations and sponsorship initiatives we have undertaken in recent years at Smile Dental:

Self-funded community relations initiatives

- Cootharinga Society of North Queensland - providing free of charge dental

service for people with disabilities, particularly cerebral palsy.

- Dental Awareness Month - conducting education programs in schools; contributing to local media; in line with the annual nationwide campaign.
- Nursing home visits - free of charge check-ups and dental hygiene awareness programs, for patients and staff.



- Health and Vitality Expo - participation in event as exhibitor and presenter.
- Donating hampers for charity prizes; donating trophies for school eisteddfods.
- Contributing columns and features to local papers and magazines.
- All staff participate as a team in community activities, such as charity walks and fun runs.
- Participation in local award programs, such as the Telstra and Queensland Government Small Business Award, which we won in 2002.

Paid sponsorships

- North Qld Chamber Music Festival.
- Townsville Fire - women's NBL team.
- Ignatius Park College Rugby Union.
- St Joseph's College Beachathon - school fundraising event.
- Rowing regattas.

Through our sponsorship of cultural and sporting events, we support a local event and gain. In the process, we receive free tickets, which we share with patients and staff.

By contributing to local papers and magazines, we are seen as an "authority" by the public. This is also a good way to form positive links with the local media. Reporters will then contact us first for comment on any related stories in the media.

It's surprising how many patients we see at community events, and how many comment that they saw us there - this fosters links with our patients, and reinforces a good impression.

And we are in the process of developing a bursary for a local school student to study dental hygiene.

All of our community relations and sponsorship initiatives work in tandem with our everyday marketing efforts to building our practice in our community. So to keep your name in the public eye and give something back to your community, get active in community relations and sponsorship. It's an essential component of your marketing and communications. And an effective way to be a conscientious member of the business community.

Sarah Arnold is Marketing and Practice Manager at Smile Dental in Townsville, Queensland, and a guest lecturer in marketing at James Cook University. Smile Dental was awarded the Telstra and Queensland Government Small Business Award in 2002. The practice is in the process of licensing its identity and practice program. For more info, see www.smiledental.com.au.